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The Photographic Absolute: An Architectural Beginning
IN MY BEGINNING IS MY END...

PhD Report



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*Of life only there is no end; and although of its million starry
mansions many are empty and many still unbuilt, and though
its vast domain is yet unbearably desert, my seed shall one
day fill it and master its matter to its utmost confines. And
for what maybe beyond, the eyesight of Lilith is too short.
It is enough that there is a beyond.*

George Bernard Shaw
Back to Methuselah

No beginning is ever pure. Every word, every act, comes in the wake of what has preceded it. Hence, the ultimate aspiration of every effort towards a new beginning can only be to collect the past as a light that shines onto a future. The need to re-begin usually follows the recognition of a state of impasse. One of the most vigorous and influential declarations of such a state in architecture was put forth by Victor Hugo in the definitive edition of *Notre Dame de Paris* (1932). I start by going back to this.

At the closure of the chapter “Abbas beati Martini” Dom Claude Frollo, the cathedral’s archdeacon, “gazed at the gigantic edifice for some time in silence, then extending his right hand, with a sigh, towards the printed book which lay open on the table, and his left towards Notre-Dame, and turning a sad glance from the book to the church, – ‘Alas,’ he said, ‘this will kill that’”.¹

Asking the pardon of the lady readers for interrupting the plot of the novel, Hugo went on in the following chapter, titled “This Will Kill That”, to seek the meaning beneath the archdeacon’s “enigmatic” words – uttered in 1482, the year in which the book is set and forty-two years after Gutenberg’s invention. After briefly acknowledging the straightforward explanation of the priestly thought – that “the press will kill the church” – Hugo expanded on a more profound and far-reaching interpretation of Frollo’s prophetic words – that “printing will kill architecture”.² Surveying the circumstances that contributed to the steady disintegration of architecture during the preceding four centuries, Hugo concluded that the demise of architecture was by his time irrevocable and he sealed the future of the art of building with inevitable doom.

According to Hugo, from the beginning of civilization and up until the 15th century architecture was the chief register of mankind’s thought. As the human race is interested in preserving and perpetuating its thought – either philosophical or religious – the permanence of stone prevailed over the precariousness of the manuscript, which could be easily obliterated by “a torch and a Turk”.³ Ever since man put the first stone upright and marked a thought on the soil, architecture followed the development of human intelligence; and as civilization generated increasingly complex sacred symbols or secular thought, architects expressed these in progressively intricate edifices that were like books of stone written “under the *dictation* of the general idea of an epoch”.⁴

Hence for six thousand years, in periods of theocracy and periods of democracy alike, architecture reigned supreme as the depository of each era’s thought. But with the invention of the printing press human thought found a way of perpetuating itself that was far simpler, less costly, and infinitely more durable and effective than stone set upon the soil. As Hugo declared, “a book is so soon made, costs so little, and can go so far! How can it surprise us that all human thought flows in this channel?”.⁵

¹ HUGO, V. and HAPGOOD, I.F. *Notre Dame de Paris*. London: Crowell, 1888, vol.I, pp.189-190.

² *Ibid.*, vol.I, p.192.

³ *Ibid.*, vol.I, p.199.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol.I, p.193. My italics.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol.I, p.204.

The intellectual energy and the financial capital that were deposited in the book of stone up until the 15th century were thereafter gradually but steadily transferred to the book of paper. As architecture lost its former significance, it was abandoned by the other arts that were previously at its service, it withered and became “lifeless and bare”.⁶ By the beginning of the 19th century, the emaciation of architecture was, in the eyes of Hugo, so complete and irrevocable that he emphatically declared: “architecture is dead; irretrievably slain by the printed book”.⁷

But every closure is *ipso facto* the creation of the possibility for a new beginning.

In the “Preface” to *Notre Dame*, Hugo recounted his encounter with the Greek word ΑΝΑΓΚΗ in a dark corner of a tower in the cathedral, a few years before he wrote the book. “These Greek capitals, black with age, and quite deeply graven in stone” were, according to Hugo, later effaced from the wall but the “fatal and melancholy meaning contained in them” had made a grave enough impression on him to become the foundation of the book.⁸ The word ΑΝΑΓΚΗ is later translated in the book by the archdeacon as *fate*.⁹

The Greek letters that Hugo encountered in that “obscure nook” and read as ΑΝΑΓΚΗ might as well have spelled the word ΑΝΑΡΧΗ – that which has no beginning, that which has always existed and can therefore never come to an end¹⁰ – and this would have been an equally valid founding word for the book. While declaring the fateful end of the book of stone, Hugo was undoubtedly aware that architecture would, by an equal measure of necessity, continue to exist in one form or another. Despite the pessimistic conclusion of “This Will Kill That”, Hugo retained a window of opportunity for architecture by stating the following in the “Note” that he wrote right before the definitive edition of the book was published:

In one of these chapters on the present decadence of architecture, and on the death (in his mind almost inevitable) of that king of arts, the author expresses and develops an opinion unfortunately well rooted in him, and well thought out. But he feels it necessary to say here that he earnestly desires that the future may, some day, put him in the wrong.¹¹

⁶ Ibid., vol.I, p.200.

⁷ Ibid., vol.I, p.203.

⁸ Ibid., p.iv.

⁹ Ibid., vol.II, pp.39-40. The word ΑΝΑΓΚΗ was first used in Ionic Greek by Homer and meant “perforce” or “of necessity”. In Attic Greek it was frequently used in the infinitive form, “it must be that.” or “it is necessary that...”. In poetry and drama it was often personified as “necessity” (as a law of nature); as a “decree” (of the gods); or as “fate” and “destiny”: LIDDELL, H.G. and SCOTT, R. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901. The theme of “fate” was prevalent in 19th century literary circles and it also surfaced in Ludwig van Beethoven’s last substantial work, String Quartet nr.16 in F major titled *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss* (The Difficult Resolution), which he composed in 1826. Under the chords in the last movement Beethoven wrote: “Muss es sein?” (Must it be?) “Es muss sein! Es muss sein!” (It must be! It must be!). One and a half centuries later, Milan Kundera revived the theme in his novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), where he developed the Nietzschean notions of eternal recurrence and *amor fati* (love of fate).

¹⁰ LIDDELL 1901, p.110

¹¹ HUGO 1888, vol.II, p.313.

Yet, regardless of how “architects may one day solve the question of their art”, Hugo declared categorically that the former hegemony of architecture as “the social art, the collective art, the dominating art” could by no means be restored, for henceforth “the grand poem, the grand edifice, the grand work of humanity” would no longer be built but printed.¹²

Hugo’s words did not deliver a conclusive message of doom, but they created in fact an opening towards a new beginning in architecture. As Neil Levine aptly pointed out, “the limitations Hugo placed on architecture could serve a direct and positive end by forcing the architect to reconsider the expressive character of the medium. ... The ‘death of architecture’ was in effect a re-definition of architecture, both as a medium and as a mode of expression”.¹³ As Levine concluded, “ever since Hugo declared the death of architecture as society’s principal means of expression, the issue has been to make architecture out of building”.¹⁴

Indeed, the sound of Hugo’s gavel has echoed throughout the years, constituting time and time again a point of departure for subsequent efforts to redefine architecture. In the years immediately following the publication of “This Will Kill That”, both architects and theorists who recognized architecture’s state of peril, but who were not ready to accept its death, set out in pursuit of its resurgence. In *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture 1750-1950*, Peter Collins affirmed that one of the most prominent phenomena of the mid 19th century was “the insistent and widespread demand for a new architecture, which reached its climax about 1853”; but as all efforts in this direction were exhausted without any success, the frequency of these urgent calls diminished significantly thereafter.¹⁵

The frustration prevalent in architectural circles in the second half of the 19th century is widely evidenced in contemporary accounts. Violet-le-Duc in his *Lectures on Architecture* (1872) asked: “Is the nineteenth century destined to close without possessing an architecture of its own? Will this age, which is so fertile in discoveries, and which displays an energetic vitality, transmit to posterity only imitations or hybrid works, without character and which it is impossible to class?”¹⁶ A decade later, César Daly – architect and lifelong editor of the journal *La Revue Générale de l’Architecture et des Travaux Publics* (1840-1888) – answered: “No! This will not kill that! No, the sheet of paper will not destroy the granite block. The book will not cover the monument with its shadow. But each will have its place in the sunlight of the future”.¹⁷

¹² Ibid., vol.I, p.204.

¹³ LEVINE, N. *The Book and the Building: Hugo’s Theory of Architecture and Labrousse’s Bibliothèque Ste.-Genevieve*. In: MIDDLETON, R. ed. *The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth-Century French Architecture*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1982, (pp.13-173) pp.153-154.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.173.

¹⁵ COLLINS, P. *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture 1750-1950*. London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998, p.128.

¹⁶ VIOLETTE-LE-DUC, E.-E. *Lectures on Architecture*. New York: Dover, 1987, vol.1, p.446. Violet-le-Duc was referring of course to Revivalism – Roman, Greek, Renaissance, and Gothic – prevalent in the first half of the 19th century and to Eclecticism, which flourished in the second half of the 19th century.

¹⁷ DALY, C. *La Revue Générale de l’Architecture et des Travaux Publics*. vol.39, 1882, p.12.

Paradoxically, Daly's defiant voice issued forth from the same camp that gave rise to the position he was resisting: the Romantic Movement. Romanticism originated in literature, and its aim to promote individual subjectivity through emotional associations and imagination remained unwavering as it spread its influence over the rest of the arts. Collins asserted that "it was the desire to live the experience of a novel which constituted the original essence of architectural romanticism".¹⁸ Geoffrey Scott confirmed this in *The Architecture of Humanism* (1914), where he identified the Romantic Movement as "the most extreme example of the triumph of association over direct experiences which the history of culture contains".¹⁹ Daly expressed his Romantic disposition clearly when he wrote that "of all the monuments, the tomb is the most appropriate in bringing to light the plastic talent and the poetic sentiment of architecture; for there exists no other where the imagination can take a more noble or more elevated essence, where the necessity for expression is more urgent, *escaping from the physical tyranny of matter*".²⁰

It is therefore coherent why Hugo, who was one of the founders of the Romantic Movement in France, regarded architecture as an expression of intellectual thought in the form of monuments and omitted both material and functional considerations from his discourse. According to Scott, it is precisely the treatment of architecture as primarily symbolic that was the gravest error of the Romantics. This "literary fallacy" in architecture neglected the fact that "in literature meaning, or fixed association, is the universal term; while in architecture the universal term is the sensuous experience of substance and form".²¹ Consequently, Romanticism was fundamentally unsuitable to plastic form for it was "much too concerned with the vague and the remembered to find its natural expression in the wholly concrete".²²

In their attempt to vest material form in robes that belong appropriately to literature, architects during the Romantic period forced their art to speak a language that was not its own and thus crippled their production. Hugo's prophecy that architecture would henceforth be "subservient to the law of literature, which formerly received the law from it"²³ fulfilled itself for the rest of the 19th century while Romanticism run its course. But although none of the efforts towards the revitalization of architecture were fruitful during Hugo's lifetime, his words survived him as a point of departure for future generations of architects. "This Will Kill That" essentially addressed the deathblow dealt by the printed word not to architecture *en masse* but to architecture as monument, and by releasing architects from the task of building humanity's intellectual register it implicitly created the opportunity for them to redefine the significance of their profession.

One such architect was Frank Lloyd Wright, who in *A Testament* under the heading "The Seed" wrote that he first read "This Will Kill That" at the age of fourteen and the story of architecture's

demise never left his mind.²⁴ Wright's first major architectural statement, his 1902 address to the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society titled "The Art and Craft of the Machine", was based on this "most illuminating essay on architecture yet written".²⁵ Seeing the printing press as a metaphor for the Machine and architecture as a representation of Art, Wright bestowed on the former the noble capacity to be "the emancipator of the creative mind, and in time the regenerator of the creative conscience".²⁶ He assured his audience that when the power of the Machine was properly harnessed and directed, it could reinvigorate Art and Craft, compelling architecture to rise again "phoenix like" out of the "*here and now*".²⁷

Wright's plea for an architecture emerging out of the soil of its time and place, enclosed the Romantic concept of the "spirit of the age," which, as Richard Etlin affirmed in *Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier: The Romantic Legacy*, was central to the search for a "new" architecture that dominated western culture from the 1820s until the end of World War II.²⁸ Collins traced the emergence of this concept to the theories of evolution and relativity, which brought about the collapse of "the faith in absolute and permanent values on which all the notions of Classical architecture were based" and promoted a fervent interest in historiography and subsequently the rise of cultural relativism.²⁹

The establishment of the notion that cultural production is distinctive to and expressive of its historical era and its national identity was accompanied by the expectation that architects add to the heritage of the past their own particular contribution, producing work that expressed their era's "widespread characteristics or its highest ideals".³⁰ The term "an architecture" was the common shorthand used by Europeans during this period to designate the architecture of each nation and era.³¹ According to Etlin, Le Corbusier titled his first treatise on architecture *Vers une Architecture* (1923) in full awareness of the significance of the term, and aptly so, since this addressed "the challenge of creating a new and modern architectural system that would respond to contemporary sensibilities and needs and symbolize contemporary culture, just the way each historical architecture had done in previous times".³² The term is also found in Wright's 1908 essay "In the Cause of Architecture":

The average of human intelligence rises steadily, and as the individual unit grows more and more to be trusted we will have *an architecture* with rather variety in unity than has ever arisen

¹⁸ COLLINS 1998, p.39.

¹⁹ SCOTT, G. *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste*. London: Architectural Press, 1980, p.62.

²⁰ DALY, C. *L'Architecture Funéraire Contemporaine*. Paris: Ducher et Cie, 1871, p.1. My italics.

²¹ SCOTT 1980, p.62.

²² Ibid., p.39.

²³ HUGO 1888, vol.I, p.204.

²⁴ WRIGHT, F.L. *A Testament*. New York: Horizon Press, 1957, p.17.

²⁵ WRIGHT, F.L., KAUFMANN, E. and RAEBURN, B. *Writings and Buildings*. New York: Meridian, 1974, pp.55-73.

²⁶ Ibid., p.67.

²⁷ Ibid., p.55 and p.63.

²⁸ ETLIN, R.A. *Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier: The Romantic Legacy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, p.168.

²⁹ COLLINS 1998, p.34.

³⁰ ETLIN 1994, p.165.

³¹ Ibid., p.14.

³² Ibid. The significance of the book's title was obscured in its 1927 translation by Frederick Etchells as *Towards a New Architecture*, but it was restored in the 2007 translation of the book by John Goodman: LE, C. and GOODMAN, J.O. *Toward an Architecture*. Los Angeles, Calif.: Getty Research Institute, 2007.

before, but the forms must be born out of our changed conditions, they must be true forms, otherwise the best tradition has to offer is only an inglorious masquerade, devoid of vital significance or true spiritual value.³³

Le Corbusier and Wright, as well as many of their contemporaries, recognized the deadlock in which architecture had found itself and fervently sought to start it anew. The multitude of manifestoes written in the first three decades of the 20th century are firm witnesses to the pressing wish to discard the old pattern books, to stop copying forms from the past, and to bring forth an architecture that manifested the spirit of the times. Out of the sixty-seven manifestoes in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads and covering the period 1903-1963, forty-two were written before 1930.³⁴

Notwithstanding the common imperative to reanimate “the architectonic sense” – as Hermann Muthesius phrased it in his 1911 “Aims of the Werkbund”³⁵ – approaches amongst architects towards this ambition varied greatly, especially in regards to tradition. Some, like the Futurists, proposed a complete severance with the past. Antonio Sant’Elia and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti began their 1914 manifesto “Futurist Architecture” with the declaration that “no architecture has existed since 1700” and they continued by calling for:

... an architecture whose raison d’être lies solely in the special conditions of modern life, whose aesthetic values are in perfect harmony with our sensibility. This architecture cannot be subject to any law of historical continuity. It must be as new as our frame of mind is new. ... Architecture is breaking free from tradition. It must perforce begin again from the beginning. ... Let us have done with monumental, funereal, commemorative architecture.³⁶

The “monumental, funereal, commemorative architecture” of the Romantic era was anathema to Geoffrey Scott as well. In *The Architecture of Humanism* – originally published in the same year as “Futurist Architecture” – Scott advocated a return to the qualities of built form that, as he claimed, “respond to human physical delight” and which he identified as *Mass, Space, Line, and Coherence*.³⁷ However, as he pointed out, any attempt to formulate a theory of architectural appreciation would work against the aims of the book, since “the attempt to decide architectural right and wrong on purely intellectual grounds is precisely one of the roots of our mischief”.³⁸ Scott did not seek to devise codes for the operation of the creative instinct, as this would falsely intellectualize the creative process; his aim was “to clear the ground: and then to indicate where

the creative instinct lies, and in what it consists”.³⁹ The essential contribution of *The Architecture of Humanism* was the dismissal of the literary legacy of Romanticism, together with its historicist and representational preoccupations, and the re-establishment of direct experience through the sensuous connection between the human body and the physical presence of built form.

In that same year Clive Bell published *Art*, a book also founded on the wish to turn away from the associative and the symbolic and towards the eidetic and the timeless in art.⁴⁰ Bell set for himself the task of finding the essential quality “that distinguishes a work of art from all other classes of objects” and he reached the conclusion that what constitutes that peculiarly moving and personal aesthetic experience common to all works of art is “significant form”.⁴¹ According to Bell, over and above what other meanings or associations an artwork may carry, or what ideas or information it might convey, its principal function is to elicit a direct and unique emotion of aesthetic exaltation, so that “for a moment we are shut off from human interests, our anticipations and memories are arrested, we are lifted above the stream of life”.⁴² The “representative element” or the historical origin of a work of art is then irrelevant:

To those who have and hold a sense of the significance of form what does it matter whether the forms that move them were created in Paris the day before yesterday or in Babylon fifty centuries ago? The forms of art are inexhaustible; but all lead by the same road of aesthetic emotion to the same world of aesthetic ecstasy.⁴³

Art was a highly influential book at the time of its publication, it was reprinted several times since and it is still in publication today. As Bell’s theory of “significant form” echoed across the art world, it naturally entered the discourse on and the practice of architecture as well. Collins affirmed that statements such as “architecture is above all an Art and only as such will it produce significant forms” became prevalent in architectural circles.⁴⁴ Walter Gropius initiated his students into architecture by asking them to manipulate “abstract shapes without any reference to building functions or the ultimate strength of the materials”, but having as their sole aim the achievement of “significant form”.⁴⁵

George Howe, chairman of the Department of Architecture at Yale University from 1950 to 1954, defined the practice of architecture as “the occupation, with intent to create *significant form*, of producing designs for and procuring the execution of, any and every sort of work constructed for the use of man”.⁴⁶ Howe argued that “the artist’s training is to feel, to do, to think, to think to do to feel, alternately until he arrives at a knowledge of his own inward feeling about his art”;

³³ WRIGHT, F.L. In the Cause of Architecture. *The Architectural Record*, vol.XXIII, March 1908, nr.3, 1908. In: WRIGHT, F.L. and GUTHEIM, F.A. *In the Cause of Architecture: Essays by Frank Lloyd Wright for Architectural Record, 1908-1952*. New York: Architectural Record Books, 1975, p.56. My italics.

³⁴ CONRADS, U. ed. *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1970. Similarly, out of the one hundred manifestoes written between 1909 and 2009 and included in DANCHEV, A. ed. *100 Artists’ Manifestos*. London: Penguin, 2011, fifty-five were written before 1930.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.26-27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.35-36.

³⁷ SCOTT 1970, p.240.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.259.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.260.

⁴⁰ BELL, C. *Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.37.

⁴⁴ COLLINS 1998, p.281 and p.273.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.274.

⁴⁶ HOWE, G. Training for the Practice of Architecture. *Perspecta*, vol.1, Summer 1952, (pp.2-5) p.3.

by absorbing the principles and the images of works he admires, the artist ultimately “learns from himself”.⁴⁷ Howe’s words hark back to Henry van de Velde’s 1903 “Programme”:

Are we to expect from a *social* programme what can only spring *from our own most inward selves*? Think rationally, cultivate artistic sensibility! Each one of us today can do this for himself; if only a large number of people do this a new social atmosphere will be brought about.⁴⁸

The position that the architect, as an artist, should cultivate his creative instinct by trusting and exploring the cosmos within him, was shared by Hermann Finsterlin, who in 1924 wrote the following in his essay “Architecture of the Future – Play of Forms and Subtle Construction”:

There is nothing beyond your outward senses that you could not create with your inmost primal sense, that miniature version of the cosmos, the mightiest wonder of human existence. Discover the philosopher’s stone that renders you all-powerful like the world spirit. . . . Push on to the center point of the world and you will find yourself again, in changed shape, at the root of the world tree, in whose sap appearance and being flow into one.⁴⁹

The confluence of appearance and being that Finsterlin installed at the core of the creative act was explicated by Martin Heidegger in his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” – written between 1935 and 1937 and first published in 1950.⁵⁰ Here Heidegger asked: “Where does a work belong?”; and he answered: “The work belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm that is opened up by itself”.⁵¹ The work of art that surfaces through this *praxis* “first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves”.⁵²

Now, let us unfold Heidegger’s position. According to him, the act of artistic creation brings forth works – as things that are not “simply nothing”⁵³ – that set up a world by which the truth of our being “becomes and happens”.⁵⁴ It is precisely this bringing forth of beings “*out of* concealedness and specifically *into* the unconcealedness of their appearance” that distinguishes art, as a mode of knowing, from handicraft, as a mode of making.⁵⁵ All works of art are then the “setting-into-work of truth”, and when move into what they disclose by their appearance “so as to bring our own nature itself to take a stand in the truth of what is” they can transform our sense of the world and of ourselves.⁵⁶

As *ontological paradigms*, artworks function on three levels of different magnitude, which Iain Thompson identified in *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*: they can help us become aware of what

matters to us, they can disclose how art itself works, or they can transform “an historical community’s ‘understanding of being’”.⁵⁷ As Heidegger asserted, art is essentially historical in the sense that it “grounds history” – not as a sequence of events in time but as the “transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people’s endowment”.⁵⁸ Based on the doctrine of *ontological historicity*, Heidegger thus bridged the gap between the appearance of the work of art – as a unity in form and matter that institutes a singular aesthetic experience – and the truth of being that this accomplishes.⁵⁹

Heidegger concluded that the creative act is “an origin in our historical existence” because it is “a distinctive way in which truth comes into being”; so “whenever art happens – that is, whenever there is a beginning – a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again”.⁶⁰ However, as he pointed out, what guides creation is the image of the work to be created, which becomes actual only through the performance of the creative act:

The work’s createdness, however, can obviously be grasped only in terms of the process of creation. Thus, constrained by the facts, we must consent after all to go into the activity of the artist in order to arrive at the origin of the work of art. The attempt to define the work- being of the work purely in terms of the work itself proves to be unfeasible.⁶¹

Mies van der Rohe had already expressed similar views to Heidegger on the nature of the creative act in the 1920s. In his 1923 “Working Theses” Mies declared that only the architecture that is “the will of the age conceived in spatial terms” creates.⁶² Then four years later he spoke of the ontology of the creative act as a per-formed practice in “On Form in Architecture”:

We do not evaluate the result but the starting point of the creative process. Precisely this shows whether the form was discovered by starting from life, or for its own sake. That is why I consider the creative process so essential. Life is for us the decisive factor. In all its fullness, in its spiritual and real commitments.⁶³

Mies’ words cited above, Heidegger’s position that the artistic gesture discloses the truth of our being, Howe’s conviction that the artist learns from himself through a process that alternates between feeling, thinking, and doing, and the aforementioned statements by Van de Velde and Finsterlin, illuminate – albeit from different angles – the quest for an authentic practice enacted through the bringing forth of matter into (significant) form.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ CONRADS 1970, p.13.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.83.

⁵⁰ HEIDEGGER, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.41.

⁵² Ibid., p.43.

⁵³ Ibid., p.21.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.60.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.59.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.74-75.

⁵⁷ THOMSON, I. *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp.44-45.

⁵⁸ HEIDEGGER 1971, p.77.

⁵⁹ Aesthetics and ethics are fundamentally inseparable in Heidegger’s thought. See: YOUNG, J. *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.24.

⁶⁰ HEIDEGGER 1971, pp.77-78.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.58.

⁶² CONRADS 1970, p.74.

⁶³ Ibid., p.102. The verb *perform* is a composite of *per* (prep.) from the Latin *per* “through, during, by means of, on account of, as in” and *form* (n.) from Latin *forma* “form, contour, figure, shape; appearance, design” or the Greek *morphe* “form, outward appearance”. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Available at: <http://www.etymonline.com> [Accessed 17 April 2012].

Since I expand on the notion of *authenticity* in the essay “Practicing-Research: Towards a Mathesis Singularis” enclosed in this volume, I will refrain from spoiling the freshness of your encounter with that discussion by remaining here with what is necessary for maintaining the continuity and coherence of the present line of thought. First, authenticity is hereby understood on the terms of Existentialism, and hence in the context of the belief that life is a practice that entails freely deliberated, committed, yet situated choices, by which the individual defines his own self, and consequently humanity at large.⁶⁴ Second, since there has not been (and there can never be) a conclusive definition of authenticity, nor a standard procedure for its attainment, it is impossible to demonstrate or verify its presence. And third, as a proposition that can not be scientifically verified, authenticity was dismissed as invalid and meaningless by the proponents of Analytic Philosophy – who prevailed in the Anglo-American world from the 1930s to the 1960s – and was devaluated further by Post-Structuralist thinkers and by Post-Modernists in general.⁶⁵

In the fourth and final installment of his 1992 article “In Search of Authenticity”, Peter Blundell Jones affirmed that “the scientific euphoria of the post-war era, in which science represented Truth as the basis for every kind of judgment” brought about the dominance of the invariable and the certain over the indefinite and the unpredictable, and consequently the reduction of architectural design to the measurable while “the immeasurable was discounted”.⁶⁶ The glorification of science “pushed art into a subordinate position” and caused an “over-emphasis on construction techniques and repetitive processes, which dominated the ordering of buildings to the exclusion of all else”.⁶⁷ This reductionism led, according to Blundell Jones, to a crisis that gave rise to the Post-Modernist revolution, which betrayed the “healthiest” side of the Modern Movement – “the attempt to wrest architecture away from academic style wars” – and regressed to the “stylistic inflation” of the 19th century with an abundance of “undigested” quotations, devoid of any real depth, and lacking authenticity.⁶⁸ In response to this predicament, Blundell Jones wrote:

The future course of architecture is not inevitably set. It does not help us to moan Cassandra-like, that we are in the grip of fate, that architecture is dead or dying, and that we can but witness her decline. If we want a more authentic, more profoundly based, less-image obsessed architecture, we can fight for it.⁶⁹

In his conclusion, Blundell Jones maintained that an “architectural authenticity” is still sustainable and can be accomplished through a “unity of use, construction and image that is self-evident”.⁷⁰ It is precisely this quality of self-evidence that was for Blundell Jones the hallmark of authenticity, and his words hark back to Heidegger and even further back to the Germany of the 1920s –

⁶⁴ GOLOMB, J. *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus*. London: Routledge, 1995, pp.203-204.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.203-204.

⁶⁶ BLUNDELL, JONES, P. In search of authenticity 4: Post-Modern despair. *The Architects' Journal*, vol.195, January 1992, (pp.29-32) p.30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.29.

when the Modern Movement was still “rich, diverse, and pregnant with other possibilities”,⁷¹ such as the ones pondered by Hermann Finsterlin:

*Building is the experience of space; inspiration, invention, the clearest, most sudden awareness of the soul's echo in the primeval jungle of the environment; a purposeless, unexampled play of the finest forces in porous matter whose flux came to a standstill in a moment of highest reflection, oblivious of pleasure, existing in appearance only, a waking sleep of forces, a stationary movement that might at any time continue to flower in all directions or disintegrate into well-shaped component parts, spontaneously splitting up like a living crystal without beginning or end like everything through which there quivers the pulse of the eternal.*⁷²

Finsterlin's words on the unending character of art echo conspicuously in the essay “In (the) beginning” by philosopher Federico Ferrari – published in the catalogue of the 2011 group exhibition *Arte Essenziale*, which he curated.⁷³ The artists included in this exhibition presented, according to Ferrari, some new beginnings in contemporary art at the twilight of postmodernity. But as he pointed out, these beginnings entail neither a return to a long lost origin, nor the rediscovery of an essential purity; instead, they emerge every time anew through the creative gesture. Resounding the position of Heidegger, Ferrari stated that the essence of art “lies in the gesture it performs, in its praxis”.⁷⁴ Art is consequently in a state of perpetual becoming, eternally ending and beginning through the creative act:

Beginning, indeed, is never any single event, but is the act, the action or the gesture that sets in motion: it's the moment in which something begins, and never ceases to begin. Everything remains for ever *in* beginning. Rather than any single beginning, there is a multitude of initial acts, departures and visions concerning that indefinable point which constitutes the beginning: the place in which the world appears out of nothingness and takes on ever new forms.⁷⁵

Because the creative act is always inaugural, arising from a “certain nakedness” to bring material into form, it is impossible to close it up in a system of codes or to redirect its meaning “to any ulterior sphere” – cultural, historical, or ideological.⁷⁶ The meaning of the artwork is entirely within itself: in the *ex nihilo* gesture that brings it forth in a form that preserves “the seed of a beginning that can rebegin forever”.⁷⁷ Ferrari proposed that this beginning ought to be imagined “as an indefinite, dormant expanse that lies below the daily flow of events while waiting to be activated, in every moment and every place”, initiating a world each time anew through the gesture of the artist or the gaze of the viewer.⁷⁸

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² CONRADS 1970, p.85.

⁷³ FERRARI, F. *Arte Essenziale*. Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 2011.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.156.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.155.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.160.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.164.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.154.

Summoning art back to itself opens it, according to Ferrari, to the dimension of ethics, “to its own latent implications, inherent in the pulsing core of creative gesture, where material and form, necessity and freedom, chance and destiny cohabit with one another, in no way discernibly distinct from one another”.⁷⁹ The union of aesthetics and ethics, also ingrained in the philosophy of Heidegger and manifested as the confluence of appearance and being, is intrinsic to authentic practice. As an origin that fulfills itself endlessly via its own performance in the here and now, art “conducts us to ourselves, recalling us to the ethical imperative of revealing that essence, of becoming our essence, of becoming what we are”.⁸⁰ Each creative gesture sets thus a singular beginning in motion – one out of an infinity of other possible beginnings – unfolding and disclosing the creases of our being on the ground on which we stand.

It is under the spell of these propositions that I use of the term “beginning” in my project. My yearning for *an architectural beginning* implies neither the recovery of a lost origin nor the projection of a future utopia; it is simply and solely the wish to unearth, by way of my practice, my site as an architect and as a human being at large. And because my practice is a creative process that begins again and again through its own performance, what I uncover will be *ipso facto* the identity of the moment rather than a definite and invariable truth. In fact, the word “identity” derives from *identidem*, which originates in the phrase *idem et idem*: over and over again.⁸¹

As I begin over and over again to turn the ground beneath me, I reveal sites affected by my disposition and by my evolving competences. Since the intentions of my research endeavor are bent towards architecture – towards designing spatial experience – the insights that I disclose are grounded in my authorship and institute openings in the intended direction. An architectural beginning is therefore not one finite act of creation, but rather the unceasing practice of giving an image to my being and situating it in the world *idem et idem*, and each time otherwise.

• • •

While Victor Hugo was writing *Notre Dame*, Nicéphore Niépce and Louis Daguerre were collaborating on experiments with silver compounds so as to improve the chemical process of a new invention: photography. Niépce had already produced permanent images by means of light, which he called *points de vue*, the first one in 1827 following an exposure time of about eight hours.⁸² After Niépce’s death in 1833, Daguerre continued the experiments and in 1837 he managed to capture a negative image on a silver-coated mirror-polished metal plate, which appeared as a positive image when viewed in the right angle and light. The daguerreotype, as he called it, required shorter exposure times than Niépce’s first attempts, but it was still too slow to capture moving subjects.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.164.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.160.

⁸¹ Online Etymology Dictionary. Available at: <http://www.etymonline.com> [Accessed 11 March 2013].

⁸² On the early history of photography see: ROTZLER, W. *Photography as Artistic Experiment: From Fox Talbot to Moboly-Nagy*. Garden City, N.Y.: AMPHOTO, 1976, pp.7-14.

Despite continuous improvements, photographic chemistry remained slow and cameras bulky throughout the 19th century. Photographers during this period worked with what the eye had already contemplated and what the mind had already comprehended to produce images as aesthetic objects. As George Santayana affirmed in a lecture that he addressed to the Harvard Camera Club at the turn of the century, photography was up until this time akin to a form of writing: recording and transmitting “the intelligible, the describable, what has passed through the process of abstraction and verbal expression”.⁸³ But as cameras became more compact and films swifter, photographers could now render “not only monuments and works of other arts, but every aspect of life in its instantaneous truth”.⁸⁴ Santayana was the first to identify the potential of photography “to help us in the weakest part of our endowment, to rescue from oblivion the most fleeting portion of our experience – the momentary vision, the irrevocable mental image”.⁸⁵

According to Santayana, mental images – which are the vivid perceptions of our mind, “the filling of our lives, the material of our beings” – can not “be retained unchanged for an instant, nor recalled unchanged at any subsequent time”.⁸⁶ By preserving mental images, photographs can improve and extend our perception, “helping us to see and to remember, and thus making the world more clear and familiar to us”.⁸⁷ Mental images, and in extent the photographs that retain these, transport us “from the animal to the spiritual sphere – to the sphere of practical wisdom and free speculation”.⁸⁸

I stop at the term “practical wisdom” and look into it. Following Aristotle, practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is action, the aim of which is acting itself – as opposed to production, which has “an end distinct from itself”.⁸⁹ Since practical wisdom is deliberation founded on belief and concerned with “what can be otherwise”, its principles can not be demonstrated and its suppositions are not “universal and necessary”.⁹⁰ Thus Santayana pioneered the notion of photography as a *praxis*: as a self-directed, self-sustained, and on-going learning process based on personal judgment – instead of an activity geared towards and concluded with the production of aesthetics objects. In his own words:

Photography is useful to the artist because it helps him to see and to keep seeing, and helpful to every intelligent man because it enables him to see much that from his station in space and time, is naturally invisible. ... the prevalence of photography will not tend to kill the impulse to design, but rather stimulate and train it by focusing attention on that natural structure of things by which all beautiful design is inspired.⁹¹

⁸³ SANTAYANA, G. The Photograph and the Mental Image. In: GOLDBERG, V. ed. *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*. Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1988, (pp.260-266) p.260.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.261.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.260.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.259.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.266.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.258.

⁸⁹ ARISTOTELES and CRISP, R. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.107.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.108.

⁹¹ SANTAYANA in GOLDBERG 1988, p.264.

Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) was one of the first photographers to practice what Santayana proposed. Starting in the early 1920s, Stieglitz took at least two hundred photographs featuring clouds, which he called *Equivalents*.⁹² Explaining his concept of Equivalence that he developed through this body of work, Stieglitz wrote that “it is only after I have put down an equivalent of what has moved me that I can even begin to think about its meaning”.⁹³ For Stieglitz “the act came first and then the word”; this act originates in “the subconscious, pushing through the conscious, driven by an urge coming from beyond its own knowing, its own control, trying to live in the light, like the seed pushing up through the earth”.⁹⁴

Minor White – a disciple of Stieglitz and an acclaimed photographer in his own right – wrote in his 1963 essay “Equivalence: The Perennial Trend” that Equivalence is “probably the most mature idea ever presented to picture-making photography” and that it grows “by the efforts and accomplishments of the people who explore it”.⁹⁵ Since there are no “rules or signposts by which one can spot an Equivalent twenty feet away” its appearance can not be described; but its function can be clearly defined:

Any photograph, regardless of source, might function as an Equivalent to someone, sometime, someplace. If the individual viewer realizes that for him what he sees in a picture corresponds to something within himself – that is, the photograph mirrors something in himself – then his experience is some degree of Equivalence.⁹⁶

As it follows, Equivalence starts from the presence of the photograph but its experience is enacted entirely within the individual. When a photograph functions as an Equivalent, it is “at once a record of something in front of the camera and simultaneously a spontaneous symbol” arising automatically in the act of photographing and later on in the act of viewing the image “to fill the need of the moment”.⁹⁷ As White wrote:

[Photographers who practice in this mode] willingly acknowledge the fact that photographs mirror some state of feeling within the viewer. They include themselves here as viewers of their own photographs and viewers of the subjects they select. They accept the truth that photographs act as a catalyst, and consequently are a step in process, not an end product. They can remember that the mental image in a viewer’s mind is more important than the photograph itself.⁹⁸

⁹² On the life and work of Alfred Stieglitz see: HOFFMAN, K. *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004; GREENOUGH, S. and HAMILTON, J. *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs & Writings*. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1999; NORMAN, D. *Alfred Stieglitz: Introduction to an American Seer*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1960.

⁹³ NORMAN 1960, p.36.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6 and p.25.

⁹⁵ WHITE, M. Equivalence: The Perennial Trend. *PSA Journal*, vol.29, nr.7, 1963, (pp.17-21) p.17. As White noted, “the idea has been continued by a few others, notably at the Institute of Design in Chicago under Aaron Siskind and Harry Callahan, and at the former California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco under the efforts of the present author”.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p.18.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.21.

The most pertinent contribution of the concept of Equivalence is the notion that the photograph is “a function, an experience, not a thing”.⁹⁹ Stieglitz initiated and developed a mode of practicing photography as an exploratory thinking process based on apprehensions and yielding self-knowledge. White concluded his essay with the affirmation that “with the theory of Equivalence, photographers everywhere are given a way of learning to use the camera in relation to the mind, heart, viscera and spirit of human beings. The perennial trend has barely been started in photography”.¹⁰⁰

Half a century after White’s essay on Equivalence and a century after Santayana claimed that “photography is useful to the artist because it helps him to see and to keep seeing”, the exhibition *Zero Point of Meaning: Non-Functional, Non-Representational, Elementary, Experimental and Conceptual Photography in Croatia* explored the role of photography “as an experimental and research medium” in the context of contemporary art. The text introducing the exhibition stated the following:

Artists who at some point of their activity decided to reach for the camera ... were not interested in the technical possibilities of the medium or the quality of the shot as such. Instead, they considered the photograph as a sort of coordinate that functioned like an echo of some event or an absent artwork, like a channel transmitting the conceptualisation and realisation of a particular idea.¹⁰¹

Santayana’s theory on the potential of photography, Stieglitz’s *Equivalents*, and the work of artists and photographers who followed in the footsteps of these two pioneers, share the notion that photography is a singular and interminable practice originating in intuition. What are the terms under which *intuition* is hereby understood? Current dictionaries define intuition as an immediate apprehension, a spontaneous understanding that precedes conscious reason or perception. At the origin of Western thought, Aristotle defined intuition (*nous*) as the “grasp of an unmediable truth”¹⁰² that differs from demonstrative knowledge in that it is “immediate, not ratiocinative”.¹⁰³ According to Aristotle, since intuitive knowledge arises from experience, from “what is more familiar to us, not from what is more intelligible in itself”, its “immediate premisses” can not be demonstrated.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, “intuitive reason grasps the first principles”¹⁰⁵ and it is thus the starting-point of scientific knowledge and of every field of research.¹⁰⁶ Intuition gives us the truth of being, the originary content of the “thing-ness” of things, the “what-ness” of experience, or the “being-ness” of existence discussed extensively by Heidegger.¹⁰⁷ As Ted Sadler pointed

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹⁰¹ KRIZIĆ ROBAN, S. Text for the exhibition *Zero Point of Meaning: Non-Functional, Non-Representational, Elementary, Experimental and Conceptual Photography in Croatia*. Graz: Camera Austria, March 9 - May 26, 2013.

¹⁰² ARISTOTELES and ROSS, W.D. *Aristotle’s Prior and Posterior Analytics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, p.586.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.606.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.515.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.678.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.512.

¹⁰⁷ HEIDEGGER, M. *Being and Time*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962; *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

out in *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Question of Being*, although the initial premises of a demonstration must be established via intuition, the “ontological knowledge” latent in intuitions must “be unearthed, uncovered, drawn out, as Aristotle says, ‘by analysis’”.¹⁰⁸

In the first chapter of *Awakening the Inner Eye: Intuition in Education*, Nel Noddings and Paul J. Shore provide an insightful account on the development of the concept of intuition through the work of pertinent thinkers.¹⁰⁹ This overview affirms that the common thread running through all discussions on intuition has been the understanding that this is knowledge that arises without recourse to reason or analysis. Like every concept travelling on the wings of history through the thought of great minds, intuition enjoyed varying degrees of interest throughout the years. At the end of the 19th century there was “a renewed interest among philosophers in many activities and experiences labeled intuitive”¹¹⁰ and the voice of French philosopher and Nobel laureate Henri Bergson (1859-1941) was the most prominent in this discussion at the time.

As William Barrett affirmed in *Irrational Man*, Bergson “was the first to insist on the insufficiency of the abstract intelligence to grasp the richness of experience, on the urgent and irreducible reality of time, and – perhaps in the long run the most significant insight of all – on the inner depth of the psychic life which cannot be measured by the quantitative methods of the physical sciences”.¹¹¹ Bergson’s philosophy was greatly influential on both sides of the Atlantic during his lifetime and Stieglitz, who was his contemporary, was clearly influenced by it while developing his concept of Equivalence.

Since I explicate Bergson’s position on the creative potential of the rapport between intuition and reason in the essay “Practicing Research: Towards a Mathesis Singularis” included in this volume, I will limit my discussion here on his definition of intuition. In *Matter and Memory* (*Matière et mémoire*, 1896) Bergson delegated intuition in the province of “pure perception”, which occurs when we are “absorbed in the present and capable, by giving up every form of memory, of obtaining a vision of matter both immediate and instantaneous”.¹¹² A decade later, in *Creative Evolution* (*L’Évolution créatrice*, 1907), he proposed that “we live and move and have our being” in *duration*, an interconnected dynamic totality that keeps unfolding and can only be grasped by instinct, which is innate knowledge manifested in its “enlarged and purified” form as intuition.¹¹³ Intuition is “*lived* rather than *represented*” knowledge, a “divining sympathy” that leads us to “the very inwardness of life”.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ SADLER, T. *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Question of Being*. London: Athlone, 1996, p.102.

¹⁰⁹ NODDINGS, N. and SHORE, P.J. *Awakening the Inner Eye: Intuition in Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1984, pp.1-23.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹¹¹ BARRETT, W. *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1961, p.13.

¹¹² BERGSON, H. *Matter and Memory*. New York: Dover Publications, 2004, p.26.

¹¹³ BERGSON, H. *Creative Evolution*. London: Macmillan, 1911, p.5 and pp.186-187. This dynamic totality is akin to Kant’s *noumenon* – the thing in itself – which he deemed inaccessible to consciousness because, as Bergson wrote, “he did not attribute to duration an absolute existence, having put time *a priori* on the same plane as space”. *Ibid.*, p.217.

Now, according to Bergson, “the more we fix our attention on this continuity of life, the more we see that organic evolution resembles the evolution of a consciousness, in which the past presses against the present and causes the upspringing of a new form of consciousness, incommensurable with its antecedents”.¹¹⁵ Hence, no two events are ever exactly the same, for the conditions from which they spring are never identical, and so “duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new”.¹¹⁶ Because every act of creation is an original moment in a ever unfolding history, it concentrates in its “indivisibility all that has been perceived and what the present is adding to it besides”,¹¹⁷ and it is hence not only unforeseeable but also absolute:

We must strive to see in order to see, and no longer to see in order to act. Then the Absolute is revealed very near us and, in a certain measure, in us. It is of psychological and not of mathematical nor logical essence. It lives with us. Like us, but in certain aspects infinitely more concentrated and more gathered up in itself, it *endures*.¹¹⁸

The *absolute* is hereby what reveals itself, by way of the creative act, as the truth of a particular person in a singular place and time. In a world understood as “perpetual growth, a creation pursued without end”,¹¹⁹ the absolute is not a recovered *a priori*, but an always a new beginning in a ceaselessly developing process. The evolution of this creative process is unforeseeable, precisely because it is creative, and within its context the absolute is not the end of the line, but what renders the line never-ending. As Bergson wrote, “every human work in which there is invention, every voluntary act in which there is freedom, every movement of an organism that manifests spontaneity, brings something new into the world” that is manifested as a material form; matter arises when “the creative current is momentarily interrupted” so as to arrest “the action that generates form”.¹²⁰

When a photographer practices his art on the basis of instinct, releasing the shutter of his camera (or a comparable mechanism on digital cameras) at the moment when an intuitive impulse moves him, he interrupts momentarily the stream of life in which he exists and creates a *thing* that has not yet been perceived, and which is therefore still uncoded. This photographic act is absolute, unburdened by a conscious before or an intended after; it is unconditioned, acausal, and autonomous, as it emerges out of a state of nothingness and grasps life spontaneously, fixing forever and precisely the transitory instant. The photographic act that springs forth by instinct is beyond doubt: it could not have been other than what it became at the particular moment of its becoming, and it can never again be the same. It is an *es muss sein*, an

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.185-186.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.29.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.315.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.252.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

ΑΝΑΓΚΗ. Absolute, in this sense, is also and simultaneously the thing that emerges from the intuitive photographic act: the photograph – the act and the artifact are linked by the unity of time and space in which creation happens.

The photograph is a finality (*telos*) but not the end. The photographic image opens up under the light of every individual consciousness in a myriad different ways, each one constituting a new beginning. The singularity of these beginnings entails a common ground: intuition. Going back to Bergson, we see that instinct installs us *within* duration and by the “sympathetic communication it establishes between us and the rest of the living” it enables us to grasp, albeit momentarily, the creative force of life.¹²¹ As it follows, the singular and concentrated origin of intuitive creation contains the possibility of its heterogeneous expansion into others, which establishes a reciprocal interpenetration between the one and the world on the basis of their mutual *being*.

The introspection that the intuitive creative act accomplishes is also and at the same time an opening unto the world. As a witness to this I bring forth Henri Cartier-Bresson, who belonged to the camp of photographers that “go out to discover the image and seize it” – instead of arranging it – and who, according to his own account, used the camera as a sketchbook, as “an instrument of intuition and spontaneity, the master of the instant which, in visual terms, questions and decides simultaneously”.¹²² Photographing was for him “a way of shouting, of freeing oneself, ... a way of life”.¹²³ In his 1952 essay “The Decisive Moment” Cartier-Bresson affirmed the unity of self and world that is accomplished in the act of creation:

I believe that, through the act of living, the discovery of one-self is made concurrently with the discovery of the world around us, which can mold us, but which can also be affected by us. As the result of a constant reciprocal process, both these worlds come to form a single one.¹²⁴

The ontological significance of the photograph as an absolute – act and artifact at once – rests precisely in this dynamic negotiation between the individual and the world, in the *I* that resides in the *YOU*. This vital interpenetrative process begins from an intuition, from the contracted moment of a momentary flash, and expands thereafter infinitely and heterogeneously. Leo Steinberg aptly expressed this process in his essay on Velasquez’ *Las Meninas*:

The picture conducts itself the way a vital presence behaves. It creates an encounter. And as in any living encounter, any vital exchange, the work of art becomes the alternate pole in a situation of self-recognition. If the picture were speaking instead of flashing, it would be saying: I see you seeing me – I in you see myself seen – see you seeing yourself being seen – and so on beyond the reaches of grammar. Confronted mirrors we are, polarized selves,

¹²¹ Ibid., p.187.

¹²² CARTIER-BRESSON, H. and SAND, M.L. *The Mind’s Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers*. New York: Aperture, 1999, p.15.

¹²³ Ibid., p.16.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.42.

reflecting one other’s consciousness without end; partaking of an infinity that is not spatial, but psychological – an infinity not cast in the outer world, but in a mind that knows and knows itself known.¹²⁵

Roland Barthes discussed the expansion of the photographic image in *Camera Lucida*.¹²⁶ Starting from a handful of photographs that “existed” for him, Barthes set out to find what photography is “in itself”.¹²⁷ He found two elements present in photographs: the *studium* and the *punctum*.¹²⁸ The former promotes a kind of education, a cultural interest in the subject depicted and what this represents, signifies, or informs; the latter is an “element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me”.¹²⁹ Unlike the studium, which is ultimately always coded, the punctum has “a power of expansion” that renders reason and analysis useless in perceiving its “lightning-like” existence.¹³⁰ Barthes wrote the following on the transcendence that the photographic punctum accomplishes:

Mad or tame? Photography can be one or the other: tame if its realism remains relative, tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits ... mad if this realism is absolute and, so to speak, original, obliging the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time: a strictly revulsive movement which reverses the course of the thing, and which I shall call, in conclusion, the photographic *ecstasy*.¹³¹

The presence of the photographic artifact is indispensable to the occurrence of this ecstasy. Forty years before Barthes, Jean-Paul Sartre discussed in *The Imaginary* (*L’imaginaire*, 1940) two ways in which any object is given to consciousness: through perception or through imagination; the former is the study over time of a particular thing with our senses, while the latter is spontaneous and total.¹³² According to Sartre, as there “cannot be an intuition of nothingness ... because all consciousness – intuitive or not – is consciousness of something”, the imaginary process can only begin from the presence of a real object or event.¹³³ When we stand back and contemplate a real presence “this slides into nothingness” and “starting from this moment, the object is no longer perceived; it functions as an *analogon* of itself, which is to say that an irreal image of what it is becomes manifested for us through its current presence”.¹³⁴ Therefore, as Sartre argued:

¹²⁵ STEINBERG, L. Velasquez’ ‘Las Meninas’. *October*, vol.19, Winter 1981, p.54.

¹²⁶ BARTHES, R. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.3.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp.26-27.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.26.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.45.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.119.

¹³² SARTRE, J.-P., ELKAIM-SARTRE, A. and WEBBER, J. *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*. London: Routledge, 2004. Arlette Elkaim-Sartre noted in the historical introduction to the book that Sartre – like Bergson in *Matter and Memory* – refuted associationism and held that the mental image through which thinking always happens “is not a weakened perception, a more or less automatic revival, but that it differs from perception in its very nature, and more generally that the metaphysical question of human freedom and that of the being of consciousness are closely linked”. Ibid., pp.viii-ix.

¹³³ Ibid., p.187.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.193.

... the image is an act that aims in its corporeality at an absent or nonexistent object, through a physical or psychic content that is given not as itself but in the capacity of 'analogical representative' of the object aimed at.¹³⁵

In the act of imagining, the analogon elicits an affective subjective response to its resemblance and takes on a sense that follows our intention towards this. The production of irreal images that our imagination accomplishes by animating an analogon is thus defined by an "attitude of consciousness".¹³⁶ And although it might seem that this consciousness is removed from the real world, our "being-in-the-world" is in fact the necessary condition of imagination. It is only from a "concrete situation" that we can begin to constitute, based on our frame of mind, the irreal. Ultimately, as Sartre argued, the act of imagining is an affirmation our freedom:

We may therefore conclude that imagination is not an empirical power added to consciousness, but is the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom; every concrete and real situation of consciousness in the world is pregnant with the imaginary insofar as it is always presented as a surpassing of the real. It does not follow that all perception of the real must be reversed in imagination, but as consciousness is always "in situation" because it is always free, there is always and at every moment the concrete possibility for it to produce the irreal. There are various motivations that decide at each instant if consciousness will be only realizing or if it will imagine. The irreal is produced outside the world by a consciousness that *remains in the world* and it is because we are transcendently free that we can imagine.¹³⁷

However, the act of imagining does not teach us anything on its own, it is through creative practice that we learn. As Sartre wrote in a notebook: "It must be that each man has been born to make, in order to understand the world, a new and solitary effort".¹³⁸ The significance of imagination rests then in its capacity to elicit the mental images that inspire new cycles of work, each time anew and differently, evolving our creative consciousness *ad infinitum*. The following excerpt from the introduction to the studio *House Without a Form* by Peter Zumthor affirms the dynamic way in which mental images function in the context of the creative process:

Designing to me is probably more re-discovering than inventing; it means to reconfigure, to recognize, to re-assemble impressions and emotions which I have experienced and now consciously try to recall. The images stored in my memory are personal co-incidents of form and meaning, that is: from image to image they hold traces of form and related meaning. The images remembered are not fragments frozen in a definite form and stored in my mind. The process of remembering is dynamic and creative. It might be called an imaginative re-construction which always produces new aspects and qualities of the remembered depending on the actual way I look at it. Every time my mind touches my memories, they change a little.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.20.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.186.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.viii.

¹³⁹ The studio was conducted at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in the Spring of 1999.

The evolution of the creative consciousness is an ANAPXH ANAGKH, an interminable *es muss sein*. A photograph, a building, any and every artwork brought forth in the world as a discernible body, enables the act of imagination to begin and to produce the mental images through which creative thinking happens. The work of art thus functions both and simultaneously as a beginning (*arche*) and an end (*telos*) in an interminable creative process. The building, as a material body, is measurable; architecture, as an experience, is immeasurable. The photograph, as an object, is measurable; the image, as an analogon that starts the imagination, is immeasurable.

I conclude with the words of artist Gianni Caravaggio, who in his manifesto-like text "The Seed-Image" emphasized the need to remedy the postmodern degradation of the image "as a two dimensional consumer good" by returning it to its place as a "germinal cause":

It is essential for beginning to be a seed. When the seed image germinates, it creates imagination within us. This germination is in fact an intimate act on the part of the observer, taking place within, with, and by way of the observer. But let's be clear: not everything that's conventionally termed an image is capable of germination. The image's ability to germinate lies in its essentiality. ... This germination is evocation: the evocation of a mystery: the germination within me of the mystery of myself. The image as seed is what in the past I have spoken of as a "device of demiurgic acts". Such demiurgic acts amount to being the demiurge of oneself (and by this I intend to imply no autobiographical or psychoanalytic process). If this act of demiurgy occurs, "the material world will open itself to the abyss which it knows itself to be. Matter as infinite potency, as the opening of the world to itself, to its capacity endlessly to create meaning".¹⁴⁰

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It is under these terms that *the photographic absolute* institutes *an architectural beginning*.

¹⁴⁰ CARAVAGGIO in FERRARI 2011, p.40.

