

***The Invisible in Architecture could be conceived as durée.*** The *durée* consists of historical lines and patterns that often unconsciously influence our individual thoughts and actions, and make the functioning of society durable and familiar. *Durée* is the mute certainty on which our existence is founded. It is the time dimension that joins objects to the forces which produce them. *Durée* is the substrata of every social, political and cultural behaviour, and stands for the persistence of the past in the present. Hence we might question whether the past really does lie *behind* us. An understanding of ourselves is impossible without a sense of *durée*.

The antithesis of the long-lasting, i.e. the event, now seems to dominate our lives. We forget *durée*; we take no interest in the hidden, permanent forces. We are so familiar with the self-reproducing order of *durée* that we fail to notice it. Conserving forces legitimise our daily practices in a complex and subtle manner. In the process, anthropological motives and ideological preferences hide behind a flexible, seemingly autonomous world of images. History seems to have stopped. Duration, the dimension that unites the *faits divers*, is de-activated. We undergo a bombardment of fragments which, seemingly isolated and value-free, add up to a staccato culture. The only permanence in that culture seems to be the eternal Now, a continual, all-moralising actuality. Countless questions concerning the self-evident character of our way of life – what, why, for whom, for what end, by what means, to what future? – succumb to the single inescapable message: *this!...*

We live in a time when forgetting the long-term has turned into a virtual ideology. Meanwhile, however, our lives remain richly regulated; we hang on to all kinds of cultural and societal codes and conventions, to our genetic passport, our climate, our social stratum and a clutch of other historical and biological factors, to our Superego and our Unconscious. Thus there are reasons enough to resist the ideology of forgetting. The *durée* vector places us in a position to investigate the relations between objects,

## Durée

conceptual frameworks, institutions and interests, from a variety of angles. It unravels myths and rituals. And, the instant we observe *durée*, we realise how dubious the advantages of its objectivising grip on our existence. We had therefore better take account of it in our thoughts and actions, if we wish to become moral agents instead of remaining servants of power. And there is only one way to go about it: keep asking questions.

Since Hegel and Marx, history is no longer understood as a supernatural programme. History, in as far as it has succumbed neither to the temptation of interpreting its subject matter fatalistically as blind chance nor to a positivistic fascination for the fact, has developed into a search for the hidden agenda. The discipline stumbled on concealed factors that determined the course of events, such as dialectics and class conflicts. Where historians have managed to depart from this antagonistic view of their craft, they have sought the explanation of events in relatively timeless factors such as anthropology, climatology and demography. Alongside the rich tradition of a history of self-developing individuals, there has thus grown a new tradition of research into super-individual, anonymous processes and structures. One might almost say that, as a worldly substitute for the reassurance of the divine, historians have developed an eye for the long term, the epistemè, the paradigm, the collective world view, the system – categories that rise well above the individual action and its object.

The philosopher Henri Bergson was concerned with permanence, continuity and the irreversibility of history. He wrote of the *survivance du passé*. Fernand Braudel, a historian from the French *Annales* school, turned his attention to the long, slow time-scale of climate and landscape which gives whole cultures their character. Martin Heidegger devoted a life of research to the phenomenological relationship between man and his world, a relation stripped of its utilitarian features. And Michel Foucault recognised a civilising and disciplining offensive, extending over centuries and associated with the permanent reproduction of



power: a techno-scientific discourse governed by an autonomous logic which dominates society and totally determines human life.

These are all interpretations of *durée* that are so broad they could not possibly offend anyone. These versions emerge first in the rehabilitation process of the enduring. However, there are also other versions of *durée* that concern us both directly and morally. For instance:

**1** Since the rise of mercantilism and, later, capitalism, we have lived increasingly in terms of quantity, goal-oriented rationality and economic value, the three techno-scientific faces of a society of commodities. In short, there has been a gradual displacement from the question of why we do things to the question of how we do things. This process, which may be alienation to one person while it is secularisation or even emancipation to another, has reached a pinnacle under late capitalism: the triumph of simulation. At first sight this triumph seems to bring in its train a total immaterialisation, a world of the radically new. But perhaps it is really just an endless reconfirmation of the same economic and social reality, expressed in a continually changing guise.

**2** There exists a form of intelligence, not necessarily conscious, a practical mastery of current regularities and conventions, which is crucial to the perpetuation of social practices. This intelligence finds its application in the status game that is played according to characteristic rules in each social field. Neither participation nor success is possible without tacit recognition of the stakes of the game. Education and specialisation can elevate the status of the individual within a social field (for example architecture) to a position that Pierre Bourdieu has called 'naturalised distinction', a form of generally recognised superiority that depends on conforming with the inherent demands of the game. The acquisition of status is thus inseparably linked to perpetuation of the rules.

**3** Even in their relativistic guise, our Western cultural mores still impose themselves as a universal criterion. Their malleability makes them all the more effective as a standard in relation to which everything is measured, adapted or subjected. High in Western esteem is the right of individual self-determination: everyone must be allowed to go about his life as he pleases, with a freedom that extends as far as the point where that of another begins. But, with the arrival of the global village, it has become clear that a universal morality can have the practical result of Eurocentricity. 'We' and 'they' are more real than ever before, with consequent xenophobia. We discover that a long-term, symbiotic bond exists between the idea of the autonomous individual and imperialism.

24

Broadly speaking, there are two tenable positions in respect of *durée*: that of *the ideology of forgetting* and that of *belief in the moment*. The ideology of forgetting gives *durée* a free hand. It accepts the restricted freedom that is allotted to the individual to intervene in time. After all, what use is it to you to penetrate the reality of *durée* if, at the same time, you are transfixed by the realisation that there is nothing you can do about it? This ideology takes its lead from whatever *durée* confronts us with. It describes and illustrates, but never ventures into explanations. Belief in the moment tries to escape the schizophrenia of the forgetting of memory. It tries to find a critical force through the trivial properties of the moment. It hopes, by this, to unmask *durée* and so to oppose alienation. What both positions have in common is that they can arrive at (no more than) an individual product within the domain of the specialism.

More than any other art, architecture is obliged to respect *durée*. It is as a rule meant to be enduring, solid and well-founded. It is never simply the substantiation of an autonomous idea of its maker, and thus an 'event', but also aims to satisfy the wishes of the user and investor. Since these wishes are typically based on durable codes and conventions, and since the investment must show a profit, architecture has little choice but to be durable. Perhaps architecture can itself be called the *keeper* of the past because it will always have a material form and be intended for more than a single moment. Even in the most unscrupulous take-the-money-and-run architecture, taking the money requires a short wait.

Architecture takes its place amid an existing configuration of climate, history, local context and socio-economic production

relationships. It offers shelter by means of its tectonics, which are based on the 'eternal' principles of the joint in harmony with gravity. Moreover, it maintains traditions of form and responds to existing archetypes and/or other kinds of functional typologies and recognised spatial organisations of programmes. At the same time, it has to be flexible with regard to eventualities, for which it must provide a platform or a background; it must not aim to be an event in its own right at the cost of all else. Architecture is thus the condensation of an idea, of dominant values; it perpetuates them and carries them along into the future. Architecture is in that sense not only the bearer of *durée* but generates it too. It is the ideal medium for representing the past in the present. It is the *trait d'union* between past, present and future.

**Three strategies and three architects** In the reaction against Modernism, *durée* too has been rediscovered. Many architects have retracted from the wish to eliminate the enduring, and use their profession as an instrument to stage a revival of the long-term. Others perpetuate durable patterns in a less unequivocal way. We distinguish:

**Archaism** The first strategy is super-historical, and honours only the eternal and transcendental. Time is reduced to a practically timeless essence. Morality and amorality are not directly relevant; only metaphysics and ontology count here. How could this goal be embodied except in matter? Hard, slow and naked matter is the medium in which the transience and shallowness of metropolitan life is problematised. The house is solid, robust and reliable. It is shelter and root.

**Tadao Ando** radicalises *durée* to the point of a spiritual experience of eternity that practically excludes historicity. Literally turning its back on the world of continual happenings, his introverted architecture principally aims to induce an ultimate serenity, an exclusion of all the tormenting problems that still cry out for solution. His architecture aspires to a reptilian level that eludes the grip of the vicissitudes of language. Ando's central purpose is to foster the spiritual exchange between mankind and the thing that manifests itself in loneliness. With its outspoken materiality, this architecture is almost a definition of the durable.

25

**Façadism** The second strategy appeals to history, from which it hopes to learn and with which it aims to educate. The primary means towards these ends is an unambiguously canonised iconographic vocabulary that is meant to guarantee the enduring reproduction of 'eternal', classical, humanistic values. The archetypes of classicism must banish doubt and reinstate a clear morality. **Leon Krier** believes that the tide of the today can thus be turned: 'The *Zeitgeist* is there despite us; the more clever we think we are at dealing with it, the more stupid we will one day appear'. The facade is deployed to institutionalise a world of order and quiet. The self-aware, honest individual will not succumb to the chaos of the metropolis, but will find himself in a peaceful pedestrian world. Pictorial, monumental series of architectural objects and axes generate the necessary quatum of civilisation.

**Fascinism** The third strategy would have nothing to do with a durable order. It shatters this order in an explosive game of form in which all is apparently permitted – a maximally individual interpretation of the Now condensed into the material of an ecstatic object. This attitude thus considers itself amoral and answerable only to the principle of simultaneity. The world is as it is, and the only adequate answer is fragmentation. This reality is fragmentary and momentary, and the appropriate architecture is always breathlessly frenetic. It seems that **Frank Gehry** wishes to turn everything on its head: the elite culture, the accepted values and norms. Everything must be possible *now*. But, at the same time, a *durée* is in fact perpetuated. Alongside the eternal ritual of daily life, the theme embodied here is also the ever-returning element of play. The carnivalesque aspect of Gehry's work, its hilarity, always looks like a denial of the past but is in fact a subtle reproduction of it.

The lack of beauty is the current architectural actuality. Materialistic functions are consistently emphasised instead of the function of the beauty of the building and its environment, which is equally important to man. Material functions are only valid temporarily, since they change constantly. Beauty is much longer-lasting and far sooner has a timeless function. **Ton Alberts & Max van Huut**

**To question the interrelationship between architecture and nature is to capture architecture within the framework of time. By employing geometry as a methodology, I seek to synthesise past and present, East and West.** **Tadao Ando**

This century is the century of the ephemeral. All is fragile, everything disappears.

The image reigns, the image dies out, fashions pass, buildings comply with changing requirements. The *Durée* lies hidden within the gaze. The gaze will only rest on those objects which it recognises. One ought to build for this gaze. **Ricardo Bofill**

Duration is primarily achieved through grounding, to be bound to the earth. Buildings are bound to the earth. Not so much by gravity but by use and by our understanding of them. Today universal deprecating produces not strong but weak bonds. The task for architecture today is enormous, the sedimentation of new perceptual modes into the realm of the physical will result in new topologies + new forms, new scales. The responsible architect must today rethink both object + field. Simulation today is reality. It is the task of everyone to give it depth. **Julia Bolles & Peter Wilson**

Believe that the professional activity of an engineer lies mainly in the development of analytical models which describe nature in a realistic way. Working with isostatic structures almost inevitably leads one to sketching nature. When, for example a dog stands on his four legs it constitutes an isostatic body. The load is divided by the number of legs, there are no other forces present other than those supplied by the muscles.

**Santiago Calatrava**

The very permanence of architecture can only be understood with the actions that take place in it as part of its structure. Then and only then can architecture entertain an intimate contact with the moment of perception – of being in it, of finding that it means something. **Nigel Coates & Doug Branson**

The duration of architecture has little to do with its physical life. Architecture changes under the attentive scrutiny of our gaze, and opens itself to new interpretations. It is the duration of continuous change. **Pietro Derossi**

Leonardo Da Vinci and Schlemmer constructed two fundamentally different models for the relationship between man and this world. As we slip further away from the model of Leonardo and past that of Schlemmer, into a time of revered artifice and spatial implosion, the relation of man to this world has become a subject of renewed interest. What could a new model of this relationship be? Could there be one? **Elisabeth Diller & Ricardo Scofidio**

Architecture is a bridge over time, spanning between those cultures of the past and the future. Buildings created today are sited in places which have evolved over the history of past cultures. Each of our projects attempts to be a special response to its own place, influenced by and sensitive to the past also shaped by an anticipation of the future. **Norman Foster**

Bouncing off the interior walls and ceiling (of the Joan Miró Library), the shimmering light becomes the permanent source of brightness, constant throughout the building.

**Beth Galí**

**You always have to work against your past.** **Frank Gehry**

People criticise me for looking back to the past – for using historical references. I would love to be able to use only archetypal references, because I think that's the basis of the myth and ritual of architecture. But I get primarily that language from Rome – that kind of continuous language. I see architecture as a cultural continuity.

**Michael Graves**

Architecture ought to be such that it allows us to hear the mysterious music of the universe and the rich, yet by no means transparent, world of emotions that have been disregarded by modern rationalism. **Itsuko Hasegawa**

There no longer are any traditions in the consistent and comprehensive sense of the word... Our architecture is not part of any actual tradition, but relates to earlier architectures through observation, critical perception, imitation or rejection. It is as if an earlier, mediating generation had been eliminated by an environmental catastrophe. This is the point of rupture where our contemporary culture begins... Such a culture only carries on earlier patterns of behaviour and buildings as apparitions of the original, comprehensive forms... **Jacques Herzog & Pierre de Meuron**

Architectural thought is the working through of phenomena initiated by idea. By 'making' we realise idea is only a seed for extension in phenomena. Sensations of experience become a kind of reasoning distinct to the making of architecture. Whether reflecting on the unity of concept and sensation or the intertwining of idea and phenomena, the hope is to unite intellect and feeling, precision with soul.

**Steven Holl**

Man has always striven for – and built for – survival: survival during life but, equally important, survival after life. In human activity there is duality and my architecture reflects this in a dialectic between the natural and the artificial, the anthropomorphic (and amorphous) and the geometric.

**Hans Hollein**

***In traditional cultures, fundamental aesthetic and ethical principles are considered to be of universal value and this is where the controversy lies; namely in the question of a universal value transcending time and space, climates and civilisation. In traditional cultures, industrial rationale and methods are subordinate to larger themes, to larger concerns. In Modernist cultures, by contrast, invention, innovation and discovery are ends in themselves.***

**Leon Krier**

Respect for time and duration is not just nostalgia. It means making allowance for things as they are and refraining from imposing tyrannical utopias. On the other hand, it is absolutely clear that we can not extrapolate an existing context into the future (that is romanticism!). Our contemporary context is mobile, multi-racial, ever more diverse (what a wealth!). Thus the present situation calls for architects who are capable of working very personally but also with great complexity.

**Lucien Kroll**

When attempting to transmit history through material objects, first history must be deconstructed into symbols and signs, and these fragments, endowed with a new meaning, must be incorporated into the work as bits of memory. Another method of achieving symbiosis between past and present is to incorporate the atmosphere or mood of the past – Japanese Buddhist thought or traditional Japanese aesthetics, or philosophy, or patterns of living, or arrangements of space – into Modern Architecture. In this case, the past that we are trying to incorporate is invisible, a spiritual legacy, and our intellectual task is to discover a way to make this spirit come alive in Modern Architecture in a sophisticated form.

**Kisho Kurokawa**

We have no vision of the future. It is all happening so quickly. A vision of the future is outdated as soon as it is expressed. We can only keep thinking and keep saying it can all be much more beautiful. For us, hard work is a way of life. We just keep working.

**Lucien Lafour & Rikkert Wijk**

**The architect must have some idea of immortality to do his work.**

**After all, history doesn't exist.**

**Daniel Libeskind**

There is a widespread yet largely unarticulated belief that buildings are going to disappear, and I share this sensation as well. Architecture is now prepared for being an ephemeral art. That is one of the reasons why architecture today so frequently appeals to the superficial image of its predecessors; today's society does not believe in the lasting condition of its own creations. The initial impact of the building is what counts, not its long life. My point of view, however, is that this durability – this condition of being built to last – is very powerful. One must still fight for that.

**Rafael Moneo**

**The once fashionable 'epistemological break' notwithstanding, ruptures always occur within an old fabric which is constantly dismantled and dislocated in such a way that its ruptures lead to new concepts or structure. In architecture such disjunction implies that at no moment can any part become a synthesis or self-sufficient totality.**

**Bernard Tschumi**

Architects should consider the need of several generations of users. This suggests political questions: Who shall decide for the future? and others regarding materials and the nature of spaces that will permit changes in both the philosophies and needs of future users. Long durée brings up consideration of the functions of space and the relations between spaces. Over the long run, should a building fit its present functions specifically, like a glove, or should it, like a mitten, satisfy a variety of functions, although the fit is loose for all? In our experience, adaptability does not necessarily require that space be bland. To appeal to multiple cultures over many years, a building might better be complex and multi-layered than bland and simple. Complex architecture may satisfy the avant-garde as well. Avant-garde architects have a right to enjoy their work. In civic, institutional, and other long-lived buildings we hope they can do so along with present and future users. Users today, who change their postures and opinions every decade, could be seen as the evanescent factor against which the building stands solid though not confrontational, supportive but not necessarily pliant.

**Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown**