

What's next?

On Living Space a Workshop Book for Architects

Dedicated to Luna.

«We, who think ourselves bound to a finitude that belongs only to us, giving us, through knowing it, access to the truth of the world—ought we not remember that we ride on the back of a tiger?»
Michel Foucault¹

«Nay, we had something worse against you: we used to think you the most impracticable people on the earth, for you were said to preach what you never practiced.»
Okakura Kakuzō²

¹ « Nous, qui nous croyons liés à une finitude qui n'appartient qu'à nous et qui nous ouvre, par la connaître, la vérité du monde, ne faut-il pas nous rappeler que nous sommes attachés sur le dos d'un tigre ? » Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1966, pg. 333.

² Okakura Kakuzō, *The Book of Tea*, Duffield & Company, New York, 1906

René Descartes is widely regarded as the originator of the modern era, while, as Charles Jencks noticed, modernism itself, through its most socially influential expression—urbanism, ended with the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe housing complex in St. Louis. The precise end time is 3:32 p.m., July 15, 1972, when this award-winning version of Le Corbusier's *machine for living* was razed because “it had become uninhabitable for the low-income residents it was designed to serve.”³

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We are used to see architecture as an art of immobility, but why not remember that even the biggest walls dance while falling?

³ Charles Jencks, *The Language of the Post-Modern Architecture*, Academy Editions, London, 1984, pg. 9.

⁴ <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/pruitt-igoe-housing-project-st-louis-missouri-1956-1976/>

So what's next?

When we were kids, this question was asked when a game finished and the next one was yet to be chosen or devised, or in those moments when an enchanting story left us on the edge, desperate to know what came next.

Now, nearly half a millennium after Descartes' birth and after the rise and slow worldwide spread of mechanical norms & choreography, dictating how we all should be, think, feel, work, raise kids and inhabit Earth, after so many decades of overconfidence in the limitless potential of human rational, systematic, universal planning, isn't it a good time to remember that "we ride on the back of a tiger"⁵?

After centuries of playing the delusional role of "masters and possessors of nature", exhausting humans and planet as well, with the shadow of another world war machines looming larger these days, humanity's story seems more defined by desperation than by enchantment. *What is next* is addressed here to you: architects and urbanists. What can be done and how can your role establish scenarios of more tolerable futures?⁶ Can we move to another scenario?

Do we still have time?

In 2017, 15364 scientists from 184 countries signed **Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice**⁷. This document came as a continuation of the first notice **World Scientists' Warning to Humanity**, penned in 1992 by the *Union of Concerned Scientists* with more than 1700 independent scientists, including the majority of Nobel laureates of that time. These two moments probably marked the largest gathering of brainpower ever to happen on the face of Earth. Both cautioned that:

"a great change in our stewardship of the Earth and the life on it is required, if vast human misery is to be avoided."

Stewardship of the Earth is used here in the sense of taking care of, of caring for, of doing the necessary things for someone who needs help or protection, of treating something in such a way that it stays in good condition.

In one word of **loving**.

The largest gathering of brainpower ever to happen on the face of Earth reached this simple conclusion: the distance between humanity and its vast misery can be accurately measured by our capacity to love the Earth and the life on it. As simple and as elegant as that.

⁵ See the chapter **Even the biggest walls dance while falling** | space as a choreographer

⁶ And what part of today's problems could be traced back to architects/urbanists actions or inactions?

⁷ <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/67/12/1026/4605229?login=false>

There's no guarantee that we still have much time left to change the scenario humanity will play in, but for sure it is time for artists and architects to join this huge, yet not enough heard, chorus of scientists. The main drive of *What's next* is moving from an architecture of power and inequity to an architecture of love and to see, through some techniques from performing and visual arts, along with some insights from science, relational logic, and philosophy, how an architecture of love can become socially and politically performative, practiced, not just preached about.

Social reality is performative (Searle, 1996). Social phenomena appear because we affirm them and take action to make them real. They are not like volcanoes, oceans, mountains, birds, that exist independently of our words, deeds, desires or conventions. Social phenomena are more similar to the modal logic of the possible and to collective dreams. The human rights for instance, grew from a performative input of a tiny group of people sharing the same social dream. It took centuries and it is still far from being realized, but a tiny group of people changed the social reality by adding to it *human rights*.

Social phenomena appear as we organize and train ourselves to act/perform in the direction of their apparition or because some others organize themselves! And if we are to think of some leaders of nowadays political and economical world, the way they organize themselves might get us out of the game. Yet, **performativity, togetherness and futuring**⁸ or in other words embodied, not just verbalized ideas, togetherness games and practiced imagination seem here the matched keys for playing in scenarios of collective dreams instead of one of collective nightmare.

Seeing our cities as huge fitness apparatuses for the social and political regimes we live in, what are they training us for? Do they train us for practicing, on daily basis, the movement scores of human rights? Are they a playfield for social justice, freedom of expression, or for the basic right to life? Are we learning, from childhood, the choreography of human and nature's rights, or we live in societies that only preach? And thinking of the risk of a new world war with a possible return of our societies to the atrocities of last century's wars, an urgent question follows: how can our cities be transformed, even through minimal interventions in public spaces, in playgrounds for the games of respect for human and nature's rights and in games of togetherness, not of separateness?

Ethical principles, like equity for instance, might appear as abstract, floating somewhere into an improbable platonic sky of ideas and thus impossible to obtain in our societies. Many times some articles of our constitutions as democratic states sound like good literary fictions, in which only stubborn idealists still believe. But in Frans de Waal experiments with capuchin monkeys, these apparently abstractions, as fairness for instance, are not floating into a sky of ideas, but in the brains and the molecules of emotions of those monkeys. So they perform according to it, practicing those apparently abstractions⁹. To those thinking that the ones still fighting for human rights are idealists, here is a question: are monkeys more idealist than humans?

⁸ Techniques of futuring: On how imagined futures become socially performative Jeroen Oomen Jesse Hoffman, Maarten A. Hajer, *European Journal Of Social Theory*, Volume 25 Issue 2, May 2022 "the act of *futuring*, which we define as 'the identification, creation and dissemination of images of the future shaping the possibility space for action, thus enacting relationships between past, present and future'. This active concept helps to view the future in terms of the *imaginative work and practices* that negotiate meanings and legitimacy, embed knowledge, engage publics and create relations of trust." <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1368431020988826>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meiU6TxysCg&t=3s>

Neither walls, nor monuments are forever, and each of them will end in a falling choreography. And yes, they can dance while falling on us. How living bodies interact and respond in changing contexts, in those labeled as crisis, when preaching is not enough and collective action is needed? How can we integrate in our cities a performative training for *change readiness*, a variable taken into account and measured in some organizational psychology studies nowadays? How can we still move, and maybe dance a survival dance, even in times of crisis? And how might our build space, both public and private, increase our change readiness in a specific context like climate change?

Turning to the idealism issue, while keeping in mind this possibility of a collective survival movement/dance, let's just remember that when walls are falling, or even without falling, when from various reasons they simply become uninhabitable, let's remember, despite all the political or economical preachers of greatness ready to throw humanity into civil conflicts and wars, let's just remember that we are all fragile and that, ultimately, *we all cry the same way*¹⁰. Despite any delusions temptingly packed in preaches of greatness, immortality, eternity, all floating into improbable skies, our life on Earth is so short and just fragile compared even to that of many trees, and as collectives, even to that of the colonies of bacterias hosted in our bodies. With all the calamities of climate change and atrocities of wars multiplying, it's more and more obvious that despite any materiality, architectural sophistication and visual appeal of any build space, the quality of the architecture of our relationships, or the lack of it, extends or shortens our individual and collective life on Earth. Good relationships, with nature included, may indicate, in fact, if we have any future at all. Sustainability and resilience depend mainly on this imaterial and dynamic architecture of relationships. Not in raising monuments for what it's proclaimed as powerfull, "breaking our backs, while lifting Moloch to heaven"¹¹. In 2020 I asked Milena Dragičević Šešić, head of the UNESCO Chair on Interculturalism, Art Management and Mediation, isn't it true that if some playful trainings in empathy, logic and democracy, based on co-creation practices from performative and visual art, would be introduced in all the kindergartens and schools, let's say from next year, 20 years from now the world would be less affected by the avoidable sufferings of conflicts, social injustice, risk of authoritarian regimes or wars? She said yes, of course, if a political will would let that happen on a larger scale.

There's no time to wait for a political will letting empathy and togetherness games happen on a larger scale, even from kindergartens. But we also shorten our lifetime if we satisfy ourselves with just preaching equality or social justice or human dignity while building monsters of inequality in which only games of privilege and separateness are made possible. This is the reason why wondering *What's next*, I invite you to make together a laboratory of alternative futures as a playground, as a fitness for the dreamers of other cities. There's no need for it to be build. Architectural structures are first mind structures and e-motional structures. Both will be our main focus. Both need stretching and training in multiple logical and imaginative possibilities: from paradoxes & modal & relational logic exercises, to those mind structures perceived with our ears in contemporary music or to those intelligent, alive structures of the natural world with their complex functionalities and dynamics, or to the power games or love games in our human world. Love was mentioned a couple of times here and it is not because my answer to the question *are monkeys more idealist than humans* would be: *not always, sometimes not only monkeys, but humans can be idealist too*, but because love can be a political power. And when we think of our build space as hosting and protecting us, love is



¹¹ Allen Ginsberg *Howl*

from a certain perspective intrinsic to architecture, and moving from an architecture of power to an architecture of love it's not mere poetry.

As one of my favorite architect and urbanist, Henrik Valeur, sais: "Please, spare me of the notion that this is what the world looks like, and that we need to act accordingly. Because if we architects are not able to imagine another world, then who is?"¹²

Travelling in these pages, that are also dedicated to him, through some stories, games and practices we will train for the agency of other choices and unexpected pathways into the possibility of more tolerable, less marked by avoidable suffering, futures.

But first a few poetical and political questions.....

because the *living* space is like a polymorphous playground envisioned, with freshness, by children in an unexhausted cascade of questions.

Modernism accustomed us to the reassuring belief that we can design and program anything: lives, relationships, jobs, nations, even beings—together with the spaces in which all these projects will unfold. But amid this endless cycle of designing and programming with its rigid and tense choreography, do we ever stop to think about how space itself shapes and programs us and our lives? Beyond the focus on abstract thinking, visual sensations, productivity, and mechanical efficiency, do we notice the subtle inner responses—the emotions, thoughts, muscle tensions, or relaxation, and subtle movements—sparked by a change in angle, color, form, or texture, or by the transition from silence to sound? In the hurried race of endless design and programming, do we still have time for the daily poetry of our dance with reality¹³?

What if every instant of our existence were recorded and preserved somewhere, capturing only the language of movement—no words, no sounds—in a never-ending archive kept by a silent, unseen entity named Dance. A huge collection encompassing the swirling of galaxies, the pulsing of dark matter, the movements of gravitational waves, electrons, clouds, mountains, cells, bacteria, and all organisms! An archive keeping the memory of absolutely all movements in the Universe! Having seen, after the end, your own archived film, would you step back into your earthly dance once more? And if that entity would give you the opportunity to return and change something at your movement's scores, what would you change? Would you breathe differently in this second chance relation with life?

¹² Henrik Valeur, *An Other City*, Architectural Publisher, Copenhagen, 2023

¹³ See the chapter *Reality is a matter of taste. A surrealist lunch with Searle, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Foucault*

Can architecture and urban planning enrich our dance, diversifying our movements, making them less mechanical¹⁴ and helping us to avoid letting the fascinating complexity of life slip by? How?

Any space, either by humans or nature's or blocking certain dynamics / movement A movement's score guides the **timing,**

spatial

outlining how a living body interacts and blueprint of the body in space and time, choreographed or directed, thus precise freer.

Architecture is only apparently an immobile movement, thus change. What are the lines¹⁶ compared to following nature's do we exhaust sooner, feel stronger, or live our spaces as if it were a score of our movement and perception habits? How are moved by the curve of an ellipse or by the personal space like, with its vital zones of is my personal space? And how public space connect or disconnect private common? What dynamics do they allow or them? And what about spaces of cooperation,

As the world once again falls into a self-lured by a shallow reductionism that threatens animal alike—how might we **create, private cooperation and the habit of free, creative would such a society differ from our routine, and obedience?** How can we that honor diversity, healing the social our detriment, have become chronic? They the first part, in no small part due to honorable alliance with the political and

SPACE AS A CHOREOGRAPHER

SPACE AS TOGETHERNESS

design, is always a choreographer, allowing scores performed in it.

organization,

and qualities of movement,

responds in specific contexts. Seen as the movement scores can be less or more and mechanical¹⁵ or open, flexible, inclusive,

art, almost everything in this world being differences between moving along straight patterns¹⁷, often curved or spiraled? When become more fragile? How would it feel to emotions or dreams¹⁸ challenging us to shift would it be to live in a society where people happy or sad air around an oblique line? What is your protection, growth, closure, or openness? How harmoniously—or dissonantly—does a given spaces? What do spaces of power have in obstruct, and what shared geometry defines what are their similarities?

destructive frenzy, overturning vital values, to eradicate intelligent life—human, plant, and **and public as well, that organically inspire thinking among their inhabitants? How current one, often defined by competition,** integrate our public lives into social geometries injustices and narrow-mindedness that both, to settle into a chronic state, as we will explore in architecture's and urbanism's not entirely economic powers that shape our societies.

¹⁴ The political danger of cognitive paradises (Oscar Wilde De Profundis.....)

¹⁵ We will talk later of Descartes and Le Corbusier shared passion for clocks' mechanisms and the effects this attraction has

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If we consider that architects create the stage design for both our private and public lives, with personal, social and political elements included, then the relationship between living space, performing arts, and architecture takes on a fertile and fascinating light. I refer to stage design as a framework/installation that generates specific behaviors through the rhythm and tempo of vertical or horizontal paths, the effects of openings and closures on the emotional comfort and intelligence of the inhabitants, or the dynamics of power and, conversely, of equality that it can create. Contemporary performing arts that avoid superficiality and decorative displays with people and objects often include a dimension of exploring human behavior within specific relational contexts. This concerns lively, concrete, real-time relations—connections experienced directly, not merely imagined or programmed in our minds.

For example, think of how you relate with a particular color, like Yves Klein's blue;
with silence, as in John Cage's *4'33"*¹⁹;
with the disquietedness of an oblique line depending on its distance from the ground;
or with the very absence of free choice when you would need more of it,
or with having control over your own breath length as in Witold Lutoslawski's²⁰ *limited aleatory* or *collective ad libitum* "*Venetian Games*".

These and other performative games and experiments may seem minor, yet each of these small ingredients (silence, sounds, colors, forms, etc) can foster a tangible, lived understanding of the relationship that develops between people and the multitude of delicate variables around them. For architects, these nuances can make the difference between being aware or unaware of how a space will attune with future occupants. In essence, these small details distinguish a living space—one that people desire to engage with—from a dead one, "enormous architectural still lives"; they mark the line between creating architectures undermined by their own future, which people ignore or avoid, and creating beloved spaces that integrate organically and harmoniously into their future.

¹⁹ [We will talk later about the constructive anarchism of John Cage.](#)

²⁰ "Texture-space takes on a role of heightened importance in much avant-garde music after 1960, notably in the music of Lutoslawski, Kzysztof Penderecki, and Gyorgy Liget, among others. The dense pitch clusters that are common in this music have generated a confusing array of terms in historical and analytical studies, including *textural music*, *cluster compositions*, *net-structure compositions* (Ligeti), and aleatorism of texture (Lutoslawski). In recent publications, some theorists have offered detailed observations of how texture-space generates form in music of the 1960s, particularly in the music of Ligeti. Absent from this literature is any exposition of how texture-space functions in the music of Lutoslawski, perhaps because his method of organizing pitch (harmonic aggregates) and rhythm (*ad libitum* sections) complicates such a study." Michael Klein, *Texture, Register, and Their Formal Roles in the Music of Witold Lutoslawski*, *Indiana Theory Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (SPRING 1999), pp. 37, Published By: Indiana University Press

Where are we now?

Responding to a Cartesian, thus mechanical definition of the human needs, for Le Corbusier, the father of the modernist architecture and urbanism, the city was “a working tool”, “outil de travail”, providing to the individual “le minimum vital” while getting out of this minimal input the maximum of effectiveness and production (see *Le plan voisin de Paris, La ville de trois millions d’habitants*). No wonder that despite the liberating equalitarian phantasies regarding the modern “homme nouveau”, with its` cities conceived for optimizing work, the firsts embracing enthusiastically the *minimum vital* and the *working tool* idea were some totalitarian regimes and some potentates of the capitalist world, all perched on a social fabric sewed with uniformisation and obedience. If, like some feminists said, even the personal is political, work is definitely, always political! Thus, designing the settings and conditions for the future of the work goes hand in hand with designing the geometries of power of the future political systems.

Where are we now? If we take a look at the way our society is raising its` kids to be future proficient working individuals, nearly forbidding them, in this process, the playfulness and the priceless pleasure of just being, without having to do anything else for getting accepted, I would say that, like the poor Pavlov`s dog, our society is very well conditioned for this working machines` reductionist propaganda. Creating more intelligent machines will not get us out of the human machine delusion. We are biological beings while, apart from accomplishing tasks and doing their jobs, machines don`t play; machines don`t fall in love or make love; they don`t contemplate or dream; they don`t fight for the freedom of expression and of course, being nor happy, neither sad, they don`t give a fuck about nature. Exactly like in Adolf Eichmann deposition, they are just “*doing their job* with unusual zeal”. Now, how should we, after almost half millennium from Descartes` birth and from the mechanical narrative birth, finally move to another scenario?

Through a series of performative frame-games/practices involving, in a dialog art-science, some of the latest cognitive and psychosocial experiments on non-linear cooperation as opposed to authoritarian leadership, my Milgram`s Park project is inviting you to find pleasure in doing what the machines cannot do: things as playing, dreaming, loving, contemplating, laughing, caring for nature, feeling good with yourself and with the others, being spontaneous. This psychosocial playfield will function as a ritual of deconditioning ourselves from the mechanical paradigm by entering into a more biological mindframe, preparing ourselves for the nonlinear, fractal-like, ways of working, living, interacting, doing politics. And thus to start designing circumstances for a future that might put an end to “just doing my job with unusual zeal” phenomenon, diminishing therefore the proliferation, in tomorrow`s work field, of people conducted, like machines, by other people, of “agentic” personalities, unassuming executants of some other people wishes. It is also an anarcho-surrealist fitness apparatus for performing, practicing some postmaterial values like equal rights, freedom, respect for life, giving us some practical tools to preview the complexity of the non-mechanical, organic cooperation that almost automatically occurs when groups build on non-authoritarian, non-discriminatory rules start to work.



Milgram`s Park
collective problem-solving playgrounds