Architecture Unmoored

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BOOK REVIEW

Architecture Unmoored

Review of *Architecture after Deleuze and Guattari*, by Chris L. Smith, London, Bloomsbury, 2023, 248 pp., ISBN: 978-1-3501-6849-7

Deleuze and
Guattari Encounters

Architecture After Deleuze and Guattari
Chris L. Smith

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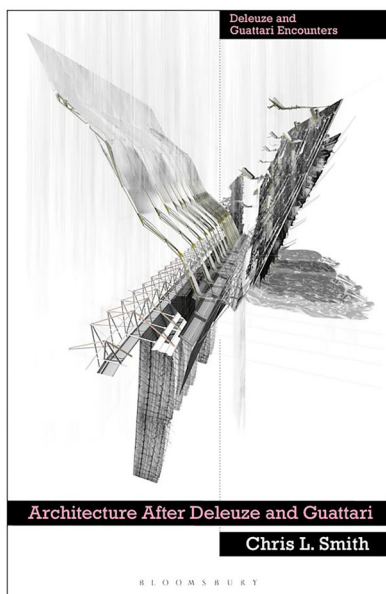
In my endorsement of Smith's previous monograph from 2017 I stated that,

> Chris L. Smith's passionately written *Bare Architecture* is proof of what it means to be done with the principle of non-contradiction. His schizoanalysis lives up to the promised logic of the included middle where (or is it when?) here-and-now actively coexists with the otherwise-or-whatever. At last one can wholeheartedly recommend the long-overdue clinical critique of architecture's proverbial propensity for overcoding. Most importantly, the reader (to come) is given the sense of what the architecture of immanence does.[1]

To my delight, Smith's latest monograph, *Architecture After Deleuze and Guattari*, maintains these high standards, both in the richness of its content and the idiosyncrasy of expression. It is worth noting that both volumes include close to a hundred references to "love," encompassing both platonic and corporeal dimensions.

Tailored for a non-ready-made audience, the new book does not strive for clarity—a statement that may raise concerns. However, as Erin Manning highlighted in a recent Facebook post,

> what is "clear" thinking if not the recognition of the "in-common"? To "be clear" is to already know what the bounds of thought have been regulated to be. Flights of thought, thought unmoored, these are considered "beside" the point. Get there directly, we are told, according to the path already laid out. Make your case through the window of cases already made [for the reader already made].[2]

Smith skilfully sidesteps such signposting, critiqued by Manning as the prevalent genre that dictates where the text is going and where it has been, transitioning from one dead-on-arrival citation to the next. One could argue that Smith avoids the limitations of categorical thinking, often associated with whiteness, where the lines of flight struggle to take off. Instead of merely "getting there," Smith revels in the time spent navigating through the rabbit holes (and glory holes) formed by the adjacency of built parentheses. In alignment with Manning's perspective, *Architecture After Deleuze and Guattari* challenges the framework of neurotypicality, critiquing it

implicitly as an all-too-systemic modality for organising bodies and knowledge systems, commonly referred to as overcoding. In contrast, the neurodiverse thought embraced by Smith rejects the predispositions of the "common." The book thus embodies ontogenetic thinking, giving life rather than merely describing it. In the words of Manning:

> What if we recognized that we are the police of thought every time we claim clarity as an answer to our hurried questions? What if we stopped trying to digest thought, to metabolize it according to frames that are familiar and instead took the time to sit with just a few lines to see what kinds of worlds they might open up? What if we recognized that when this isn't possible, when we can't be alongside, it may not be the writing but our own exhaustion? Because that's certainly a good reason not to be able to continue. But then, instead of turning on the thought because we couldn't "get through it," what if we recognized that despite not finishing it, it might have left us with a thought we could take on a walk?[3]

Apart from championing neurodiversity—a tendency Manning describes as emerging from the incapacity to conform to the norm and to resist being centred in the whiteness that defines and polices it—Smith's most significant contribution lies in advocating for the reintegration of technology into culture, also known as "technophany." The concept was coined by Gilbert Simondon in the early sixties and has recently been revived by Yuk Hui.[4] The separation of technology from culture has historical roots. Firstly, there is xenophobia in the modern cultural understanding which prejudicially regards technical objects as alien. Beyond this, a more fundamental conflict arises from the ongoing obsolescence of culture on the one hand, and the continuous evolution of technology on the other. Although both culture and technology evolve over time, the pace of technological evolution is much faster, perpetuating and intensifying their existing polarisation. Institutions and their associated infrastructures find it challenging to keep pace with the rapid advancements in new technologies. Smith does not. For him, the accelerating technical evolution does not necessarily lead to an antagonistic relationship between culture and technology:

> The attention to territory and the assembling of extant technologies cannot help but pre-empt micro-qualities, expressive features and transformations […]. The point is that this is an architecture that precedes. Not architecture as an event or spectacle, but rather the preconditioning of a place, a material, a people for that which might (or might not) burst forth (177).

Architecture After Deleuze and Guattari thus presents a more optimistic perspective, viewing "Culture"—in the broader sense—as the unity of both culture and technics. Aesthetics, understood in the Greek sense as the study of the sensible, plays a crucial role in reconciling the antagonism between a "backward-looking" culture and "forward-moving" technology. Following this line of thought, Hui suggests that the concept of technophany is key to understanding the power of aesthetics and the possibility of convergence between two polarising forces: the schematisation of technics and the intuiting of the "sacred." It is not surprising, then, that Simondon himself originally drew on an architectural example in his discussion of technophany; specifically, Le Corbusier's Couvent Sainte-Marie de La Tourette. While the term "sacred" is mentioned only once in Smith's book, specifically in relation to Adolf Wölfli's drawings, it signifies a process of world-making. In this transformative process, the world sheds its homogenous nature

and becomes a constellation of heterogeneous places where the sacred is manifest. These places vary widely in Smith's analysis, encompassing examples such as Lightning Ridge, the Longhouse Roof Garden and Plasencia's Palacio de Congressos, among others.

This containment of technicity and sacrality constitutes a new normativity, which, according to Hui, is necessarily "teratological"—that is, simultaneously auto-normative and auto-constructive. To paraphrase Félix Guattari, the primary function of architecture as a node is the production of subjectivity. It is a discipline that, as Smith asserts, "brings the most disparate of things into proximity: cities, populations, rooms, streets, beds, bodies, love and hate, subjects and senses of self" (49). *Architecture After Deleuze and Guattari* enthusiastically embraces the challenge of the convergence of "sacrality" and "technicity," a significant undertaking in contemporary thought navigating between the Scylla of technological determinism and the Charybdis of political naturalism. The book operates at the nexus between thoughts and things, grace and gravity, and—according to its author—the organic and inorganic worlds in particular.

What is it that binds Smith's affective sympathies, critical exploration, political experimentation, and non-complicit minor architectures? In their last collaborative work, Deleuze and Guattari provide an answer: the brain as the junction—not the unity—of the three planes: philosophy, the arts, and the sciences.[5] This Ruyerian *form* (N–1) is self-sufficient: not referencing any external point of view; an absolute, consistent form that surveys itself independently of any supplementary dimension (N + 1), without appealing to transcendence.[6] Every genuine act of invention could be said to tap into the irreducibility of form, force (or spirit), and function: the philosophical faculty generating "superjects," the artistic plane contracting to produce "injects," and the scientific plane with functions and concomitant "ejects."[7] This delineates the scope of the (auto)survey presented in *Architecture After Deleuze and Guattari* and sets it apart from phenomenological accounts, despite the author's declared allegiances. Any form of phenomenology, including the materialist variant, is in fact an epi-phenomenology.[8] Ultimately, it is the brain that thinks, not the person—the latter being merely a cerebral crystallisation.[9]

Notes

1. Andrej Radman, "Bare Architecture—Reviews," June 27, 2019, https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/bare-architecture-9781350138940/.
2. Erin Manning, "Clarity," Facebook post, January 2, 2024, www.facebook.com/erin.ecologies.
3. Manning, "Clarity."
4. Yuk Hui, "Apropos Technophany," *Technophany: A Journal for Philosophy and Technology* 1, no. 2 (2023): 1–13.
5. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 210.
6. Raymond Ruyer, *Neofinalism*, trans. Alyosha Edlebi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 90–103.
7. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 211–15.
8. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul R. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 52.
9. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 210.

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