

# Title: Mythopoetics of the Kunsthalle

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## Abstract:

In the midst of an architectural landscape replete with empty discourses on technology, environmentalism, and fetishistic spectacles, is there space for an architecture that holds on to the idealistic values of modernity? Is there space for an architecture that has not succumbed to the flattening logic of the market, indistinctly banalizing space either as utilitarian infrastructure or as propagandistic theme park? In other words, is it still possible to construct an architecture underpinned by what we might call 'humanist' values: universality, egalitarianism, and civility – a civic architecture – in the face of a post-humanist critique? Can 'the civic' be encapsulated and activated by a building?

In this article we will trace two different approaches for addressing this specific question by looking at a typology, the 'Kunsthalle,' through the prism of two buildings: Turner Contemporary, UK, and Kunsthau Graz, Austria. Through this comparison we will examine the Kunsthalle as a typology articulating social ideas through seemingly opposing architectural forms, but, more importantly, we will question whether its underlying ideas and principles could be applicable to the practice of architecture itself. In such a hypothetical scenario we will suggest that the Kunsthalle could be viewed as more than a typology; it could be viewed as a conceptual model conveying the fundamental instability of 'the civic,' and thus challenge architectural culture – its normative forms of subjectivity and attendant social relations – from within.

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Turner Contemporary. Photo by Manuel Shvartzberg

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of an architectural landscape replete with empty discourses on technology, environmentalism, and fetishistic spectacles, is there space for an architecture that holds on to the idealistic values of modernity? Is there space for an architecture that has not succumbed to the flattening logic of the market, indistinctly banalizing space either as utilitarian infrastructure or as propagandistic theme park? In other words, is it still possible to construct an architecture underpinned by what we might call ‘humanist’ values: universality, egalitarianism, and civility – a civic architecture – in the face of a post-humanist critique? Can ‘the civic’ be encapsulated and activated by a building? In this article we will trace two different approaches for addressing this specific question by looking at a typology, the ‘Kunsthalle,’ through the prism of two buildings: Turner Contemporary, UK, and Kunsthhaus Graz, Austria. Through this comparison we will examine the Kunsthalle as a typology articulating social ideas through seemingly opposing architectural forms, but, more importantly, we will question whether its underlying ideas and principles could be applicable to the practice of architecture itself. In such a hypothetical scenario we will suggest that the Kunsthalle could be viewed as more than a typology; it could be viewed as a conceptual model conveying the fundamental instability of ‘the civic,’ and thus challenge architectural culture – its normative forms of subjectivity and attendant social relations – from within.

## 1. The modern Kunsthalle as proto-civic architecture

The Kunsthalle is often interpellated as being capable of embodying a certain value-culture in how it relates art to citizenship. Beyond the logic of art as entertainment, and within a mythological paradigm that mobilizes art as a vehicle for universal understanding and community, the Kunsthalle is the reified promise of a radical cosmopolitanism: the utopia of an architecture that establishes boundaries without generating forms of exclusion in society. The ‘Kunsthalle’ (a German word for ‘art gallery’ which literally means ‘art-hall’ or ‘art-shed’) originates in northern and central Europe (Germany; but also the Swedish ‘Konsthall’; and Danish ‘Kunsthall’),<sup>2</sup> where the modern social-democratic design canon can also be said to have originated.<sup>3</sup> Hannah Arendt’s work suggests that it would seem to hold the key for enlightened architects to relate men *without* separating them.

David Chipperfield’s project for the Turner Contemporary gallery in Margate, UK, is a project that displays attributes of this modern utopianism. The building, a public art gallery, was commissioned by the regional government in an effort to ‘regenerate’ the depressed seaside town of Margate, which suffers from one of the worst levels of unemployment and social exclusion in England.<sup>4</sup> Turner Contemporary is thus another specimen in the recent genealogy of ‘culture-led-regeneration’ projects where a famous architect is contracted in order to give a waning city a social facelift.<sup>5</sup> Although Chipperfield has expressed reservations about architecture’s responsibility within these ambitious regeneration projects,<sup>6</sup> the Turner Contemporary gallery idiosyncratically mobilizes concepts of ‘the public’ and thus inscribes itself within the mythology of social-democratic design dignity; a myth which finds suitable expression in the typology of the ‘Kunsthalle.’ Turner Contemporary is a building that wants to be accessible, transparent, open, responsible, and efficient, and to do all this with a certain dignity. Its architecture, compared with the flamboyance of other specimens of its kind,<sup>7</sup> is distinctly austere – a quality that resonates with the social-democratic ideal of a civic architecture. Chipperfield recognizes this as an early

design intent:

The ambitions for this project were first of all that, given its lack of a permanent collection, it should be understood as a Kunsthalle, rather than as a museum. It is an arts center. I was interested in what might help guarantee that potentially fragile condition.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of a ‘civic architecture’ – as one could derive from the association to the “arts centre” (in opposition to the museum) – is here specifically linked to the typology of the Kunsthalle and to the recognition that with less defined capacities (an attribute of *kunsthallian* nature, such as the absence of a proper collection), comes the need to guarantee a “potentially fragile condition.” This fragility, in one instance, results from the fact that for a museum without a collection it is much harder to get loaned works of art, as it has nothing to trade with. But also, in its lack of a particular functionality, the Kunsthalle is typologically less determined than museums tend to be – its broad characteristics are providing flexible exhibition space (for any and all types of art), and providing spaces capable of hosting group events such as discussions, performances, and screenings. The Kunsthalle’s institutional nature is thus fundamentally transient and contingent: hosting temporary exhibitions and dependent on the activities borne therewith.

However, this relative indeterminacy is also possibly related to Chipperfield’s notion of the Kunsthalle’s “fragile condition” as a quality of the civic itself. The word ‘civic’ derives from the Latin *civicus*, from *civis*, which means ‘citizen.’ Thus, etymologically, a ‘civic’ architecture is an architecture of, or for, citizens – that is, an architecture that underpins the fragility of the social; the contingency of the very concept of citizenship. In this formulation, Chipperfield seems to be echoing Arendt in drawing a parallel between the primacy and fragility of the public realm – a physical space which establishes a ‘common world’ meaningfully binding people together – and the Ancient Greek *polis*, which, as Arendt tells us, was dependent on the physical structure of the city for its constitution.<sup>9</sup> This “space of appearance,”<sup>10</sup> focusing attention on the common without precluding a diversity of perspectives, resonates strongly with the ideal of the Kunsthalle. In Arendt’s words:

Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life, ... the reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators. Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.<sup>11</sup>

Is not the contemporary art world a particularly well-suited signifier for Arendt’s ‘space of appearance’ as the experience of speech and deed in the public realm? And does not the Kunsthalle, as a civic center that has no particular agenda, qualities, or social purpose, other than being a ‘space for expression’, work as a kind of contemporary *polis*? Viewed this way, the Kunsthalle would become the privileged typology for the contemporary fantasy of the cosmopolitan, enlightened citizenship formed around the world of art. As a space that makes no particular demands neither in concrete spatial terms, nor in the way it should be used (as the prerogative of contemporary art’s experimentalism, and in contrast to, for instance, the mercantilist agenda of the private art gallery), the Kunsthalle seems to pose itself as today’s aesthetico-

political stage for all manner of discussions: artistic, but also; philosophical, political, and social.<sup>12</sup> It is thus invested with the symbolic virtues of the ‘public realm’. In this way, the Kunsthalle could be understood as “civic” – a tool (*the* tool) for generating and sustaining community as a value in itself.

## 2. Architectural immunopolitics

Following this argument, Chipperfield identifies the condition of the Kunsthalle with “fragility,” but he also sets himself the explicit task of “guaranteeing” this fragility. His concern implies that the indeterminacy of the Kunsthalle (and hence also the indeterminacy of community) must be guarded, protected, ‘fixed.’ It is as if the architect, in this way, were acting as a guardian of community; as the social discriminator of the civic and of citizenship. Chipperfield discusses this self-imposed right and responsibility when considering the design of Turner Contemporary:

In such a context the architectural task is to create real value, getting the most out of the budget but more importantly making the building as open, inviting and unthreatening as possible, so that it works for the whole community. In the case of a cultural institution this means it should be less like a temple. It’s not about getting existing museum goes to go, it’s the wider community that is the issue.<sup>13</sup>

If the *polis* relied on the stability of the constructed world to underpin and make possible political action, but also, crucially, to delimit the condition of citizenship, Chipperfield here makes clear his intentions of creating a cosmopolitan space whose community is as open and wide as possible. Thus the architect assumes the position of custodian of a certain type of citizenship; a technocrat who engineers a particular definition of citizenship and community.

Implicit in this understanding of the Kunsthalle is the construction of an architecture that creates a space for citizens and community. However, this also inevitably leads to exclusion. Even a community intended to be as “open, inviting and unthreatening as possible,” generates or marks an ‘outside’ to that community and produces its own forms of protection against potential threats – what we may define, through the terminology of Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito, as ‘immunity’ – its own immunological defenses. Esposito’s arguments hinge around the etymological understanding of community from the Latin *communitas*, focusing on the root *munus* in its signification as the obligation of a ‘gift’ or duty that must be reciprocated. Community is not the gift itself, but rather the expectation of a gift – a debt that holds subjects in relation to each other – not the fulfillment of a debt, but the debt (the void) itself. Its opposite, ‘immunity’, is thus defined by Esposito as the exemption from that debt:

Tracing the term back to its etymological roots, *immunitas* is revealed as the negative or lacking form of *communitas*. If *communitas* is that relation, which in binding its members to an obligation or reciprocal gift-giving, jeopardizes individual identity, *immunitas* is the condition of dispensation from such an obligation and therefore the defense against the expropriating features of *communitas*. ... We can say that *immunitas*, to the degree it protects the one who carries it from risky contact with those who lack it,

restores its own borders that were jeopardized by the common.<sup>14</sup>

Esposito thus identifies ‘immunity’ as the restoration of borders affected by the impositions of community and the process through which it occurs as ‘immunopolitics’ – both terms represent oppositions to the notions of community and the ‘civic.’ Taken literally into the realm of architecture, ‘immunity’ and the ‘immunopolitical’ can be understood as the work of architecture itself – after all, architecture cannot avoid drawing boundaries; ‘putting *that wall there*’; making distinctions between inside and outside and, by extension, defining appropriate users and their opposites. Thus, we come to an understanding of architecture, even the architecture of the Kunsthalle, that seems impossible to define as absolutely civic; architects, more or less autocratically, impose an architectural form and a cultural definition on the community in which they work.

This ‘immunological’ condition is then inherent in the condition of architecture as a practice of civic adjudication. But can this condition be addressed (ameliorated or exacerbated) directly through the purely formal – a particular sensual experience, morphology or style? Taking two seemingly antithetical formal approaches – Peter Cook’s ‘fluid’ Kunsthau Graz, and David Chipperfield’s ‘purist’ Turner Contemporary – we ask; can ‘the civic’ be addressed as a purely formal architectural phenomenon? How do they articulate the Kunsthalle’s community/immunity membrane?

### ‘Purist’ architecture

In the case of Turner Contemporary as ‘Kunsthalle’, the discourse of ‘community’ and other social values were embedded in the design intent of the building. This modernist, proto-civic discourse was materialized through a design that sought to reduce the project’s conditions and ‘problems’ so as to allow for the affirmation of the social and architectural values advocated – openness, community, accessibility, as well as technical performance. ‘Openness’ and ‘accessibility’ were to be *achieved* by locating art as close as possible to the front entrance;<sup>15</sup> ‘community’ was to be *achieved* by providing primary public spaces at ground level and making them visible from the street;<sup>16</sup> and natural lighting conditions were optimally integrated to ensure high technical performance and thus the most ‘dignified’ experience of seeing art.<sup>17</sup>

Externally, the form is shaped by a consideration of the town’s scale – matching the adjacent buildings’ heights and providing adequate access provisions, to and around the building, in what is a complex, liminal site.<sup>18</sup> In the same way as the design factors considered can be positivistically enumerated and distinguished as precise elements, the actual tectonics of the building – its formal nature – is also clearly legible: simple prismatic volumes, walls, stairs and windows, are arranged in such a way that the gallery spaces themselves are clearly defined, with clear limits. For example, the entrance ‘piazza’ is rectangular in plan, proportionally similar to the actual gallery spaces inside, and has four distinct sides marked by stairs, walls and the building itself.





Turner Contemporary. Photo by Manuel Shvartzberg

The ‘clarity’ or ‘purism’ distilled by the way Turner Contemporary is organized, and therefore by the way it organizes the physicality of the art experience, can be related to what critic Kenneth Frampton called ‘the place-form’: a spatial construct that clearly defines a boundary – against pure flux (architecture as infrastructure) and against sprawling development (architecture as market dynamics). Frampton has argued that spatial clarity or definition is a pre-condition for Arendt’s ‘space of appearance’ (a shared public space in which one is seen and heard) and that it therefore offers a political or socially engaged form of architecture.<sup>19</sup> This notion also resonates with the explicit intentions of building with an aesthetic that references the tradition of social-democratic design and its avowed universalism. However, it also includes a judgment upon the role of art in society and how it should be viewed. Within the canon of the Kunsthalle as social *tool*, ‘purist’ architecture presents art as a transformational, educational, and civilizing experience. This mythology of art as absolute social reflection and communal therapy is thus inscribed in a narrative of progressive political resistance. Chipperfield explicitly opposes this ‘Purist’ approach to non-purist art space design strategies that are, in his view, colluding with the flattening logic of art as entertainment:

I think there is a strange thing that happens in the design of contemporary cultural buildings. The drama that such institutions increasingly seem to require is generally achieved through the grafting on of circulation spaces and bits of ancillary programme, which are not to do with the primary activity. It is interesting that if you go back and look at historical precedents, there was not much between the front door and the first piece of art. Now we are dealing with the museum or gallery as part of the leisure industry. All the bits that are now regarded as essential - the shop, entrance, café, education space, big staircase etc. serve to collectively distance the visitor from the art. Now museum directors have to go through their collection and choose pieces because they fit those

spaces rather than because it makes sense in terms of curatorship.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to this ‘impurity’, Chipperfield attempts to ‘dignify’ the art-viewing experience for the community, therefore providing the ‘correct quantity and quality’ of art to its citizens beyond the enslaving dynamics of art-viewing in contemporary capitalism. This is authoritatively *achieved* through a focus on programmatic purity (his focus on the primary activity of display); the establishment of clearly bounded ‘spaces of appearance’ (the ‘place-form’); and the phenomenological particularization of the art object when illuminated with natural light.<sup>21</sup>

This architectural clarity, however, far from producing a universal community of understanding, was not immune to a polarized public opinion regarding the gallery; despite all the social-architectural aims of openness, community and accessibility. It was seen by some as exacerbating economic and cultural class exclusions; some local citizens expressed their alienation at the prospect of the ‘cosmopolitan art elites’ perturbing the small town of Margate once the gallery was built; some cultural critics denounced what they considered demagogic political propaganda through ‘star-architecture’ instead of building more ‘useful’ buildings such as hospitals or schools. Yet another set of critics questioned the gallery as a project that commodified culture through marketing Margate as a ‘creative city’ – with the ultimate end of instrumentalizing this creativity for the logic of capital – generating land value speculation in the town and driving existing residents out of their homes.

Following our earlier ‘immunopolitical’ interpretation, the purity of the building’s program, spaces and possibly its purist aesthetic, led to certain social ruptures. It was seen as separating inside and outside, defining users and non-users and, by extension, categorizing citizens and non-citizens. Indeed, it could be argued that despite the communitarian aims of the project, in fact because of them, the project privileged a particular type of citizen – one who is either already protected by the humanist, social-democratic welfare state, or who is an immunized agent of the elitist art world community.

### **‘Fluid’ architecture**

If ‘purist’ architecture is derived through a Hegelian struggle of opposites which results in a synthesis that creates a categorical inside-outside divide, ‘fluid’ architecture engages context in a completely different way: by attempting to diffuse categories altogether. We find an example of this type of architecture in the Kunsthaus Graz, Austria. This building is comparable to Turner Contemporary on many accounts: it is of a similar size, it is located in a town other than the nation’s capital, and also doesn’t have a collection of its own. But this is where the similarities stop. Architecturally, the two galleries are completely different: if Turner Contemporary establishes clear articulations between elements through an absolute self/other categorization, Kunsthaus Graz seeks to blur all conventional categories. This ‘fluidity’ is latent in how it relates to its context, in its own morphology, and in how it structures the art experience itself.

In contrast to the Turner Contemporary, the Kunsthaus Graz is embedded within the historical city fabric, and thus resolutely stands out from its context, it appears (using the institution’s phrase) as a ‘friendly alien.’ However, if our built environment were to be universally populated by buildings and landscapes of similar ‘fluid’ architectural traits, then literally boundaries between buildings, and urban categories



generally, would become much harder to distinguish. As opposed to the pure ‘place-form’ discussed earlier, this fluidity would result in a city that has lost all established references to conventional, legible form – it would become a “zone of indiscernibility.”<sup>22</sup>

This resonates with the ‘deep ecology’ of the post-humanist philosopher Timothy Morton. As discussed in his book, *The Ecological Thought*, Morton argues for an ontological understanding of “mesh” to replace the problematic Cartesianism of the object/subject dichotomy.<sup>23</sup> In Morton’s formulation, our increased scientific and ethical awareness of the interdependency of the ‘self,’ and what we call the ‘environment,’ results in a total dissolution between any conception of a background and a foreground. Given this understanding of the physical/ontological as a total continuum, Morton suggests we ought to consider everything in terms of ‘nearness’ rather than inside/outside or here/there. Architecturally, this would translate as a total fluidity in and between form, program, context, and physical experience.

In order to design such a complex ‘organic whole’, architecture is to be regarded less as an aggregation of distinct products and more as the interaction of fluid processes. In Morton’s words: “The surfaces of living beings are envelopes and filters, thick regions where complex chemical transfers and reactions take place.”<sup>24</sup> Theoretically, a truly fluid and responsive architecture of this kind seems to suggest the possibility of total political inclusion: by infinitely modulating itself in response to the contingent factors of community – opening, closing, and folding itself as and when required – it could potentially avoid drawing the immunopolitical line between community and ‘the other.’



Kunsthaus in Graz. Photo by Marion Schneider & Christoph Aistleitner

In this case Morton’s ideas also apply formally and programmatically. Like many other projects within the diverse currents of architectural ‘digitalism,’<sup>25</sup> Kunsthaus Graz, although not literally chemically responsive and kinetic, follows a fluid logic of formal defamiliarization and indiscernibility that wants to be understood in terms of ‘nearness’ rather than ‘here/there.’ Hence, what Chipperfield discusses critically in terms of the “grafting on of circulation spaces and bits of ancillary programme which are not to do with the primary activity” is here featured prominently and in multiple articulations: its façade is

literally a huge electronic sign; the top of the building hosts a long corridor with windows offering spectacular views of the city; and the exhibition spaces are heavily determined by non-Cartesian geometries and atmospheric spatial effects. In other words, the building clearly affirms itself within a wider paradigm of ‘affect’ as opposed to making any claims as a tool for experiencing art in a ‘pure’ way.

The result of these formal and programmatic tropes however, is not one of a total dissolution of the immunopolitical effect. On the contrary, by presenting itself as a “friendly alien,” firmly anchored in a culture of spectacularization, the Kunsthaus Graz is exoticising and gentrifying ‘the other’: its strangeness is not one which dissolves economic and cultural fault lines, but one which domesticates them. Following Morton, our relation with *strangeness* cannot be one of ‘understanding’, as this is effectively reconstructing the immunopolitical divide of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ In order for such an art space to fluidly dissolve static categorizations, it must articulate a *strange* strangeness – one where “we can’t ever predict exactly who or what strange strangers are, whether they are a “who” or a “what.”<sup>26</sup> Without this total denaturalization, *mere* strangeness will serve the clear role of ‘the other’ in a well-rehearsed narrative of phony defamiliarization.

In this sense, by aligning itself so clearly with a dynamic of cultural spectacularization, Kunsthaus Graz not only gentrifies the other in morphological terms, it also caricatures art as entertainment and creativity as capital – a notion of art which tends towards its commodification and which is therefore far from encouraging as a ‘zone of indiscernibility’ between the self and the other; far from a ‘civic’ architecture of true communal engagement. As critic Douglas Spencer has noted, this architectural approach “has tended to read the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari with a marked bias towards its Bergsonian and Spinozian (rather than Marxian) registers,”<sup>27</sup> thus expurgating political questions from architectural discourse.

The unboundedness of ‘fluid’ architecture might not literally produce a clear inside-outside, but in its lack of a clear-cut political mythology it ends up supporting the logic of the citizen as consumer, which is the substitution of the never-fulfilled, reciprocal, ‘gift’ of *communitas* with capitalism’s commodification of culture for the individual – precisely the opposite of Esposito’s definition of community as a reciprocal and equitable relationship between individuals. This building too fails as civic architecture, not through reifying the divide between ‘art-citizens’ and alienated ‘art outsiders,’ but because its fluidity reduces all potential ‘citizens’ to mere consumers.

### **Beyond architectural positivism**

What we see in these two projects are two different formal and programmatic approaches to the typology of the Kunsthalle. The ‘purist’ approach applied in Margate resulted in certain negative reactions from the community on socio-political grounds; and while the ‘fluidity’ of form and program employed in Graz may not have alienated the public on these grounds, it certainly failed to produce a space for critical engagement with the public – a ‘civic’ architecture or a ‘space of appearance’. In neither case however, were these failings a question of pure form or aesthetic. Neither ‘the fluid’ nor ‘the purist’ formal approaches are capable of overcoming the immunopolitical impasse because, in reality, the nature of the ‘civic’ does not reside here. Attempts at locating such traces of a radical cosmopolitanism in a kind of

material resolution (whether through formal dialectic purism or “architectural Deleuzism”) are patently insufficient. Although certain forms may be conducive to certain behaviors, to claim that architectural form alone, as a kind of social machine, reifies and naturalizes ideas without factoring in the pervasive social processes that modulate and configure those effects as well, is to fall into a naïve positivism.

The idea that the reality of the social lies in a more total scientific knowledge of its material expressions is the same fantasy as that of ‘solving climate-change’ through a totally environmentally-intelligent architecture – as if both the question and the answer to climate change resided solely in information and technology. Likewise, the idea that the reality of the social can be encapsulated by a single privileged agent, such as the master-architect, as a self-appointed avant-garde who by virtue of their mastery over ‘space,’ may totally resolve the tensions of society, responds to the same positivistic fantasy.<sup>28</sup>

The pitfall is to assume that the social may be totally understood and its tensions absolutely resolved by reducing it to a matter of technocracy. In the context of architecture, this technocratic regime alludes to a pseudo-scientificism to justify architectural form, or to claims of expertise in design; the (immunopolitical) professionalization of architectural practice. In both cases we have seen, the discourses employed to arrive at and justify architectural form negate the idea of community and the uncertainty and complexity it involves by replacing it with different totalizing meanings. The ‘purist’ approach constructs a theological narrative where the master architect, like the sovereign, assumes the body of the community, interpreting its nature and establishing its *right* form – a singular authority totalizes the space of appearance of the design process, effectively erecting professional-immunological barriers against the community that the building is supposed to serve. In contrast, the ‘fluid’ approach mirrors the flux of capitalism, allowing itself to be uniquely shaped by the flows of art as industrial entertainment. Renouncing any form of opposition, the architectural discourse renders itself immune through invisibility: architecture *becomes* the market, and in so doing, the citizen loses the productive negative pressure of community in exchange for their commodified subjectivity (their commodified sense of self).

Thus, we suggest, the key to addressing ‘civic architecture’ underpinned by values of universality, egalitarianism and civility, cannot be through material and geometric aesthetics alone, but rather through a ‘politics of aesthetics’ – an understanding of how architectural discourses are ways of institutionalizing politics. These discourses should not attempt to resolve antagonisms through architectural form, but rather to stage them in the political act of making architecture – an act involving an indeterminate and agonistic idea of community.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. The *kunsthallization* of architectural professionalism

Although the analysis given here seems negative, a possible way out, or route through, this immunopolitical impasse may be found in the idea of the Kunsthalle itself – as something undefined, transient and contingent – as something indeterminate. It takes on this condition in contrast to both the fixed and rigid definitions of the museum and the permanent collection on the one hand, and in contrast to the commodification of culture in the commercial art gallery on the other. On this basis it may be worth asking whether the architectural profession should consider subjecting itself to its own *kunsthallization* – to explore its own potential as a practice of the contingent and unstable forces of community. In this

interpretation, the Kunsthalle's attraction lies in its potential as an analogy for architectural practice itself – as a discourse on both the representation and performance of the non-closure of the social.<sup>30</sup> The Kunsthalle's ultimate success is to never totally close itself upon itself. It relies on maintaining itself as open and contingent – as always unpredictable and 'contemporary' itself; as something resisting the definition of 'community' as a type of closure – at best, art is a 'community' that forms around the negation of itself; of its own community.

In a similar way, the architectural community, what we call 'the profession,' could explore its potential in part by questioning its own established and closed practices. Architects should turn towards their own profession as if arriving at a Kunsthalle empty-handed, ready to acknowledge and let go of all preconceptions, allowing themselves to be intimately touched by both its mythological experimentalism and social responsibility, re-learning how and what it can mean to be an architect. Only by identifying and altering the in-built immunopolitical dimensions of the architect's own self, their business, and their profession in the context of society at large, will architecture face a truly critical and political challenge – that of its own constitution. What is required if architecture is to go beyond the exclusionary aspects of the modern humanist project of 'the civic,' is the addressing of its own psycho-social ecology so as to disengage the architect from technocratic automatism and pseudo-scientific discourses that prevent 'the profession' from engaging in the complexities of processes of subjectivation; the mental, legal and other processes through which the architect's definition and understanding of him/herself are formed.<sup>31</sup>

Following this argument, we can say that professionalism is the appropriation of a subject by a way of life: making it proper and closing it on itself – turning it into a possession to be possessed by individuals. Thus, Esposito's paradigm of immunization also helps explain the characteristic defensiveness of professionalism in the context of modernity. As ways of life, such as that of the architect, become institutionally mediated – first through guilds and then through professional institutions – their communitarian potentialities are pitted against an individualistic model of self-preservation. Professionalism thus constitutively 'locks' ways of life in a logic of privacy against the obligation of reciprocal gift-giving demanded by community. The paradox is therefore evident: while professionalism is advocated as a public guarantee, it is also the mechanism by which a collective of individuals (architects) achieves a degree of autonomy (separation) and thus immunity from community.<sup>32</sup>

Professionalism thus becomes the 'immunitary mechanism' by which a group of individuals insure themselves against the debt inherent to community. By reifying the agents of community into fixed identities of the social (i.e. "the architect"), and virtualizing the 'debt' into specific transactions to be settled through capital, the professional contract also marks the closure of the social and the collapse of community. This substitution of the common by the private mirrors the substitution of subjectivity by professionalism's totalizing appropriation of a 'way of life' – an identification that trades subjectivity for self-preservation in commercial and utilitarian terms. The inversion of this would represent a form of *kunsthallization* of architectural professionalism – a reconsideration of the architect's own identity and role, its conversion into artistic substance and, indeed, a matter of design through which the architectural community's immunity is intimately formed.<sup>33</sup>

Everything about architecture as technocracy, about the architect's understanding of his/her identity, must be challenged; architecture as an instrumental form of capitalistic 'added value'; the idea of 'civic

architecture' itself; architectural corporatocracy;<sup>34</sup> the architect-builder relation as a form of economic, legal, technical, and professional adversarialism; the imperatives of style; and the very notion of professionalism. We should seek to articulate value beyond capitalist speculation and to openly, aesthetically and politically, experiment with an art of the architect-self.<sup>35</sup>

Against a vision of the profession as service-providing and distanced, as a soldier of normativity in what Jacques Rancière terms “the order of the police,”<sup>36</sup> we should strive to generate a discussion in which architects recognize the ‘other’ within their own profession; relinquishing custodianship and coming to terms with their own over-professionalized citizenship. As Morton puts it, to recognize our very own *strange* strangeness; “our own artificiality, projected onto the outside world.”<sup>37</sup> This entails challenging professionalist distinctions and the current processes of design and construction, including the techno-legal scaffolds upon which they are founded. A new relationship to making architecture, a new relation between the architect and the social, between architecture and subjectivity is needed – one that subverts mercantilist logics in favor of a critical notion of who and what makes (and counts in) social space.

And yet, we cannot completely abandon professionalization – the myth of total technocracy cannot be replaced by an equally destructive myth of total liberalization. The practice of architecture cannot be totally *liberated*. We need to develop an awareness of the critical tension architects are inescapably inscribed in, and try to theorize a ‘third way’ of professionalism – not a path between labor and capital or old and new, but rather between the practice of architecture and the production of subjectivity. This path must make the relations visible in an exercise of (utopian but necessary) responsibility; a form of practice that is conscious of its intrinsic contaminatedness and limitations – a *critical* professionalism.

The projects examined earlier failed as ‘civic’ architecture because, despite being programmatically definable as Kunsthallen – places for open ended experimentation and communal participation – they were produced through a process of design and implementation at odds with these values. ‘Civic architecture’ presents us with the aporia of modernity’s good intentions and fatal consequences. However, architects have established a space in the collective imaginary for creating new political definitions to move beyond this impasse: the Kunsthalle. Now it is time “architecture” left the office and subjected itself to the Kunsthalle’s promise.

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 52.

<sup>2</sup> Not only did political social democracy determine 20<sup>th</sup> century history in these countries (particularly in Sweden), but the paradigm of social democracy – the pragmatic compromise between labor and capital for the technocratic optimization of society as an organic whole – was both exemplified and furthered through design culture. Unlike other radical modernisms, social-democratic design was able to secure the identification of the individual with the collective and put the private ‘virtues’ of austerity and responsibility at the service of the public good. See: Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, eds. *Swedish Modernism, Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare state* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010). See also: Manuel Shvartzberg, “When Cathedrals were blue”, *Magazine on Urbanism*, January 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Frampton, “The Untimely Timeliness of Swedish Modernism,” in *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts*, edited by Lucy Creagh, Helena Kaberg, Barbara Miller Lane, and Kenneth Frampton, 15-18 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Savage, “Unemployment rises in Britain’s seaside towns.” *The Independent*, August 21 2009.

<sup>5</sup> A genealogy that usually begins with the Guggenheim Bilbao; the most notable instance in recent history (1999) where a famous architect – in this case Frank O. Gehry – was commissioned to design and build a spectacular structure to house an art museum that would revitalize the regional economy by attracting tourism. The “Bilbao Effect” was thus coined to refer to this type of economic and cultural ‘miracle’.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Rosbottom, “Interview: David Chipperfield on the Turner Contemporary gallery” *The Architectural Review*. April 28 2011.

Chipperfield’s view on ‘regeneration’: “Margate has real social and economic problems, which are explicit within the physical fabric of the town, but I think it is right not to stress issues of regeneration and that has always been my policy. One may have expectations and ambitions for regeneration, and a building may possibly do something to fulfill them but that cannot be its primary purpose. As an architect you have to work hard for what it is meant to be doing and making sure it does it well. If, as a result, you get regeneration, then that is, of course, fantastic but it cannot be the reason to undertake a building project.”

<sup>7</sup> Guggenheim Bilbao, Centre Pompidou-Metz, Denver Art Museum, Kunsthau Graz, to name a few.

<sup>8</sup> Rosbottom, *Interview*.

<sup>9</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*. These two attributes; the contingency of citizenship and the reliance on physical structures as the basis for political action are explored in p.14 (“Athenian law did not permit remaining neutral and punished those who did not want to take sides in factional strife with loss of citizenship”) and p. 194 (“Before men began to act, a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place, the space being the public realm of the polis and its structure the law”).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance: Rogoff, Irit. “Turning”. E-flux journal, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/turning/>

<sup>13</sup> Rosbottom, *Interview*.

<sup>14</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Bios. Biopolitics and Philosophy*, Trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 50.

<sup>15</sup> By literally walking into a large gallery space when one crosses the main entrance door, and by making that ground level gallery space visible from the outside through large windows.

<sup>16</sup> A gallery, café (open to an entrance ‘piazza’), bookshop, flexible ‘events space’ for screenings, seminars, performances, etc, are all located in the ground level.

<sup>17</sup> North-facing clerestory windows filter natural light into each of the gallery rooms. The light is modulated by another set of south-facing skylights, and glare and black-out blinds are integrated in all openings for total control over the rooms’ lighting conditions.

<sup>18</sup> The gallery sits in a plot of land directly adjacent to the sea (towards the North) and the town (towards to South). This ‘no-man’s land’ is flooded an average of 7 times per year, which is why the building is raised by 2m on a concrete plinth.

<sup>19</sup> “The bounded place-form, in its public mode, is also essential to what Hannah Arendt has termed “the space of human appearance,” since the evolution of legitimate power has always been predicated upon the existence of the “polis” and upon comparable units of institutional and physical form.” Kenneth Frampton, “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>20</sup> Rosbottom, *Interview*.

<sup>21</sup> Following this argument, Frampton discussed how natural light in galleries could resist the commodification of art by anchoring artworks within the specific experience of the local (as opposed to the placelessness of commodities); he also argued that a design’s attention to other senses than just the visual could provide a phenomenological experience of space which contested the hegemonic regime of sight, thereby dislocating capitalism’s reduction of experience to mere scenography of market information. Frampton, *Towards a Critical Regionalism*, 27-29.

<sup>22</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>25</sup> For instance; parametricism, which uses CAD technology to transcribe any given parameter into spatial information; or, as with the Kunsthau Graz, blob architecture, which seeks to destabilize familiarity as discussed in the text. What I am interested in regarding these movements is that they represent a shift in architectural thought from particular values (such as modernist values) to a kind of architectural technocracy where the focus is on the ‘how’ rather than the ‘why’. This is perhaps best exemplified in Michael Speaks’s essay “Design Intelligence.” *A+ U* 12, no. 387 (2002): 11-18: “Visionary, utopian ideas have given way to the ‘chatter’ of intelligence. Philosophical, political, and scientific truth have fragmented into proliferating swarms of ‘little’ truths”.

<sup>26</sup> Morton, *Ecological Thought*, 46.

<sup>27</sup> This results in a debased form of criticality that he has termed ‘Architectural Deleuzism,’ in which, as Douglas says, “the production of all social space tends now to converge upon a single organizational paradigm designed to generate and service mobility, connectivity and flexibility. Networked, landscaped, borderless and reprogrammable, this is a space that functions, within the built environments of business, shopping, education or the ‘creative industries’, to mobilize the subject as a communicative and enterprising social actant. Integrating once discrete programmes within its continuous terrain, and promoting communication as a mechanism of valorization, control and feedback, this spatial model trains the subject for a life of opportunistic networking.” Douglas Spencer, “Architectural Deleuzism: Neoliberal Space, Control and the ‘University’.” *Radical Philosophy* 168 (2011): 9.

<sup>28</sup> This is a long-standing attribute of architectural avant-gardes, at least since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. See for instance: Mary McLeod,

“Architecture or Revolution: Taylorism, Technocracy, and Social Change.” *Art Journal* 43.2 (1983): 132-147.

<sup>29</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001).



<sup>30</sup> Following this argument, it can be said that the Kunsthalle is the proto-democratic space for society. As Claude Lefort argued: “democracy is instituted and sustained by the *dissolution of the markers of certainty*. It inaugurates a history in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law and knowledge, and as to the basis of relations between *self* and *other*”. Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*. Translated David Macey (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 19.

<sup>31</sup> Regarding the psycho-social emancipation alluded to here see Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*. Translated by Gary Genosko (London: Continuum, 2008), 25; and for a critique on how political discourses pervade scientific discourses see Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Esposito, *Bios*, xi. As Timothy Campbell notes in the introduction: “He who has been freed from communal obligations or who enjoys an originary autonomy or successive freeing from a previously contracted debt enjoys the condition of *immunitas*.”

<sup>33</sup> Rejecting rigid characterizations of the architect’s ‘role in society’ would re-cast the architect’s subjectivity beyond technocratic dogmas and, perhaps, this would avoid what Guattari terms the “cycle of deathly repetition.” As Guattari puts it: “In order to converge with the perspective of the art world, psychiatrists [and architects] must demonstrate that they have abandoned their white coats, beginning with those invisible ones that they wear in their heads, in their language and in the ways they conduct themselves.” Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Morton, *Ecological Thought*, 54: “Consider the idea of the “authoritarian personality,” the too-normal person who seems to have purged herself or himself of negativity, perhaps of any trace of inner life – but at what cost? Corporate culture selects for authoritarian personalities all the way down the chain of command. For the authoritarian personality, all psychic space appears smooth, spick and span”

<sup>35</sup> As Guattari suggests, “Rather than remaining subject, in perpetuity, to the seductive efficiency of economic competition, we must reappropriate Universes of value, so that processes of singularization can rediscover their consistency. We need new social and aesthetic practices, new practices of the Self in relation to the other, to the foreign, the strange.” Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Ranciere, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Translated by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> Morton, *Ecological Thought*, 54.

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