

Is Architectural Theory Liable to Be Affected by No End of Issues and Disciplines?

JOS BOSMAN

Technical University of Eindhoven

Nowadays every architect, architectural student, and in particular every teacher, has his or her own personal point of view, presented as architectural 'concepts'. The result is that we have become used to the fact that every architectural theory is liable to be affected by no end of issues and disciplines, and that theorizing, whatever form it takes, is very much an individual affair and as such may have no claim to universal validity. Steven Holl, for example, is *for* phenomenology and *against* abstract linguistic analogies, while Bernard Tschumi is *against* a preconceived form and *for* post-structuralist ideas, such as "inscribing bodies in space," which he defends as the starting point of his designs. Both architects have been teaching for many years at the same university and the students have been left to discover the difference for themselves. They roam around on the *mille plateaux* where every conceivable form, looked at from a different viewpoint, appears to mean something else.

But perhaps the status of the seemingly 'open' non-consensus we regard nowadays as inevitable in terms of architectural concepts is one big misunderstanding, once we try to understand the involved concepts in terms of their type of operation (of being formulated and communicated). For, instead of the countless 'unrelated semantic atoms' that have also long enjoyed the status of received truth in linguistics, the meaning of multiplicity can, in fact, as Susan Lindner demonstrated, be categorized as a limited number of basic representations of related expressions¹. The important thing is that the form of reasoning should not allow such a notional determination to lapse into a fixed, hierarchical schema. A consensus for this is to be found in the adoption of an underlying thought-image, or, as Gilles Deleuze puts it, *image-pensée*.

In the following sections we start with how architects deal with concepts, and at the same time we try to better understand how the basic understanding of concept has changed from a modern abstract one to a post-modern sensuous one. It is the *form* of the understanding of a concept we are dealing with here, not the content.

The most common way in which a Western-trained architect thinks about a concept is by means of a visual comparison. For years most architects accompanied their lectures by dual projection slide shows. The two images show a related expression, either with some kind of common or different features (often it is just about a slight difference), framed by a common term or name. If the architect succeeds to theorize what he/she presents by means of a visual comparison, such is often based on paired concepts—somewhat in the tradition of the Wölfflin School. For instance, Bernard Tschumi's 'architecture and disjunction' and José Luis Mateo's 'vaporous solidity,' are both in a way variations on Wölfflin's 'tectonics-atectonics,' based on the opposition stable-unstable. But it are variations of a particular kind, a kind as published by Michel Tournier in *Le Miroir des idées* (1994), a 'treatise' in which he discusses one hundred paired concepts, starting with 'man and woman' and ending with 'being and nothingness'. In his introduction Tournier reminds us that Kant employed twelve conceptual keys made up of four main concepts, each with three sub-concepts.

Tournier includes two of Kant's main concepts, quality and quantity, in his own list of one hundred paired concepts. He observes, among other things, that it is possible to allow the temperature of water to fall a degree at a time in accordance with a quantitative scale, but that suddenly, after the temperature has reached zero, the water undergoes a change in quality

and becomes ice. By thus confronting concepts with one another by means of the description of a representation that becomes, so to speak, visualized while reading, Tournier combines the powers of the visual comparison and the paired concept in a contemporary understanding of a concept in a way that also architects use to apply them.

Such use of the paired concept, paired by subtle difference and fierce tension, has a source. It comes from semiotics, where the term 'category' is used to mean obeying a categorical opposition—for instance up-under, when dealing with verticality. This is essentially different from the use of the term 'category' in Kant's theory, where the categories stand by themselves as object and material-related concepts.

As Kant may be seen as the major representative of the project of modernity, the moment has now arrived in our analysis to trace back the changed use of the notion of concept more precisely, as well as some of the most relevant criticism, and efforts of correction.

In Kant's Critique of Pure Reason he distinguishes 'space' and 'time' as the *a priori* of aesthetics, and he sees four categories as the *a priori* of analytical intellect, each with three subdivisions: quantity (plurality, unity, totality), quality (negation, reality, limitation), relation (cause-effect, reciprocity, substance-accident) and modality (existence, possibility, necessity). We see that two subcategories are defined by pairs (cause-effect and substance-accident), but they function rather as the scale of a course that propels abstract thinking and not as a polarity within a field of experience (like the categories of semiotics later on).

In the sequence of influence of Kant on Wölfflin on Giedion, there was also a minor influence from Lipps and his empathy theory, resulting in the wish to relate the experience of feeling inside of aesthetics to intellect. Giedion, who chose 'space' and 'time' as a concept pair for the understanding of modern architecture, suggests this by referring to the possibility of a sensed space-time experience in abstract painting, and of an analytical notion of space-time in science. He declared it to be a crucial topic, as such, to relate feeling and intellect: "We must first understand how far the emotional and intellectual are today interrelated, how nearly we have approached that vital preconception of every culture: affinity between its methods of thinking and feeling."² Such 'vital preconception' may be understood as a wish to relate the *a priori* of aesthetics and analytical thinking.

Giedion made a strong point here, but he was not really able to deal with it as a theme or topic. Mark Johnson pointed out in *The Body in the Mind* (1987)³ that the usual disengagement of emotion frequently experienced in conceptual thinking is a legacy from Plato in which the questions 'why' and 'what' are regarded as being of a different order from the question 'how'. It is a legacy that dooms the architect—as well as an art historian like Giedion—who thinks in images, to the status of a wandering soul; Johnson: "According to what I am calling the 'Platonic' reading of this diagram, imagination is our way of grasping objects through their images, shadows, and reflections. But, as we all know from our experience, such images can be fleeting, changeable, and illusory. (...) To grasp (...) essences, therefore, it is necessary to jump to the 'intelligible' realm beyond the senses—to transcend all sensuous and imaginative cognition." Johnson, based on studies like that of Lindner, set out to show that the power of imagination, once understood as working at an abstract level via perceptual schemas—*image-schemata*—forms the link between physical experience and the more complex manner of expressing experience in language. He believes that this discovery of an active role of perceptual schemas inside imagination justifies the recognition of a similar impulse in Kant's conceptual thinking, but with this difference:

"In contrast to Kant's view, I have stopped short of his stronger thesis that schemata are procedures for generating images that can fit concepts." This can be taken as an adequate definition of abstract notion of a scheme: an image that is able—by means of the sensuous—to "fit concepts." Johnson continues: "Instead, I am identifying the schema as a *continuous structure of an organising activity*. Yet, even though schemata are definite structures, they are dynamic patterns rather than fixed and static images, as their visual diagrams represent them." So Johnson takes an "organising activity" as a starting point, that—in relation to the corporeal basis that he introduces with his book—may be taken as of a sensuous nature that renders the diagram as an elastic kind of flexibility. In this way, we arrive at a possible definition of the sensuous notion of a scheme.

Relating meaning to abstracted schemes of perceptual understanding is a discovery of semiotics. Kant had supposed in a rather more open way that imagination 'schematizes' when it relates its power to understanding (with its concepts). In semiotics the notion of empathy is used to imagine such a relationship as a scheme that relates a perceptual understanding to meaning with a visual—sometimes symbolic—content. Allowing imagination to form the link between physical

experience and language implies a dramatic shift of position within Plato's schema: instead of 'how—what/why', from now on 'how' (analogous to emotion) might occupy a position in relation to 'what' (analogous to physical experience and material conditions) and 'why' (analogous to intellect).

Such 'adjustment' in the Platonic arrangement corresponds to the Cartesian schema of the zones of the face: physical-chin, emotional-nose, intellectual-eyes/forehead. Towards the end of the 19th century, this Cartesian schema was rediscovered, via psychology, in theatrical theory, where it was seized upon as a possible conceptual basis for essential differences in expressiveness (and led to the entire body being divided into zones of expressiveness). In every time period and every theory, in which expressiveness has formed a key of understanding, emotion played a role together with intuition. For the first time at the beginning of the twentieth century this acquired the specific notion of 'Einfühlung' (empathy). Only then was a theoretical hinge between phenomenological experience and abstraction discovered.

Worringer had developed a most interesting model of relating empathy to abstraction, which continues its effect in the image-oriented architectural theory of Sigfried Giedion as an intuitive component of orientation. We also recognize the empathy-abstraction connection in the terminology of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin invented combined understandings such as *Bildgedächtnis* (image memory) and *Gedächtnisbild* (memory image), in which the notions of image and space are related on a corporeal basis⁴. This type of combination allows imagination to take a central position between bodily experience and language, as a way in which empathy relates to abstraction. Less refined, but most effective, do the captions under Giedion's image comparisons witness of a similar space of imagination that links a specific type of corporeal experience to the analytical notion in the theory he develops in the running text.

The basic problem of the position of imagination in modern art and architectural theory is that Giedion, Benjamin, Adorno, later Tafuri and many other important theoreticians, converted their ideas and assumptions toward a historical materialist model, that in itself would allow no place for the image-oriented way of thinking. The most absolute and extreme proof of this exclusion may be found in the East German 'Philosophisches Wörterbuch' (philosophical dictionary)—Leipzig 1964, reaching 325,000 copies in the 8th edition of 1972—where the understanding of the human consciousness is reduced to a "modern information theory"

that denies the role of icon-like signs⁵. Historical materialist thinking cleaned the sensuous aspect out of the abstract kind of concept of understanding. Postmodernism once again had to claim the role and position of the allegorical, icon-like image, in order to rediscover and redefine a fundamental metaphorical capacity in thinking.

It was in semiotics that a first answer was found. Kant was out: for a possible post-modern reorientation, the theory of Kant has not been an immediate source of correction, as he was a major modern thinker. The dogmatic dialectical materialist theory had particularly explored the categorical thinking of Kant as a basis for its own model of categories⁶. The focus was on a relationship of concept and materials/things, a concept-object relationship. Semiotics redefined the notion of category as a paired one, with something like an emotional field as part of the load of their opposition. The focus shifted toward a concept-experience relationship. In Tournier's adaptation of the paired concept emotions (in his words, emblematic and symbolic meanings) also acquires a place within a story line that reflects a form of logic. However, Tournier gives a subtle twist to the semiotic manner, by relating more subtle differences that are not strict opposites—such as Don Juan-Casanova. The fact that he refers to Kant is also remarkable. It probably indicates his understanding of how the 'Kantian turn' in the work of Lyotard and other philosophers allowed a new effort of relating the heritage of semiotics to the post-structuralist option of re-evaluating Kant. We will see that Deleuze offered the point of departure for such a possibility, and that Mark Johnson elaborated on the possibility of such a connection.

Exactly where dogmatic Marxism had criticized Kant for being subjective-idealist, and his tendency to deny the "objective source and content" of the categories—his tendency to treat them as subjective became a new source for postmodernist theory in the work of Lyotard and Derrida. It was Deleuze who was most precise in defining a point of departure for reorientation.

In 1984 Deleuze presented the hypothesis (in his preface to the English translation of 'La Philosophie Critique de Kant', 'On four poetic formulas which might summarize the Kantian philosophy', also published in French in: *Philosophie*, no.9, Winter 1986) that a kind of continuous rather than static interpretation activity can be identified as the typical, poetical contribution made by Kant. Admittedly, Kant maintains the static separation of the 'I' of consciousness and the 'me' of experience, however, Deleuze interprets this separation as a differentiation with poetical potential: "The concept-object

relationship still exists in Kant, but is duplicated by the I-me relationship which constitutes a *modulation, no longer a cast*. In this sense the compartmentalized distinction of forms as concepts (trumpet-violin), or of materials as objects (copper-wood) gives way to the continuity of an irreversible linear development that necessitates the establishment of new formal relationships (time) and the definition of a new matter (phenomenon): it is as if in Kant one can already hear Beethoven and before long the continuous variation of Wagner.'

Three years later Johnson took the quality that Deleuze reads as a quality of Kant as his difference with Kant when he wrote (as seen earlier) "I am identifying the schema as a *continuous structure of an organising activity*." There is no specific evidence of a perceptual dimension structured along various specific types of action and involved movement within Kant's notion that imagination 'schematizes', in the way that Johnson wishfully interpreted it. However, Deleuze opened the way to see such a notion of perceptual suggestion by relating it to the area of 'tension'-mindedness of the symphony—which is indeed already the imaginative field of abstract perceptual forces that Johnson schematizes with his image schemata. Johnson's important contribution is that, with help of the image schemata, he links the inheritance of semiotics to that of post-structuralism after the 'Kantian turn'.

The question left open by Deleuze and Johnson is how one might imagine the continuous movement—'la continuité d'un développement linéaire sans retour' or 'dynamic pattern'—in the face of the traditional reading of Kant's theory as a hierarchical ordering of object-type oriented categories. Do these kind of categories fall apart or do they automatically split up via numerous associations into *mille plateaux*?

Let us return to Johnson for a moment where he defines his correction of Kant's theory:

'The move I am making beyond Kant can be summed up in the following way: I am suggesting that Kant's greatest contribution to our understanding of meaning and rationality was his work on imagination, which, ironically, his system forces him to separate sharply from reason and understanding. I am thus led to deny that the metaphysical and epistemological dichotomies presupposed by his system are rigid and absolute. I regard them, rather, as poles on a continuum of cognitive structure. By taking imagination as central, I see its structures as a massive, embodied complex of meaning upon which conceptualization and propositional contents. We also see that meaning is not always, or even

usually, univocal as Kant seems to think when he defines concepts as rules specifying lists of features. At least where human conceptualization is metaphorical, there is not a core underlying set of literal propositions into which the metaphor can be translated. Finally, rationality resides in *all* of these structures taken together, *each* with *their* own special constraints.'

Kant's habit of treating the categories as subjective may be seen in relation to Mark Johnson's presumption about the mental space "where human conceptualization is metaphorical." This had been denied most categorically and principally by dialectical materialist theory. Such a theory had seen Kant's habit of subjective treatment as a bad habit, not inherent to the supposed essence of his method. The correction that Johnson proposes in the theory of Kant is therefore not as subtle as it may seem from the formulation of his proposal. When Deleuze and Johnson see imagination as a central key in the work of Kant, and when Johnson corrects Kant's idea of meaning in that it "is not always, or even usually, univocal as Kant seems to think when he defines concepts as rules specifying lists of features," he positions the reflected notion of imagination from post-modern theory into the centre of Kant's own model. This can be seen as the decisive step in redefining modernity as such. If it is at all possible to think and formulate a new—in the sense of redefined—modernity, it is given by the radical positioning of post-modern theoretical concern in the heart of Kant's model. Verifying the possible ingredients of imagination itself in the centre of Kant's model of concepts is as radical as leaving the role of imagination out in the type of categories that dialectical materialist theory had deducted from Kant.

In what way is the model of Kant's concepts replaced by Johnson's "sufficient internal structure to constrain our understanding and reasoning:" the image schemata? Johnson arrived at a total of twenty-seven. He sees this number of concepts as a "partial list": container, blockage, enablement, path, cycle, part-whole, full-empty, iteration, surface, balance, counterforce, attraction, link, near-far, merging, matching, contact, object, compulsion, restraint removal, mass-count, centre-periphery, scale, splitting, superimposition, process, collection. Some of these have been drawn as diagrams of image schemata in his book.

What do we have here as a result for art and architectural theory? We recognize: 1. some concept-pairs from the Wölfflin tradition, like Riegl's 'near-far', 2. some basic notions of balance (Johnson specifies various subcategories of balance) that one has theorized since the Renaissance, 3. various tension notions that have

been present in art theory since the Romantic period, and 4. the concept 'superimposition' as used by Tschumi and Eisenman. So is this a whole lot of completely different and barely comparable understandings?

Indeed, Johnson's categories seem to have various contents and points of reference in the history of the understanding of the human mind, however, in as far as the way that he treated his image-schemata in more in detail in his book, there is also a remarkable type of coherence of a vectorial representation by means of schemata that relate corporeal experience to a manner of understanding. Such coherence is active once the notion of image schemata can be interpreted as one with a specific 'trajectory' and 'target,' and therefore a scheme of force and tension.

Johnson took Paul Klee's arrow-like type of representation of force and patterns of force and tension as a protolinguistic basis for the comprehension of expression in general. Instead of some ephemeral considerations that refer to an infinite cosmos—the notion of abstract forces in the Bauhaus education—the same visual expression can be understood today as one of force, related to corporeal experience. So now and then already Giedion's notion of force seems to have been moving away from the Bauhaus vision towards the more physical one as theorized by Johnson⁷.

Due to the discovered basis of vectorial representation, Johnson's type of categorization has resulted in a possible similar representation of two 'traditional' kinds of architectural thinking—that have been considered to be fundamentally different up until now:

1. analogous to the human body in proportion schemes (from Alberti and Michelangelo, to Berlage's module and Le Corbusier's Modulor, and here reinterpreted not only through the notion of 'scale', but also with the help of 'part-whole', 'full-empty' and various kinds of 'balance')

2. Bauhaus-like understanding of forces and energies that one cannot literally see (according to Kandinsky and Klee, and here thematized in the variations of blockage, enablement, path, cycle, iteration, counterforce, attraction, link, merging, matching, contact, compulsion, restraint removal, and splitting). As such, the bridge from gestalt structures to 'pure' abstraction may become more evident and may fulfil what Tschumi has indicated as 'event-space'. By interpreting the Bauhaus category as also being an interpretation or consequence of corporeal experience, the two mentioned kinds of architectural understanding may suddenly be considered as being part of the same world of

image-schematic understanding. The elements from the two categories can be seen as belonging to the same spectrum. The linguistic research on the understanding of corporeal experience in the use and learning of language allows us to see such a direct relationship.

The open question is: is the relationship between the abstract and the sensuous defined in a new way? Is there a new angle of approaching such a relationship? As Johnson expresses it, the image-schemata are "extended" with meaning. He proposes the abstract diagrammatic image schemata as one of the five basic components of a more complete theory of imagination (in other words: of the sensuous), the other four being: 1. prototypical categorization, 3. metaphorical projections, 4. metonymy and 5. narrative structure.

Prototypical categorization has always been a base for flart and architectural theory. Metaphorical projections, metonymy and narrative structure were introduced or reintroduced by postmodernist theories. The notion of the image-schemata—or diagrams—is the component that seems more related to a new—or 'second'—modernity. It anyway allows for a better understanding of what is labelled as 'second modernity' in architecture, as so far it has a preference to operate in an imaginative field, where perceptual forces can be abstracted as vectors. In contrast to forms of schematic perception in former episodes of modern imagination, the formative field of thinking is highly receptive for sensuous corporeal stimuli.

Before second modernity existed an absolute opposition: the opposition between thinking modernity—from Kant to Giedion, and their supposed denial of an emblematic understanding of concepts—and postmodernist theory—with a focussed interest on emblematic understanding as part of a symbolic type of meaning as it emerges from forms of projection (such as metaphor and metonymy), and as it arises from narrative structures. Mark Johnson contributed in philosophy not only an approach to escape from such a dilemma, but also a way to re-examine it. The challenge for architectural theory is to re-link the elements from a former separation within a renewed theory of architectural imagination.

NOTES

¹ Susan Lindner, *A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Verb-Particle Constructions with UP and OUT*, San Diego, 1981

² Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1967, p. 876

³ Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind. The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, Chicago/London, 1987.

⁴ Benjamin created similar understandings such as *Schriftbild*, *Bilderrede*, *Denkbild* (sometimes criticized as a 'hollandism') and *dialektisches Bild*.

⁵ 'Philosophisches Wörterbuch' (Leipzig, 1964), under 'Zeichen, ikonisches': "Wie die Erkenntnistheorie des dialektischen Materialismus zeigt, sind die Abbilder der Dinge im menschlichen Bewußtsein nicht ikonischer Art. Dies entspricht auch den Ergebnissen der modernen Informationstheorie".

⁶ 'Philosophisches Wörterbuch': "Kants Lehre von der logischen Funktion der Kategorien im Denken enthält wichtige Erkenntnisse und Ansätze, die für die weitere Ausarbeitung der dialektisch-materialistischen Kategorienlehre bedeutsam sind."

⁷ Such a type of interpretation links the modernity of Kant's notion of category to the modernity of a type of imagination that works for tension and forces in space. As examples we can refer here again to the theory of Giedion, who takes the notions of 'force' and 'flow' as basic ideas (that he nonetheless hardly substantiates). Force: "To use plane surfaces, on the one hand, and to give them force and expression by the frank use of undisguised materials, on the other, is to employ (...) one of the means of painting, which (...) in France was opening the way for our new spatial conceptions." (STA, 411) Flow: "(...) there must be unobstructed freedom of movement, a flow of traffic maintained evenly at all points without interruption or interference." (STA, 824).