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Cum fundamento in re Architecture and Reality

Christophe Van Gerrewey (Gent)

In his writings, the Belgian architecture critic and historian Geert Bekaert (b. 1928) has consistently described architecture as reality. In a recent English anthology of his writings, the word 'reality' appears more than two hundred times. In the essay 'Architecture Devoid of Shadow', for example, Bekaert speaks about "the polemic, conflicting, two-sided reality of architecture":

What is architecture [...] if it isn't this game (this game of cat and mouse) played with reality? The grasping of reality and, in the grasping itself, the escape. [...] If architecture is, in this ambiguous manner, the establishment of reality, the production of reality, we can adopt [this] conclusion, because reality isn't generated by systems but, as Goethe formulated, [by] their undoing or, in other words, the system can only match reality by the grace of its own continual destruction and renewal, its constant decomposition. (Bekaert, 2011: 28-39)¹

It does indeed seem to make sense to consider architecture at least as a part of reality: The buildings constructed by architects constitute, together with all other natural beings and artificial things that surround us, the tangible horizon against which our life takes place. Moreover, architecture is supposed to be more 'real' than for example poetry (because its material existence is more obvious and usually has a longer life span), or than painting – because it does not produce or reproduce something that needs to be looked at, but is actually there to be used,

¹ The Dutch original reads as follows: "Want wat is architectuur anders [...] dan dit spel (dit spel van kat en muis) met de werkelijkheid? Het grijpen ervan en in het grijpen zelf het ontsnappen. [...] Wanneer architectuur het op die dubbelzinnige manier stichten van werkelijkheid is, productie van werkelijkheid, dan kunnen we [die conclusie] tot de onze maken, want het zijn immers niet systemen die werkelijkheid voortbrengen, maar, zoals Goethe het al formuleerde, de doorbraak ervan, of in andere woorden nog, het systeem kan maar werkelijkheid dekken bij de gratie van zijn voortdurende vernietiging en vernieuwing, zijn voortdurende deconstructie." (Bekaert, 1988: 18-20)

and in this use, to be forgotten. Of all the arts, architecture could be considered the most real.

Opposed to this, one can also defend the view, however, of architecture as representation. Every building is not only what it *is*, namely a collection of stones; it also expresses a specific view on what it is to be human, to be part of a society, to work, etc. It seems to be more than something that exists, more than just a reality, but also an interpretation of reality. As representation, architecture is fundamentally open; which conception of human nature a building exactly represents, is not to be pinpointed, not only because of some indeterminacy in the architect's head, but also because this is co-determined by the inhabitants of the building. In contrast to the conception of a building as one, determinate reality, in this view a building is thus understood as consisting of a plurality of representations that are not sharply delineated.

It is an interesting experiment to conceive of the history of architectural theory along the lines of a tension between both conceptions of architecture – of architecture as the most real among the arts, and of architecture as only one of many possible representations of reality. The discussion between the American architect Peter Eisenman and the French philosopher of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, for example, can be understood as a discussion between a realist and a representationalist. In an interview in 1993, Eisenman says:

[I]t is very difficult to talk about architecture in terms of deconstruction, because we are not talking about ruins or fragments. The term is too metaphorical and too literal for architecture. Deconstruction is dealing with architecture as a metaphor, and we are dealing with architecture as a reality. (quoted in Derrida, 1993: 12)

At the time, Eisenman was involved in a long discussion with Jacques Derrida about the possibility of deconstructivist architecture. For the architect, architecture could not be simply 'deconstructed' because it is made out of real elements – unlike language or texts. A column or a wall does not 'signify' a column or a wall – a column *is* a column, and a wall *is* a wall. Derrida was clear in his refutation of this opinion. He quoted the aforementioned passage from the interview with Eisenman in an open letter to the architect, and concluded: "I certainly believe that I would *not* subscribe to *any* one of these statements." (ibid.) For Derrida, everything is constructed, so everything can be deconstructed: there are no real and absolute things, not even in architecture.

In what follows, this problem will be further examined. Is there only one reality and can this reality be (at least partly) identified with architecture? Or is, on the other hand, architecture simply one of the countless languages that man speaks in order to construct a reality that is open to interpretation and deconstruction? I will combine these two viewpoints, by proposing an alternative to

the schism between Derrida and Eisenman: Architecture can indeed be considered as a representational construction, but then as a crucial one – as the representation of *one* absolute reality. Architecture, therefore, is the human construction that makes it possible to consider and experience one fixed reality for everyone, that is at the same time still being interpreted and experienced differently by everyone – or that, in other words, makes it possible to be a realist and a representationalist at the same time.

1. What Is Reality? (Freud and Lacan)

The first question to be answered is how reality might look like. Is there one fixed reality that is the same for everyone? Are there as many realities as there are interpretations of the world – and thus: subjects at hand? Or is there a third way between these two extremes? Unsurprisingly, Sigmund Freud makes a suggestion in this third direction, although not explicitly. It is common to say that Freud (and psychoanalysis in general) has endorsed the cliché that 'reality does not exist' and remains forever 'unknowable', but in a short text published in 1925, he has given the initial impetus to a more nuanced approach. In the essay 'Die Verneinung' [Negation], Freud describes the well-known collision between the 'lust principle' [Lustprinzip] and the 'reality principle' [Realitätsprinzip]. 'Reality testing' [Realitätsprüfung] enables the conscious subject to discern whether it is possible to fulfil a desire or a wish 'in reality' (or whether this desire is already fulfilled), or if this fulfilment is only possible in fantasy, by hallucinating or by dreaming. What Freud says in 'Die Verneinung' is that the abyss between the belief in one objective and unique reality on the one hand, and the belief in the existence of countless subjective realities on the other hand, does not exist in the modern subject. It is exactly the process of reality testing that bridges this abyss or even fills it up:

It is now no longer a question of whether what has been perceived (a thing) shall be taken into the ego or not, but of whether something which is in the ego as a presentation can be rediscovered in perception (reality) as well. [...] Experience has shown the subject that it is not only important whether a thing (an object of satisfaction for him) possesses the 'good' attribute and so deserves to be taken into his ego, but also whether it is there in the external world, so that he can get hold of it whenever he needs it. (Freud, 1925: 237)²

² The German original reads as follows: "Nun handelt es sich nicht mehr darum, ob etwas Wahrgenommenes (ein Ding) ins Ich aufgenommen werden soll oder nicht, sondern ob etwas im Ich als Vorstellung Vorhandenes auch in der Wahrnehmung (Realität)

The subject desires something and can imagine this something as real, but the question is whether this thing also exists in the external reality of the outside world. It is right here that Freud consequently short-circuits the problem of the two kinds of reality, by making clear that they are two sides of the same medal, hung around the neck of the modern subject:

In order to understand this step forward we must recollect that all presentations originate from perceptions and are repetitions of them. Thus originally the mere existence of a presentation was a guarantee of the reality of what was presented. The antithesis between subjective and objective does not exist from the first. It only comes into being from the fact that thinking possesses the capacity to bring before the mind once more something that has once been perceived, by reproducing it as a presentation without the external object having still to be there. The first and immediate aim, therefore, of reality-testing is, not to find an object in real perception which corresponds to the one presented, but to *re-find* such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there. (ibid.)³

Freud subscribes partly to an idealist conception of reality, in the sense that our decision whether something is real or not is based upon the possibility of confirming a perception or representation of reality. Expanding the argument of Freud, this perception of reality has one important characteristic of reality itself: we believe everybody can agree upon it; we believe it to be true. Exactly this characteristic also returns in an empiricist conception of reality because everybody thinks that his or her subjective reality is actually an objective one, that is the same for everyone, and that is real in an absolute sense. Reality testing thus bridges the gap between the two conceptions of reality: It recognizes that there are as many realities as there are thinking subjects, but every reality must present itself as being the only one. A unique and universal reality does not exist, but in order to exist, a human being needs to be convinced of the opposite.

wiedergefunden werden kann. [...] Die Erfahrung hat gelehrt, es ist nicht nur wichtig, ob ein Ding (Befriedigungsobjekt) die 'gute' Eigenschaft besitzt, also die Aufnahme ins Ich verdient, sondern auch, ob es in der Außenwelt da ist, so daß man sich seiner nach Bedürfnis bemächtigen kann." (Freud, 1978: 12)

³ The original reads as follows: "Um diesen Fortschritt zu verstehen, muß man sich daran erinnern, daß alle Vorstellungen von Wahrnehmungen stammen, Wiederholungen derselben sind. Ursprünglich ist also schon die Existenz der Vorstellung eine Bürgschaft für die Realität des Vorgestellten. Der Gegensatz zwischen Subjektivem und Objektivem besteht nicht von Anfang an. Er stellt sich erst dadurch her, daß das Denken die Fähigkeit besitzt, etwas einmal Wahrgenommenes durch Reproduktion in der Vorstellung wieder gegenwärtig zu machen, während das Objekt draußen nicht mehr vorhanden zu sein braucht. Der erste und nächste Zweck der Realitätsprüfung ist also nicht, ein dem Vorgestellten entsprechendes Objekt in der realen Wahrnehmung zu finden, sondern es *wiederzufinden*, sich zu überzeugen, daß es noch vorhanden ist." (Ibid.: 13)

There is one problem to this theory. The question is, if there is a very first perception on which all other perceptions are based: Is there one basic and fundamental reality that, in comparison and by being remembered, marks every other new experience as real? And if so, where does this first perception come from? Is it culturally or genetically inscribed, is it formed in the womb or outside the womb during the first years of existence? Or is it simply a survival mechanism that tricks the subject into believing that every experience has – no matter how slight – an antecedent that helps to experience it as reality?

By commenting and further elaborating on this fragment from the oeuvre of Freud, Jacques Lacan has subscribed to this last option, and in *L'éthique de la psychanalyse* [The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960] (1986), the seventh book of his seminars, Lacan goes one step further. He stresses that even before the reality test takes its course, the result of the test is already clearly defined. It does not even matter whether there is a true and real first experience of reality. Ascertaining whether reality effectively exists, is nothing but a formality, an innate reflex:

[Reality-testing] is clearly a probing form of progress that seeks points of reference, but with relation to what? – with the world of desires. It demonstrates that something is there after all, and that to a certain extent it may be useful. Yet useful for what? – for nothing other than to serve as points of reference in relation to the world of wishes and expectations; it is turned towards that which helps on certain occasions to reach *das Ding*. [...] In the end, in the absence of something which hallucinates it in the form of a system of references, a world of perception cannot be organized in a valid way, cannot be constituted in a human way. The world of perception is represented by Freud as dependent on that fundamental hallucination without which there would be no attention available. (Lacan, 1992: 62f.)⁴

Reality testing cannot fail; if it would fail, the result would be panic, madness, death. In order to live, one has to, time and again and in an experimental man-

⁴ The French original reads as follows: "C'est là ce autour de quoi s'oriente tout le cheminement qui sans aucun doute, pour le sujet, est à tout instant cheminement de contrôle, cheminement de référence par rapport à quoi? le monde de ses désirs; fait l'épreuve que quelque chose après tout est bien là qui jusqu'à un certain degré peut servir. Mais servir à quoi? servir à rien d'autre qu'à référer par rapport à ce monde de souhaits et d'attente qui lui est orienté vers ce qui servira à l'occasion à atteindre *das Ding*. [...] Et si en fin de compte il n'y a pas quelque chose qui l'hallucine en tant que système de référence, aucun monde de la perception n'arrive à s'ordonner, à se constituer d'une façon humaine, d'une façon valable, ce monde de la perception nous étant donné comme corrélatif, comme dépendant, comme référence à cette hallucination fondamentale sans laquelle il n'y aurait aucune attention disponible." (Lacan, 1986: 123)

ner, neglect the idealist truth ('a clear-cut reality does not exist') and revert to the empiricist illusion ('there is no need to doubt or discuss reality'). One has to believe that what is experienced is real, authentic and complete, but this is only a belief. It makes no sense – and it is actually impossible – to expect or to desire a definite choice between the two aforementioned conceptions of reality: It is necessary to suppose that reality exists outside of us, but this supposition implies that reality is an invention, or at least, an interpretation.

The question is how and why this double-sided nature of reality is applicable to architecture? To answer, one might as well begin at the basis of modern aesthetics – that is, at Hegel's introduction to the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* [Lectures on Aesthetics], given at Heidelberg between 1818 and 1829.

2. How Real Is Architecture? (Hegel)

Hegel unfolds a chronological and teleological view on (art) history: Egyptian architecture is the first, primordial and fully symbolical art, followed by classical Greek sculpture, expanding Egyptian art's force of expression. This expansion reaches a peak as well as an end point in romantic poetry, being the expression of the individual mind. The ultimate goal is the penetration of the dominant arts by 'Spirit' [Geist] or 'Idea' [Idee], in such a way that the arts become entirely conscious of their own time, after which the arts dissolve, as they no longer have a future. What is interesting for the purpose of a theory on architecture's reality, are the a-historical and fundamental characteristics that Hegel ascribes to architecture – that is, the characteristics that resist his dialectically propelled theory of art. In the fifth chapter of the introduction to his *Vorlesungen*, Hegel writes:

The first of the particular arts with which, according to their fundamental principle, we have to begin, is architecture considered as a fine art. Its task lies in so manipulating external inorganic nature that it becomes cognate to mind, as an artistic outer world. The material of architecture is matter itself in its immediate externality as a heavy mass subject to mechanical laws, and its forms do not depart from the forms of organic nature. [...] In this material and in such forms, the ideal as concrete spirituality does not admit of being realized. (Hegel, 1993: 90)⁵

⁵ The German original reads as follows: "Die erste der besonderen Künste, mit welcher wir dieser Grundbestimmung nach zu beginnen haben, ist die schöne Architektur. Ihre Aufgabe besteht darin, die äußere unorganische Natur so zurechtzuarbeiten, daß dieselbe als kunstgemäße Außenwelt dem Geiste verwandt wird. Ihr Material ist selbst das

According to Hegel, architecture is the art of the manipulation of 'external' and 'dead' material, in such a way that the forms that emerge – although they are certainly a cultural product since they are the work of man – do not deviate from the forms of 'dead nature'. Architecture is not 'real' culture because 'concrete spirituality' is not being 'realized' in it. Architecture does not contain ideas or concepts. It is perfectly possible to remain 'unconscious' of architecture and this unconsciousness is actually its main goal. Nowhere man succeeds better – if the results are satisfactory – in forgetting the artificiality of his own creation than in the case of architecture.

And then Hegel writes: "Hence the reality which is represented in [the forms of architecture] remains contrasted with the Idea, as something external which it has not penetrated, or has penetrated only to establish an abstract relation." (ibid.)⁶ Thus, Hegel does affirm that reality is represented in these forms of architecture. Architecture represents reality: In three words, Hegel puts forward the aforementioned paradox of reality, and recognizes that reality is always objective and subjective at the same time. What does it mean if architecture represents reality? Does Hegel subscribe to an empiricist conception of reality? No, because according to the empiricist principle, reality is the same for everyone, and it is recognizable as such; therefore, it does not need representation – it is simply always present. Does he then subscribe to an idealist conception of reality? It might seem so, because representation does require interpretation; architecture is the work of one man who designs and builds one cultural but subjective and highly personal version of reality. The problem here is that Hegel also sabotages this idealist conception of reality exactly because he clearly states that architecture is "not penetrated by Spirit" and remains forever "contrasted with the Idea" (ibid.)⁷ Architecture is in this sense, of all the art forms, the cultural product that most closely attains an objective character. It is made by a subject without having subjective features. Thus, for Hegel, architecture does not represent an idealist or an empiricist form of reality – the reality of architecture lies somewhere in between. Hegel defines architecture as a sort of 'natural culture', as a 'fictional reality', as a human realization in which Spirit remains absent, but which can nevertheless not be reduced to dead matter.

Materielle in seiner unmittelbaren Äußerlichkeit als mechanische schwere Masse, und ihre Formen bleiben die Formen der unorganischen Natur." (Hegel, 1975: 145)

⁶ The original reads as follows: "da in diesem Material und Formen das Ideal als konkrete Geistigkeit sich nicht realisieren läßt und die dargestellte Realität somit der Idee als Äußeres undurchdrungen oder nur zu abstrakter Beziehung gegenüberbleibt" (ibid: 146).

⁷ The original reads as follows: "die dargestellte Realität somit der Idee als Äußeres undurchdrungen oder nur zu abstrakter Beziehung gegenüberbleibt" (ibid.).

Hegel's conception of architecture might seem critical of the art of building, because architecture remains contrasted with Hegel's notion of Spirit. Moreover, Hegel seems to consider architecture as a thing of the past, given the fact that he identifies it with the historical period of the Egyptian civilization: architecture 'belongs' to an era in which Spirit was not yet developed in a substantial way. Although he puts in his teleological 'ranking' architecture at the beginning, he is not necessarily negative or dismissive about it. Rather the opposite is true: Because architecture is both subjective and objective, because it is a conscious human construct, that nevertheless remains 'immune' to Spirit, it is able to realize something that other art forms cannot attain exactly because of their gradual absorption of Spirit. Exactly because architecture is so 'low' in Spirit, it makes space for other manifestations. It is therefore meaningful that Hegel continues the same passage by writing that it is *a God* [ein Gott] who comes after architecture:

For these reasons, the fundamental type of the fine art of building is the *symbolical* form of art. It is architecture that pioneers the way for the adequate realization of the God, and in this its service bestows hard toil upon existing nature, in order to disentangle it from the jungle of finitude and the abortiveness of chance. (ibid.)⁸

If a God wants to be able to realize itself adequately, there is no longer a place for an author in architecture. Understandably, Hegel does not speak about the architect for the simple reason that the architect cannot be present in his work: Architecture cannot (like the other arts do) attract attention to itself by means of its authorship because authorship necessarily implies the presence of Spirit (and prevents the realization of a God). It is always possible to look at (good) architecture as if this architecture is not 'made'; nothing in or around the architecture should (at least not continuously) remind us of this artificiality. If architecture continuously shows that it is made and constructed – if it contains too much Spirit – it is bad architecture.⁹

A reading of the lectures of Hegel makes clear how the ambiguous and problematic character of reality becomes visible and readable in architecture. As was stated in the passages from Freud (and in the quadrature of his theories by

⁸ The original reads as follows: "[S]o ist der Grundtypus der Baukunst die *symbolische* Kunstform. Denn die Architektur bahnt der adäquaten Wirklichkeit des Gottes erst den Weg und müht sich in seinem Dienst mit der objektiven Natur ab, um sie aus dem Gestrüppe der Endlichkeit und der Mißgestalt des Zufalls herauszuarbeiten." (Ibid.: 146)

⁹ That is the reason why architects were locked up inside of the Egyptian pyramids once they were finished – and the pyramids were after all, for Hegel, the ultimate symbolic forms of art.

Lacan), reality cannot be agreed upon, and as such, it does not exist – but it is impossible to live without reality. Thus reality has to be made in such a way that the artificiality of it does not show itself all the time, because then reality would no longer be experienced as 'real' but as false. Hegel is the first one to locate the realization of this almost impossible straddle in architecture. The reality status of architecture can be considered the invisible fundament upon which all modern architecture theory rests. After Hegel, there are many other authors that have pointed some more explicitly than others, at architecture's capacity to represent reality.

In the following, a few jumps along the road of an implicit tradition – and of three coupled texts – will gradually enlighten the characteristics of this architectural reality. Starting with the often-overlooked theory of Roman Ingarden (compared with a conception of architecture developed in a famous essay by Walter Benjamin), passing by a Platonic dialogue of Paul Valéry (which has a pendant in a famous text by Roland Barthes), and ending at a contemporary recapitulation and conclusion by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas (and again Geert Bekaert), might prove to be a fitting trajectory to illustrate this.

3. How Real Is a Building? (Ingarden and Benjamin)

Between 1928 and 1945 the Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden writes his *Untersuchungen zur Ontologie der Kunst* [The Ontology of the Work of Art], in which 'the work of architecture' takes a prominent place. Ingarden clearly wrestles – often in a funny and clumsy way – with the ambiguous character of architecture. He has problems connecting the creative and passive nature of architecture, or one could say: the idealist and empiricist nature of the reality it represents. In an attempt to do so, he makes a distinction between 'the real building' and the 'building as a work of art':

As soon as we discover that a building is a work of art, and either admire its beauty or rebel against its ugliness, we notice that the building then comes into consideration for us not as a merely real object, but instead as something that somehow extends beyond the building's reality. Moreover, this reality (this being-real) itself plays no particular role in our attending to the building as a work of art. (Ingarden, 1989: 256)¹⁰

¹⁰ The German original reads as follows: "Es fällt uns aber auf, daß, sobald wir bei einem Gebäude entdecken, daß es ein Kunstwerk ist, und seine Schönheit bewundern oder uns im Gegenteil gegen seine Häßlichkeit auflehnen, – daß dann dieses Gebäude für uns nicht als ein bloß realer Gegenstand in Betracht kommt, sondern als etwas, was irgendwie über dessen Realität hinausreicht. Zudem spielt dabei auch diese Realität (das

In line with Hegel, Ingarden believes that we can only consider architecture as reality when 'acts of consciousness' are excluded, thereby underscoring the idea that architecture can only be considered as reality as long as no Spirit has entered it. Contrary to Hegel, however, he seems to believe that reality cannot be represented and that reality actually only exists as long as representation is absent. He does not define architecture as the representation of reality. For Ingarden, the first and empiricist reality disappears as soon as architecture becomes truly visible as a construction, when it demands our attention and our interpretation and, by doing so, becomes an idealist and completely subjective reality, relative to our own point of view (and that of the architect). Ingarden thinks that when we realize that architecture is made by a fellow human being, it becomes a stage setting, something false, something unreal.

It is tempting to compare Ingarden with Walter Benjamin, who defended a similar idea in his essay 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' [The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction] (1935). For Benjamin, architecture is an art form that can only be experienced 'in distraction', because architecture has no, or hardly any, 'aura' (see Benjamin, 1999: 232). Because the architect, as an author, usually (or at least ultimately) remains absent, architecture can embody the empiricist reality upon which everyone silently and unconsciously agrees. Ingarden confirms this: The absence of aura is "the condition for the fact that the architectural work can be not merely thought or imagined but also [needs to be] realized to a certain degree, that it can be [not merely] an intentional object, but *cum fundamento in re*" (Ingarden, 1989: 271).¹¹ Architecture necessarily has 'a fundament in something real'; it can exist in our mind as an artistic 'object of thought' only if it has a material kernel or an 'ontic foundation', if it is a unique building that cannot and shall not be repeated:

The architectural work of art is not a purely intentional entity, but is instead embodied in something real. [...] In addition to this spatio-temporal individuality, there occurs in every genuine architectural work of art that qualitative individuality that we have encountered already in the musical work. [...] This is the reason that one finds every repetition in the realm of art, and especially in architecture, disagreeable. [...] Let us suppose that every European city

Realsein) selbst keine besondere Rolle, so daß sie für uns an Bedeutung zu verlieren scheint." (Ingarden, 1962: 286)

¹¹ The original reads as follows: "Das ist die Bedingung dafür, daß das architektonische Kunstwerk nicht bloß gedacht oder vorgestellt, sondern in gewissem Grade auch realisiert werden kann, daß es zwar ein intentionaler Gegenstand sein kann, aber *cum fundamento in re*." (Ingarden, 1962: 288)

built for itself a copy of the Notre Dame of Paris. Would that not be a senseless undertaking? (ibid.: 273f.)¹²

Contrary to Benjamin, Ingarden did not foresee that reproducibility would soon, during the twentieth century, become not only a characteristic of works of art, but of reality itself. It is therefore not surprising that he has not even sensed the existence of a second, 'externally represented' and 'internally interpreted' form of reality. Architecture is '*cum fundamento in re*', because it always corresponds to an empiricist and objective reality – but for Ingarden, this was completely incompatible with every form of idealist and subjective reality.

4. Is Reality an Effect? (Valéry and Barthes)

Returning again to an inclusive conception of the reality of architecture, in which the consciousness of architecture and of its aura does not make reality disappear but only reinforce it, calls into being a definition of architecture as a combination of objective reality and representation or meaning. This conception can be found in the dialogue *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte* [Eupalinos, or The Architect] by Paul Valéry from 1921 – although not a philosophical text as such, it does narrate about the passion for wisdom, and does, as such, contain philosophical ideas. In this text, Phaidrus and Socrates talk about the realizations of the architect Eupalinos. They talk about architecture as one of the arts "that engender in us, by means of numbers and relations of numbers, not a story, but this hidden force that makes all stories" – and that therefore creates "an endless variety of imaginary things" (Valéry, 1960: 105).¹³ Architecture does not tell stories but makes stories possible. Architecture, to summarize the discussion, has potential: It generates art, life, ideas and stories; architecture is full of activities and human events – after all, nearly everything literally 'takes place' thanks to architecture.

¹² The original reads as follows: "daß das architektonische Kunstwerk kein rein intentionales Gebilde sei, sondern in einem Realen verkörpert. [...] Neben dieser raumzeitlichen Individualität aber tritt in jedem echten architektonischen Kunstwerk jene qualitative Individualität auf, auf die wir bereits bei den Musikwerken gestoßen sind. [...] Dies ist der Grund, daß man jede Wiederholung auf dem Gebiete der Kunst, und insbesondere der Architektur, auf unliebsame Weise empfindet. [...] Denken wir uns aber, daß sich jede europäische Stadt ein Exemplar der Pariser Notre-Dame baute. Wäre das nicht ein sinnloses Bemühen?" (Ibid.)

¹³ The original reads as follows: "Mais les arts dont nous parlons doivent, au contraire, au moyen de nombres et de rapports de nombres, enfanter en nous non point une fable, mais cette puissance cachée qui fait toutes les fables." (Valéry, 1960: 105; *my translation*)

This conception of architecture (that is developed by Valéry's fictional characters) does not include the first, pure, empiricist and unconscious reality: We cannot look at architecture without immediately unmasking its objective character in favour of a subjective interpretation. Even if meanings do not impose themselves from the start, the possible existence of meaning is always present. No matter how we conceive reality, we are always conscious of the multitude or the discretion of this reality, and so we immediately bring along the sabotage of an empiricist reality, and the realization of an idealist one. This means we always know that reality is an *effect produced by ourselves*. In order to develop this idea, it is possible to refer to Roland Barthes. In his essay 'L'Effet de réel' [The Reality Effect] (1968), Barthes introduced the idea that every kind of text can be qualified as reality, and – more importantly – that within this reality even the most banal elements (elements without Spirit, as Hegel would say) have an important function: exactly because they are meaningless, they produce a 'reality effect'. Barthes can be put in the tradition of those thinkers who consider empiricist and idealist reality to be two sides of the same coin. He has contributed to what he himself calls the unmasking of "the great mythic opposition of the *true-to-life* (the lifelike) and the *intelligible*", an opposition based on the idea that "the pure and simple 'representation' of the 'real', the naked relation of 'what is' (or has been) thus appears as a resistance to meaning" (Barthes, 1989: 146).¹⁴ This opposition is the same as the simple opposition between the two kinds of reality: as soon as something acquires meaning, it is no longer lifelike. The removal of this opposition implies, according to Barthes, that "the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism: The *reality effect* is produced, the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity" (ibid.: 148).¹⁵ *All the standard works of modernity*: There is no reality that is not produced, that is not the consequence of the effect of a construction – and for Barthes this conviction is the main definition of modernity. Combining this insight with the conviction, present in *Eupalinos*, that architecture is meaningful only because it can produce meanings, it becomes clear that the combination of a conception of a material reality

¹⁴ The French original reads as follows: "La 'représentation' pure et simple du 'réel', la relation nue de 'ce qui est' (ou a été) apparaît ainsi comme une résistance au sens; cette résistance confirme la grande opposition mythique du vécu (du vivant) et de l'intelligible." (Barthes, 2002: 27)

¹⁵ The original reads as follows: "[L]a carence même du signifié au profit du seul référent devient le signifiant même du réalisme: il se produit un *effet de réel*, fondement de ce vraisemblable inavoué qui forme l'esthétique de toutes les oeuvres courantes de la modernité." (Ibid.: 28)

(that is to say: not on paper, but three-dimensional, in real life) with the modern conviction that reality is always an effect, necessarily ends up with architecture. It is because architecture (just like Ingarden described it 'scholastically') always exists *cum fundamento in re* ('with a fundament in a real thing' – a wall *is* a wall, as Eisenman stated, even if it is only remembered as such), and the *res* is at the same time a matter of cultural production (the wall is designed, and nobody sees the same wall), that the empiricist and idealist reality are contained in it like nowhere else.

5. Is Reality in Crisis? (Tafuri and Koolhaas)

The possibility of this combination in architecture is contradicted by one of the most famous quotations concerning the relation between architecture and reality, a quotation by the Italian historian Manfredo Tafuri:

The two roads of modern art and architecture are here already delineated. It is, in fact, the inherent opposition within all modern art: those who search into the very bowels of reality in order to know and assimilate its values and wretchedness; and those who desire to go beyond reality, who want to construct *ex novo* new realities, new values, and new public symbols. (Tafuri, 1976: 24)¹⁶

Tafuri presents a clear-cut choice: On the one hand, one can think as an empiricist and consider – in this case as an architect – reality only as something given to work with; on the other hand, one can think as an idealist and consider reality as something that can be constructed by (for example) architecture.

The conception of the relationship between architecture and reality that has been outlined in this text is more subtle and combines the two opposites sketched by Tafuri in a paradoxical unity. It is a precarious undertaking: The equilibrium between the reality and the representation of architecture is fragile. At the same time, the conception of architecture as a combination of an idealist and an empiricist reality seems to become more difficult to defend or realize as history and modernity evolves. Even more so: If modernity is the condition in which the artificiality of reality is clearly understood, but is at the same time overcome by

¹⁶ The Italian original reads as follows: "E la dialettica immanente all'intero decorso dell'arte moderna, infatti, che sembra opporre fra di loro chi tenta di scavare fin nelle viscere stesse del reale per conoscerne ed assumerne valori e miserie, e chi vuole spingersi al di là del reale, chi vuole costruire ex novo nuove realtà, nuovi valori, nuovi simboli pubblici." (Tafuri, 1973: 22)

modern cultural production (as Barthes stated), then postmodernity is the condition in which the artificiality of reality is so omnipresent, that every possible cultural construction is first and foremost considered as artificial rather than real. To illustrate this, it is possible to return to Ingarden's remark on the European city: According to him, it would be a 'senseless undertaking' to build copies of the Notre Dame of Paris everywhere around Europe. The unique and historic character of urban environments makes it impossible to repeat these elsewhere – or to put it more generally: Historical architecture cannot be reproduced or forged, and also architecture in general is unique and unrepeatable, exactly because it always 'belongs' to one place. To prove, however, the changed conception of reality since Ingarden made these remarks at the beginning of the twentieth century, it suffices to refer to the generic and repetitive character of the contemporary Western city that is built out of the same elements everywhere – shops, iconic museums, concert stages and open-air terraces. This has changed the experience of the city-dweller in such a defining manner that it is no longer a real environment that is recognizable for most people, but a fake one. If Ingarden would consider a reproduced Notre Dame (in Brussels for example) as 'senseless', one can wonder if a truly postmodern subject would not find it extremely meaningful exactly because of its artificiality and its indebtedness to the spatial strategies of for example Disneyland or of contemporary shopping centres.

It is clear that this postmodern condition and this crisis of reality extend far beyond the task and the work of the architect. The Dutch architect and founder of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, Rem Koolhaas, for example, considers architecture in his classic book *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto of Manhattan* (1978) as only one of the many participants in a history of a continual loss of reality and of the ongoing victory of artificiality:

Facts wear, reality is consumed. The Acropolis disintegrates, the Parthenon is collapsing due to the ever-escalating frequency of tourists' visits. As the big toe of a saint's statue gradually disappears under the onslaught of his devotees' kisses, so the Big Toe of reality dissolves slowly but inexorably under perpetual exposure to the continuous Kiss of mankind. The higher the density of a civilization – the more metropolitan it is – the higher the frequency of the Kiss, the faster the process of consumption of the reality of nature and artefacts. They are worn out so rapidly that the supply is depleted. That is the cause of the Reality Shortage. (Koolhaas, 1994: 241)

This growing lack of reality by a growing presence of consciousness, reproduction, consumerism, tourism, city marketing and urbanity – this ever advancing 'desert of the real' (to use the title of one of Slavoj Žižek's books), is certainly diagnosed by Koolhaas. As an architect, however, he does not immediately give

up the battle against artificiality. He – and every other capable architect – still believes that architecture (being *cum fundamento in re*) is always already an empiricist form of reality, and, by doing so, minimize the 'reality shortage'. Therefore, according to Koolhaas, architecture needs to be practised in a 'paranoid-critical manner', a method he borrows from Salvador Dalí. The paranoid perceives a clear and irrefutable scheme in reality: "[T]he radical attitude of the paranoid" Lacan wrote, "concerns the deepest level of the relationship of man to reality" (Lacan, 1992: 65).¹⁷ The paranoid concocts a very particular and idiosyncratic interpretation of reality, and therefore becomes the ultimate idealist. But by believing stubbornly – and at the same time – that his interpretation is correct and should be accepted by everyone else without much further ado the paranoid is also the ultimate empiricist. So is the architect when he selects elements from reality in order to 'do' architecture. The method of the paranoid is in this sense – as also Dalí, being a surrealist, understood – always bestowed with a critical dimension, because the choices the paranoid makes will always differ surprisingly and sometimes even uncomprehendingly from the most commonly accepted solutions or interpretations in society; these choices will necessarily deviate from the *doxa*. The result of this method is thus another paradox: architecture's *critical belief* in reality, its almost psychopathological perspicacity in a reality that is reproduced, represented and built in a critical manner, offering a new version of what is commonly understood as reality. Architecture has as its foundation a 'foolish' and old-fashioned belief in an 'ancient' and empiricist reality – architecture is necessarily *cum fundamento in re* –, and it combines this with an idealist reality that is constantly produced, criticized, represented, disputed, sabotaged and interpreted.

6. A Chance of Survival? (Conclusion)

The idealist conviction that reality does not exist, hence that we cannot know the world, has become an *idée reçue* of postmodern and especially of the contemporary philosophy and theory. It is even an idea that has been adopted by all possible domains of life, and that has completely relativized, individualized and atomized every view on life or on the world. Lacan states:

¹⁷ The original reads as follows: "Je veux dire que ce mode de rapport, le plus profond de l'homme par rapport à la réalité, qui s'articule dans le terme de la foi, c'est là ce qui m'apparaît intéressé dans ce que Freud signale, désigne comme l'attitude la plus radicale du paranoïaque." (Lacan, 1986: 243)

Idealism consists in affirming that we are the ones who give shape to reality, and that there is no point in looking any further. It is a comfortable position. Freud's position, or that of any sensible man for that matter, is something very different." (Lacan, 1994: 35)¹⁸

In this sense, being postmodern means being idealist – and means affirming that reality is not given but is constantly *produced*. Indeed, the more convincing and numerous the arguments to doubt reality have become, the more cunning are the machines that transform the world into a desert in which everything is arbitrary interpretation, a world without a real kernel, without a common grip. It makes no sense to claim that architecture is the irrigation channel that will turn the world into a fruitful oasis again, or that reality is univocally 'designed' by architecture.

What is certain though is that there exists a tradition of thinkers that constantly renews itself and that has put the reality problem within the hands of architecture: Architecture can help to deal with the postmodern ideal of the non-existence of reality, because it reveals both the irrefutable existence of reality and the continuous disappearance of it. This tradition can be considered a form of thinking in unity that tries to do justice to some of the complexities and aporiae of the history of ideas and of human experience, and at the same time tries to go towards the ancient and all too human desire for a cognizable and shared reality. Whoever wants to think about reality, wants to get in contact with it, wants to see and experience how we deal with it, can revert to architecture. To return to the dispute between Eisenman and Derrida: A wall might not be the same wall for everyone, but it is not that easily chopped down. It is this attitude that Geert Bekaert must have had in mind every time he used the word reality in his writings on architecture – and also when he concluded a recent essay on the work of Rem Koolhaas with the following words: "All that remains is architecture, but this architecture opens up a chance of survival." (Bekaert, 2011: 498)¹⁹

¹⁸ The original reads as follows: "Cela consiste à nous dire que la réalité, c'est nous qui en courrons la mesure, et qu'il n'y a pas à chercher au-delà. La position dit idéaliste est une position de confort. Celle de Freud, comme d'ailleurs de tout homme censé, est bien autre chose." (Lacan, 1986: 244)

¹⁹ The original reads as follows: "Er blijft ons niets meer over dan architectuur, maar in die architectuur wordt een mogelijkheid geopend om te blijven leven." (Bekaert, 2004: 5)

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