To be or not to be. What? Is the question!

Architects strive for a moment of perfection—when their building is finished. But as soon as that moment passes, their building begins to decay. A finished building is really unfinished, the first frame of a descent to destruction.

Balthasar Holz

"…accept the premise that allegiances are not what makes architecture but instability makes it move, and instability means: confusion, discomfort, uncertainty…"

Eric Owen Moss

Architects are children of time. As many other professions, we have to abide by its apparent linearity and consequently, design, process, program, build in a hierarchical and sequential manner. Or, so we are told! The entire profession and most of its ideologies are based on the canonical image that actions move within a forward direction. Nevertheless, if time is somewhat predictable by enclosing and defining it through acknowledged measurements, such as seconds, days and years, actions are nonlinear and hence, pray to an indeterministic chaotic ontology. However, in order to take a hold of actions in time, as adepts of habit, we quantify them and pair them with time within the notion of frames. As late German/American architect Balthasar Holz argues, architecture revolves around a product-oriented mind-set.[1] Most architects seek to bring a product to its completion and "frame" it in time. In a way or another, buildings tend to become a poetic representation of the past, even if their conceptualisation was based in the "near present". Therefore, in some respects many interpret architecture as a static form of art and classify it in the category of paintings and sculptures. Conversely, Holz intends to fight against the idea of a static singularity. He proposes the thought of an ongoing process of building until paradoxically, there is no building, at least in the predefined sense, based on its conceptualization. At the same time, he places the entire process within an order: "…the first frame". However, and this is where we have to distinguish between two different ideas of descending into decay. The frame that Holz is implying could be indeed a unit of time-action, as physicist Ernst Mach introduces it, an "inertial frame". It could indicate the relative spatial relations, which the building used to have in the past, currently has and will be developing in the future. Through this spectrum, we then understand the buildings' descent into decay as a path of physical deterioration, or as he also argues, a final frame = "…a heap of rubble". Nonetheless, a second dimension is being added when frame is

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[1] Lebbeus Woods, *The Architecture of Trans-political Thought*, accessed on april 14, 2016, http://www.lebbeuswoods.net/HOLZessay.pdf.

understood, as sociologist Irving Goffman intended, as a device through which we preview the world. When the frame becomes the filter of societal normopathic distinction, the "heap of rubble" extends above its corporeal connotation, other factors such as economic and social functionality, become the conductors of the descent process. Consequently, the final frame will never take place and the descending process would be extended through reformation. Late architect Lebbeus Woods, expanded on the notion of decay and tried to correlate the notions of decay and reformation grounded to a normopathic contextuality:

> *Decay is reformation without desire. Reformation without decay is desire's final incarnation.* [2]
>
> *Lebbeus Woods*

What is important to know is that Lebbeus was an enthusiast of the theoretical visionary architecture of Holz. Most of the architectural concepts of Lebbeus were based on the theories of Holz; the decay and reformation thought is part of his architectural manifesto for the city of Havana, a city where the incorporeal meets the physical where decay is the closest it can get to the theoretical thoughts of Holz. It is in Havana where one can truly understand why architecture's final form is a "heap of rubble". Due to economic and social conditions, most of which crystalized after the fall of the USSR, Havana, as most parts in Cuba, has not only stagnated its architectural growth but, it has also been unable to improve or even sustain decent or safe living conditions. For the year 2016, Havana expects an acceleration of decay and it is already predicted that approximately four buildings will collapse per day.[3] Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the city have a metaphysical connection with the decaying architecture. It is part of their daily life, it is part of their culture and it is part of their individual identity. Filmmakers Florian Borchmeyer and Matthias Hentschler make this very clear in their incredible documentary, "The New Art of Making Ruins". One of the habaneros interviewed by them, who inhabited at that time the famous Campoamor Theatre, explained his incredible poetic relation with the ruin. It was a part of Havana, a part of Cuba, a part of his identity and even if he knew the risks, he could not imagine another more idyllic environment and above it all, as he stated "… who would not want to live in a theatre?".[4] Unfortunately, as Holz already explained, architecture's final frame is its own destruction. Consequently, in 2012 the building collapsed and achieved its final form of metaphysical contextuality. It transcended to "-here it used to be, -here it happened"; its inevitable future became the present and with the next frame, the past.

This almost theatrical representation of decay without reformation is the perfect background on further expanding the spatial notion of time. As French philosopher Henri-Louis Bergson argues, the palpable, the real, is nothing more than a continuous manifestation of itself; it is not something that can be given.[5] On this notion, architectural theorist Sanford Kwinter expands his concept of time as a catalyst for this perpetual

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[2]Peter Noever, *The Havana Project: Architecture Again: International Conference on Architecture, Havana, Cuba* (Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, MAK-Center for Art, and Los Angeles Architecture, Prestel, 1996), 134.

[3]reHabitar, Urb-Al3 Centro Habana, " Desplazamientos proyecto recuperacion" (presentation, Convention of the conference for rehabilitation of the center of Havana Urb-All 3 Centro Habana, Havana, Cuba, 2012).

[4] *Havana - The New Art of Making Ruins*, directed by Florian Borchmeyer and Matthias Hentschler (2006; Germany/Switzerland), DVD.

[5] Henri Bergson, "The Cinematographical Mechanism of Thought and the Mechanistic Illusion -- A Glance at the History of Systems -- Real Becoming and False Evolutionism", Chapter 4 in *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell, Ph.D. New York: Henry Holt and Company (1911): 272 - 370.

manifestation. In his view, time is what enables materialization, nevertheless, not in a carthesian or sequential way. It is exactly time's nonlinearity that enables the "becoming-ever-diferent" of reality.[6] Naturally, it sounds as a contradictory way of thought. If we would filter the definition of Holz through a normopathic ideology, architecture/decay/time, all follow a "dramatic" structure of the protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe (beginning, middle and the end). As we saw in the example of Havana, the building started with a function, afterwards it unwillingly metamorphosed into another and subsequently, it reached a final form. However, within the same manifesto, Holz introduces the idea that change is not embodied within a sequence of succeeding frames, but it is becoming out of indetermination and chaos within a field of infinite probabilities. This is why he viewed architecture not as the harmonious resolution of conflict between the multitude of fields that act within the frames of probability, but as a form of conflict that engenders change. This is exactly why Havana's decay is not a western-global normopathic one. Havana's decay is a methamorphosis, a transformation, a transmutation and a transfiguration, one that can present an indetermined infinity of corporeal or virtual arrangements.

However, the question is why the western-global normopathic society is unable to achieve this type of chaotic, yet natural mutation. The answer can be found in the manifesto ideology of Lebbeus. "Decay is reformation without desire", in other words, we shy away from this natural process. This happens mainly due to the fact that we are creatures of habit and societal normative regulations. Especially when it comes to a concrete and ever more permanent field like architecture, we tend to correlate decay to its corporeal result and thus, reject its becoming. We favour the way of pure reformation where preferably decay has not even started and thus, paradoxically, contradict Holz's idea of omnipresent decay, which appears even out of pure reformation. The most troublesome thought is that we do not do it in a conscious way. Unfortunately, the borders of societal top down normativity are eroding and the different societal notions that we use to generate conflicts are now intertwining. This results in an egocentric position where not only the agents of the networks of authority, or networks of expertise, but also the agents that partake within the networks of performance, are being placed within the middle of the current frame of corporeal possibilities and subjectively expand. This further concludes in the birth of critique as a notion, which implicitly includes an *a priori* definition.[7] We elaborate upon a static pre-existing model, which has no time-space correlation. In order to clarify my thought I shall make a blunt assumption and correlate this thought to the canonical way of teaching/designing architecture through physical precedents. At most universities we are thought to analyse the site, understand the physical flow of elements, their social interpretation and influences and the future trends. Nevertheless, this gives us the false sense of novelty. We do not move forward and we neither go back. We criticise from static position and produce a static model, which conforms to the norms framed by the present society. To place it in Deleuzian terms, we only fold and refold, we are rarely apt or prone to unfold.[8] All this happens due to the fact that we do not accept the

[6] Sanford Kwinter, *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture*, (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 2002), 4.
[7] Sanford Kwinter, *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture*, (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 2002), 6.
[8] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, (New Haven, Co: Yale University Press, 1991).

uncertainty and indeterminsism of decay. Every time we detect decay, we have the tendency to reform it and paradoxically, reject a new identity.

Not to be wrongfully understood, I do not plea for architectural icons and neither for an iconoclastic behaviour. Architecture needs to be rooted, but not only superficial, as most of the time it happens through flattering shape or material imitation, or even worse, architecture ignores the context and is excused by the idea of it creating a new context. The new has to be based on the process of decay, of its corporeal or virtual context. It is an important process, which helps us understand how we could move forward. A word of caution, the process of decay should not be assumed within a western highly normative society, as its corporeal representation. Even in the case of Havana, where this was vividly present, the underlying concept of decay, the transformation/mutation of ideologies and methaphysical spatiality was the driving factor of its process of folding and unfolding. Therefore, in order to be able to move forward, one needs formation. That is when a process is completed and another one may start. For this reason, when designing, we should take the plane, the ontological frame of the context, through the unfold process in order to understand its decay and subtract the layers, which have achieved their prior formation. In this way, we are left with the observable and the unobservable, both captured within different frames of possibility. Consequently, it is within this stasis that we can surpass the static critique process by bringing them together within the current spatially contextualized frame and achieve conflict, or as architect Owen Moss explains, "an instable architecture, one of discomfort, uncertainty and confusion". This is a type of architecture that is in itself, a conflict engendered through a process of ever becoming different and therefore, truly fold and unfold by the rules of the natural and the undetermined.

PS: *"The secret of realizing the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius!"*

Friedrich Nietzsche

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