



SCREAMING IN BINARY LANGUAGE

ON THE ROLE OF ANALOG THEMES
WITHIN THE ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE

“Why in the digital age have some of our best thinkers turned toward characteristically analog themes?” (Galloway, 2022, p.212). The question, which repeats itself twice in the influential essay “The Golden Age of Analog,” by Alexander Galloway, professor of Media, Culture, and Communication at NYU, remains unanswered. The text, first and foremost, proposes and further explains in detail, the division of themes among theoretical humanities into digital and analog. According to Galloway (2022), the first type of representations work through discrete units, such as letters and integers. Anything constructed with those is thus inherently digital: words, languages, texts, symbols and codes . The analog representations are demonstrated to be working through continuity or continuous variation and are tied by the author to the “perception, experience, indeterminacy, or contingency” (Galloway, 2022, p.212). Furthermore, the digital operates through divisions, distinctions and

abstractions. In the end, the combinations of the discrete units contain symbolic value that transcends their singular meaning. The analog on the other hand works through assemblages, multiplications, mosaics. As it embraces the multiplicities and the differences, its products are in the words of Galloway himself: “[...] fully coextensive with reality” (Galloway, 2022, p.232). Although the author states somewhere in the beginning that he is not favouring neither digital or analog approaches, by the end of the text it becomes clear that he sees the analog as unsettlingly anachronic and the digital as the one being able to provide opportunities for “[...] the confrontation of the two, of breaking with the present state of affairs” (Galloway, 2022, p.232). Furthermore, he doesn’t advocate for the softening up of the digital/analog distinction, but rather for the development of the digital thought as an alternative branch. The paper doesn’t attempt to fully answer Alexander Galloway’s initial question,

Oh, for the long gone era of classical architecture, the era of the common architectural language, of standardised architectural vocabulary and of explicit architectural communication

the *macabre* of El Chorrillo



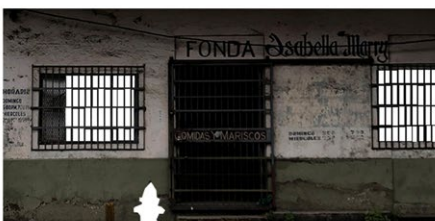
as it limits itself only to the scope of architectural theory. The essay "The Golden Age of Analog" however becomes a point of departure for the investigation into what could be the reasons for the turn toward analog themes within the field of architecture. The text is divided into two parts, each exploring one of the arguments for the relevance of the analog in contemporary discourse.

ARCHITECTURE TALKING

Oh, for the long gone era of classical architecture, the era of the common architectural language, of standardised

architectural vocabulary and of explicit architectural communication (Summerson, 1963). Perhaps one of the earliest manifestations of its inescapable collapse was the visionary architecture of Étienne-Louis Boullée's? Aldo Rossi, in 1967 introduction to a translation of Boullée's *Architecture, essai sur l'art*, distinguishes him from the other architects of eighteenth century French classicism, differentiating his "exalted rationalism" from "conventional rationalism" (Aureli, 2011, p.174-175). In *The Possibility of An Absolute Architecture* architect and writer, Pier Vittorio Aureli (2011), offers an interpretation

soundscape of El Chorrillo





of Rossi's nomenclature. He explains conventional rationalism as based on existing normative apparatus from which architecture derives its forms. However, in the exalted rationalism it is the subjective decision that produces architecture and guides the formulation of the logical principles of the structure and composition. Furthermore, this personal choice is a deeper manifestation of the way the acting subject situates itself in relation to the fundamental problems and dilemmas of life. Nicholas Andrew Pacula, historian and educator, sees Boullée's design of the French National Library (1785)

as a moment of "radical subjectivity in his position toward essential problems of architectural design in late-eighteenth century Paris" (Pacula, 2017, p.151). Until very recently the general consensus was that the late architect prepared three equally feasible propositions for the primary facade with the main entrance. Pacula, in his 2017 Master of Science in Architecture Studies thesis at MIT, argues that the third drawing of the elevation was actually meant for the facade on the opposite side of the street and that the two Atlases holding up the globe were in fact framing a fountain, not an

frames from mapping video
"Danse macabre in
El Chorrillo"



According to Carson, logos for the ancient thinkers was a point of control, of self-control to be exact, a mechanism of dissociation.





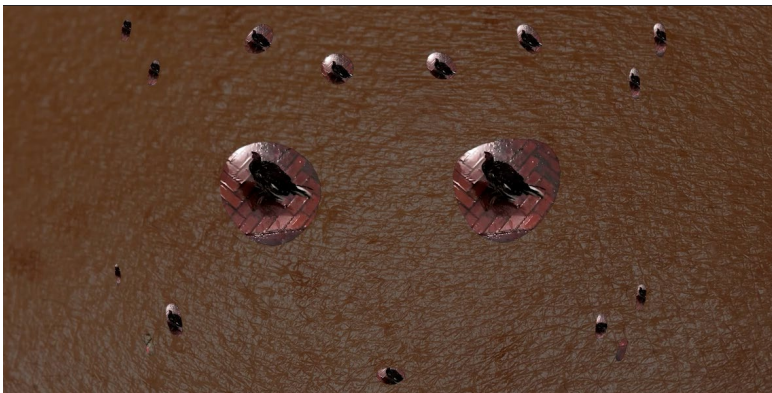
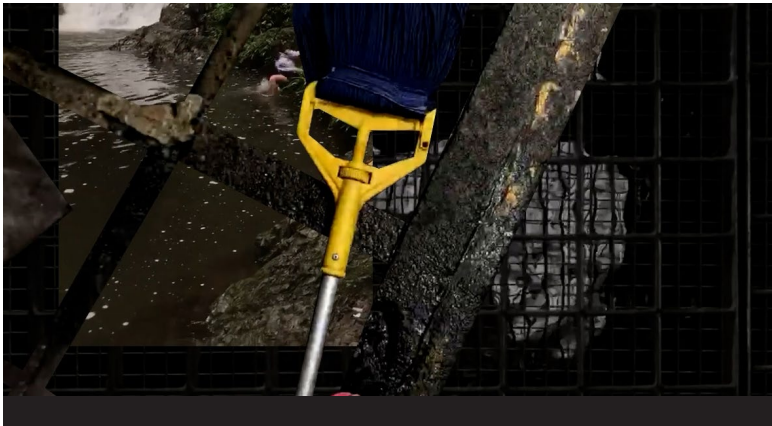
entrance. However, Pacula's (2017) meticulous reading of Boullée's drawings uncovered yet another context for, in the words of Aureli, the "public monument dedicated to the free citizen" (Aureli, 2011). In fact, the Bibliothèque du Roi was a private institution only open for men. At the bottom of the "fountain" facade Boullée chose to show figures of women which cannot be found in the interior drawings, occupied only by silhouettes of men. As Pacula (2017) argues, by proposing a square with a fountain opposite the library, Boullée not only offered a quality public space but also diversified the user groups. What philosopher and theorist Elisabeth Grosz (1995) calls "the privilege of interiority" in the architectural discourse could be interpreted quite literally here. In the end though, the two remaining propositions for the main facade are still operating within the common language of classical architecture. However, how

common could it truly be if its message was gendered from the beginning? When it informed women about the restrictions and boundaries while welcoming men with its monumental, grandiose entry? Interestingly, the traces to the answer can be found within Galloway's (2022) text itself. Author correlates the digital with the greek word logos, which means "speech" and cognate with it is logismos, which, among its many meanings, signifies "reason." Galloway further introduces its Greek opposite: alogos, which consequently means "without speech" and further "without reason": used for "the brutes and animals,[...]. The child but also its mother and women [...]" (Galloway, 2022, p.222-223). Here, for supplementary research, Galloway (2022) refers the reader to Anne Carson essay "The Gender of Sound," quoting her main argument that "putting a door on the female mouth has been an important project of patriarchal culture" (Carson,

1995). Carson's (1995) analysis of ancient Greek literature and philosophy reveals an ingrained disdain for the female sound and its association with savagery and disorder. The author highlights how women on one hand would be "reassigned to the expression of nonrational sounds" such as ritual lament, but on the other the patriarchal culture would emphasise that what differentiates man from beasts is "the use of rationally articulated speech: logos" (Carson, 1995). According to Carson (1995), logos for the ancient thinkers was a point of control, of self-control to be exact, a mechanism of

dissociation. Communication that wouldn't pass through it was then a threat for the social order.

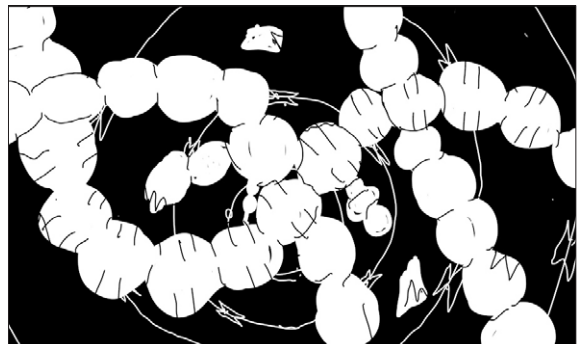
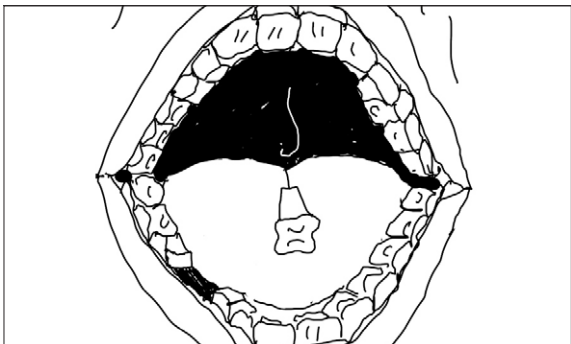
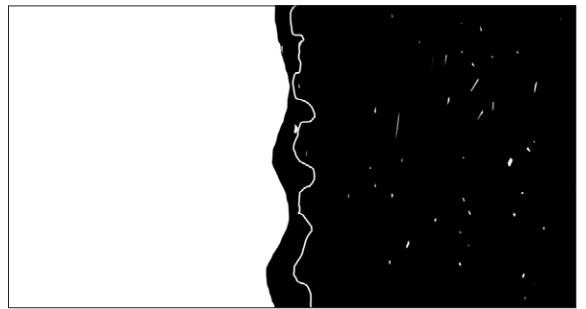
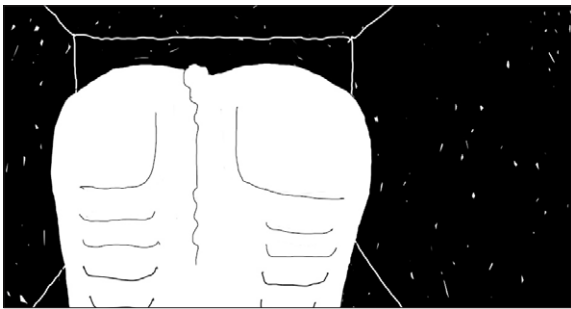
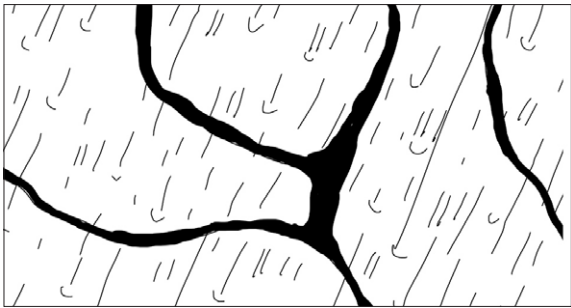
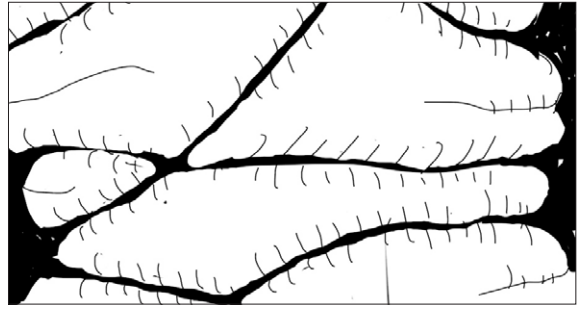
Galloway's (2022) acknowledgement of this critical feminist theory, in his view, doesn't seem to undermine the power of the digital to bring systematic changes. However, the exclusion of women not only from the codification process of the architectural logos but even historical placement as its antithesis questions its assumed transcendentality and universality. Gülsüm Baydar (2004), architect and theorist, argues that the idea of an ahistorical and universally recognizable





frames from video
collage "Architectural
body without organs"

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domain of architecture is a Western myth. Furthermore, she argues that as "an identity category, architecture has to distinguish itself from what it isn't" (Baydar, 2004, p.21). The stability of the architectural definition is thus based on exclusions, repressions and loss. Philosopher and literary critic Julia Kristeva (1984) points out that the subject is influential to the process of the production of meaning. The association of a signifier and a signified is therefore arbitrary. The miniscule involvement of women within the formation of the language of classical architecture resulted in a critical gap that questions the coherence and completeness of its language.

TALKING ARCHITECTURE

The article *The Incomparable Eye*, written in 1992 by Paul Virilio, French historian and critic of technology, is not only a commentary on the then state of visual culture but is constructed as a

rather alarmist prophecy for the future. The concern for the accelerating loss of freedom of the postmodern humankind is omnipresent in the text and manifests itself in the language and intonation applied by the author. Repeated use of tenses which emphasise the process: "is happening", "we are witnessing", "is being corrupted" induce a rhythm within the text which progressively amplifies each consecutive warning (Virilio, 1992, p.:96,97,101). Furthermore, the gravity of the situation is intensified by the choice to use not only first person statements, such as "I fear", "I believe" but also references to the ambiguous, non-defined group of 'us': "Do we want to lose the ability to see for ourselves? [...] Will we become visually handicapped [...]?" (Virilio, 1992, p.97). The insistent linear progression of the text delineates a path from the past to the troubled present and further to an even more grim future. This pervasive concern for what

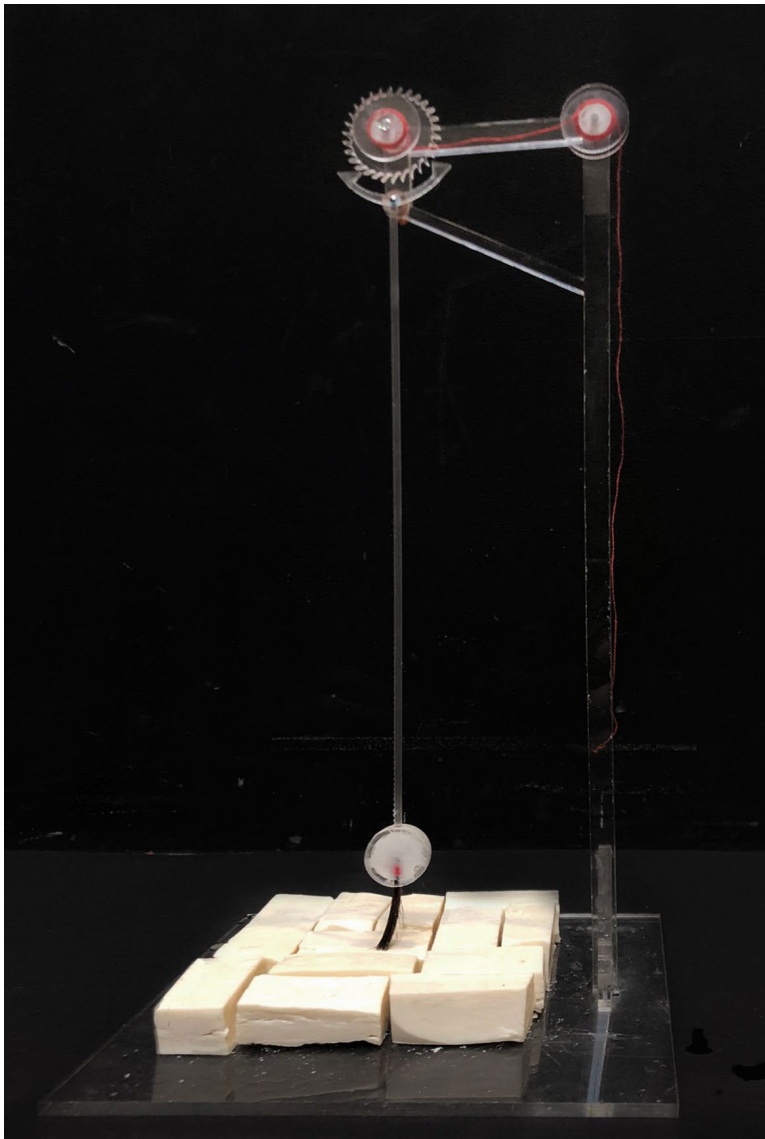
is to come, woven into the framework of the text, builds a rather pronounced and evident pattern: a dichotomic understanding of the past-future time frame, where the first one is only defined through the comparison with the latter. One of the developments that Virilio appears to be most uneasy about is the increase in transplant and implant operations within the medical field: "soon our bodies will be ruled by biotechnology, by these nanodevices [...] (capable) of penetrating our actual physical being" (Virilio, 1992, p.105). There is then the implication that the growing ability of technology to alter our bodies is taking away something from our agency over them. In this regard, these operations could be seen as a desecration of the sanctity of our bodies and the idea that there is something that needs 'fixing' within us as inherently blasphemous and dehumanising. What lacks in this equation however are those whose needs these procedures answer. However brutal the idea of carving open our bodies may seem,

there is something deeply human in pursuing one's need for a healthy, equal, fulfilling life.

Critique of Virilio's exclusionary narrative was addressed by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (2004), both scholars and contributors to the field of studies of disabilities. In the introduction to the jointly edited book *Body and Physical Difference. Discourses of Disability*, they scrutinise Virilio for his influence on furthering the ableist ideology within the fields of architecture and city planning. They focus predominantly on his essay "The Third Interval: A Critical Transition," a part of the prominent collection *Re-Thinking Technologies*.

Virilio's comparison of the "reduced mobility of equipped invalid" with the "growing inertia of the over-equipped, 'valid' human population," [...] betrays key precepts of an ableist philosophy. His admonition to audiences about the dangerous lure hidden in technological prostheses results in a stereotypical

Modi Operandi 1
"Soap dancefloor
at the cemetery"



equation of disabled populations, technological fetishism and welfare state dependency (Virilio, 1993, as cited in Mitchell et al., 2004, p.7).

If there is an agreed upon "normative lifestyle of the able bodied", then people with health conditions and impairments are not only positioned as a threat to the very integrity of it but also

placed on the periphery of society, in the role of 'the other' (Mitchell et al., 2004, p.7). As Mitchell and Snyder (2004) point out, Virilio's criticism of technology is informed by those binaries he reifies: abled/disabled, non-artificial past/artificial present, human/inhuman. In the end, as the authors highlight, what ability means exactly is arbitrary and its definition would vary throughout history

However brutal the idea of carving open our bodies may seem, there is something deeply human in pursuing one's need for a healthy, equal, fulfilling life.



Modi Operandi 2
"Disassembly and reassembly
with mango, chicken feather
and a tampon"



to serve different interests. On the opposite side of the spectrum the authors place essayists such as Donna Haraway, who attempt to break with the nature/culture divide and embrace the body not as a 'wholeness' but as a patchwork: "we are cyborgs" (Haraway, 2001). However, these arguments lack the nuance of "the conflictual relationship of disabled people with the equipment that helps them" (Mitchell et al., 2004, p.8). As Mitchell and Snyder (2004) point out, the people with health impairments in Haraway's thesis, are deployed to demonstrate patriarchal ironies. In the end "rarely

do critics venture toward an elucidation of the experience of the population that underwrites either critical system" (Mitchell et al., 2004, p.8). Nevertheless, what Virilio (1993) refers to as "reduced mobility" not only involves people with health conditions and impairments. Profound insight provides architect and activist Anne Thorne, formally from Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative. Particularly compelling is the project conducted by Anne Thorne Architects in 2002, which aimed to facilitate the use of the Aldgate metro stations in London. The extensive research supported by



Modi Operandi 2
"Disassembly and
reassembly with
mango, chicken
feather
and a tampon":
frames from
the process
timelapse



interviews with pedestrians and local community groups and businesses showed that the main problems were a complicated network of underground tunnels, with 28 exits and confusing signage (Thorne, 2005). In the city where the majority of car drivers were men of productive age, women, children and elderly were forced to use dark, cramped corridors of underground tunnels (Thorne, 2005). The unnecessarily lengthy pedestrian route was shortened by turning the underground passages into aboveground ones wherever possible. What is more, the studio decided to keep the signage strictly visual, differentiated by colours, as the area was inhabited by people of different cultural backgrounds and mother tongues. As Teresa Hoskyns, Doina Petrescu conclude (2001), Thorne collaged the 1960s subway system with contributions from the local community and "those she

saw as marginalised" in order to embrace the differences in the perception of place. Thorne's 'collage' could be compared to what Elisabeth Grosz (1995) calls for when she argues for the assemblage in architecture. After Deleuze, she defines thought as "a consequence of provocation of an encounter" - with 'the outside' (Grosz, 1995, p.128). She argues not for the rejection of binarized categories but for their interplay, not for the rapture of the order but for the reordering. These encounters are moments of reflection, hesitation and becoming. Similarly, Virilio's, Haraway's, Mitchell's and Snyder's texts on their own are merely partial representations of fragmented reality. However, following Grosz's line of thinking, it is their comparison, compilation and intercommunication that allows for a deeper understanding of the problem.



Similarly, Virilio's, Haraway's, Mitchell's and Snyder's texts on their own are merely partial representations of fragmented reality. However, following Grosz's line of thinking, it is their comparison, compilation and intercommunication that allows for a deeper understanding of the problem.

CONCLUSION

The intention of the paper is to first of all prove that there is an 'outside' of language, social order, history, power (Grosz, 1995). More importantly, what is beyond the discourse isn't at all a minority but a vast assemblage of marginalised groups. The paper only focuses on exemplary issues, such as gender and physical mobility. The systems of power and order, as Galloway argues, perhaps could be more efficiently fought with the use of their own digital tools. What the paper disputes though is that in order to notice the shortcomings, harms, or even further, crimes of those codes, one must look at

them from the outside, from the perspective of the other. Furthermore, critical theory on topics such as gender, race, sexuality or differences in abilities might be prominent in contemporary discourse but it is still a relatively new domain. Therefore there is thus far an unsatiated need for the diversification of the field. Coming back to Anne Carson's essay, the paper in the end is an attempt to reflect "if there might not be another idea of human order than repression, another notion of human virtue than self-control, another kind of human self than one based on dissociation of inside and outside [...] (or) another human essence than self" (Carson, 1995, p.136-137).



[2] *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent*, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1559)

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FIGURES

[1] Francis Bacon - *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944)

<https://darkartandcraft.com/blogs/news/francis-bacon-horror-in-oil>

[2] *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent*, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1559)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnavalesque#/media/File:Pieter_Bruegel_d._%C3%84._066.jpg