



Architecture in the space of flows. Edited by Andrew Ballantyne and Christopher Smith, Routledge, London, 2011. 242pp, ISBN 978-0-415-58542-2, £29.99 (pb)

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Architecture in the space of flows

Andrew Ballantyne and Chris L. Smith (eds), Routledge, London, 2012, 242 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-58542-2, £29.99 (pb)

Once Foucault famously said that perhaps one day the 20th century “will be known as Deleuzian”. What is certain is the impressive resonance that in recent years the work of Deleuze, along with his fellow companion Guattari, has had on numerous Anglo-Saxon scholars (Buchanan, 1999). This engagement finds its main strength in disciplines, like Human Geography and Architecture, traditionally concerned with the concept of *space*. Deleuze can indeed be considered the twentieth century’s most spatial philosopher (Buchanan and Lambert, 2005), thanks to concepts such as the “plane of immanence”, smooth and striated, deterritorialization-reterritorialization, as well as many others. Ballantyne and Smith’s edited book, *Architecture in the Space of Flows*, is a genuinely incisive account of how *Architecture* - as a set of practices, philosophies and politics - can be interpreted through the post-structuralist deleuzian train-of-thought (which is not only limited to the work of Deleuze and Guattari).

In twelve chapters, divided into three sections, the authors take us into an investigation of what flows mean for architecture. Although the book’s blurb explicitly refers to Castells’ “space of flow” (Castells, 1996), only a few authors take Castells’ work as a departure point. The majority of contributors rely instead on post-structuralist approaches, like the one already cited, which in the end are the true strength of this work. The book thus traces a topology of material and immaterial fluxes, of forces of desire and power, of bodies, places and ideas that are not meant to define what Architecture is, but to unfold the complex relational patterns through which Architecture comes into continuous forms of being.

Starting with Herakleitos of Ephesus’ *ta panta rhei* (everything flows), Chapter One, written by the editors of the book, is probably one of the most compelling post-structuralist accounts of Architecture to date. The authors claim that instead of fixed geometries we should see a sequence of moments made by different movements in which everything flows. Two points are particularly relevant to this point: firstly that much of this flow take place at the unconscious level, and secondly that our own life condition is deeply entangled in the contexts of where it takes place. Architecture should hence be seen from this perspective, re-dimensioning the role of the architect and enhancing the importance of the flows that make up one’s own environment. The chapter then turns to a fascinating journey into the land of

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3 the multitude and of the Guattarian's subject, which clarifies what we consider to be the
4 main aim of the book: to open up Architecture to the topologies of space, where the
5 environment and the subject take different forms through constant processes of re-
6 territorialization and de-territorialization.
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10 The essay presented in Chapter Two by Godts and Janssens is a very interesting
11 attempt to render this Architectural discourse from a practical and political view point. The
12 chapter, which is presented in a two-column plus footnote design, centres around a process
13 called M.U.D. (Multi-User Dimension) where different designers came together to consider
14 a shared territory, the Belgian coastline, as being faithful to the ideas of flux/flood/flows.
15 Through this exercise the coastal area is made again "a truly coast", a Space of Flows. This
16 is a space where changes constantly happen, and where within those changes it is possible
17 to find zones that cannot be set down in rules - zones, in the end, which are seen as
18 expressions of freedom.
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24 In Chapter Three Yates connects the idea of space of flow to the specificity of a context,
25 in this case Oceanic architecture. This is one of the few essays in the book, along with the
26 following one, which actually concerns itself directly with buildings and their design.
27 Arguing that "architectural discourse remains inflected by its traditional concerns with
28 spatial stability and temporal stasis, with the effect that the time-space relationship remains
29 under-considered" (p.63), the author, referring to Bergson's ontology of becoming-flow,
30 proposes considering space as a phenomenon of time. In this sense, Oceanic architecture is
31 read from the ephemeral (temporal) boundaries that "disrupt spatial containment" (p.79).
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37 In Chapter Four, written by Andersson, we find similar concerns, particularly in
38 relation to the in-distinction between interior and exterior spaces allowing the enabling of
39 "a sense of flow" (p.85), which the author shows using his summer cottage as an example.
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42 In Chapter Five, Wise's journey through the Gold Coast (a city located 94km south of
43 Brisbane, Australia), shows us how solar light, water and beaches are an integral and
44 relational part of the city. The Gold Coast takes from them and is made of them, not least
45 because these resources are subject to a "commodification on a grand scale" (p.104). Wise's
46 chapter develops into an analysis of the role of solar light as a "conduit for the circulation of
47 desire" (p.107), which in the end seems capable of transforming, to use the deleuzian-
48 guattarian terminology, highly striated context into smooth space. The same light,
49 however, is also the connector that allows the reterritorialization of the "nature-panorama-
50 architecture assemblage" (p.113), which is directly linked to the commodification of City's
51 spaces.
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3 Chapter Six, authored by Monterbock and Mooshammer, brings us into the market's
4 informal world of fluxes, taking as examples the Arizona market in Brčko (Bosnia and
5 Herzegovina); the Topkapı in Istanbul (Turkey); and the Izmailovo in Moscow (Russia).
6 Their aim is to understand the informal market not from the standpoint of its totality, but
7 to look within in order to see "channels through which goods and commodities are
8 transported and through which cultures outside the designated places of encounter interact
9 directly with the forces of globalization" (p.118-119). This argument is clarified both in the
10 introduction and in the concluding section of the chapter, and it can definitely be agreed.
11 However, the authors do not fully show how the internal and external flows of these
12 informal spaces work, since they concentrate much of their attention on describing the
13 transition of these markets into different spaces (respectively, transformation into legal
14 structure; move to new location; demolition). A closer look within the multitude of flows
15 that actually took place in such markets, for instance in the way Venkatesh describes the
16 black economy of the American Ghetto (Venkatesh, 2008), would have possibly given a
17 better idea of the movements, connections and resilience that are part of these spaces.
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20 Chapter Seven, written by Sinuraibhan, shows the constant flow of a particular machine
21 (a train) through an open-air informal market in Thailand. Although this essay is not
22 completely in tune with the theoretical background proposed in the book (since it refers to
23 Castells' account of flows, which Ballantyne and Smith try to overcome), the empirical
24 material proposed in it is genuinely interesting, and stimulates reflections around how flows
25 are experienced and perceived in an informal settlement of a non-Western country.
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28 PART II of the book begins with Chapter Eight, written by Craig. Taking as an
29 example the shipping container movements in the port-space of London Thamesport in
30 Kent, UK, Craig engages with the effect of the "ordering strategies of logistics and supply
31 chain management on certain conceptions of time and space" (p.147). Drawing a parallel to
32 De Landa and Virilio's work on the logistics of military campaigns, Craig underlies the
33 importance of distribution in the logistics' systemic control. This is a distribution
34 characterized by extensive control that attempts to eradicate uncertainty, and to secure
35 free flow.
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38 In Chapter Nine Basson questions the linear understanding of time that leads to a
39 consideration of architecture as a "continuous and accessible subject of historical
40 knowledge" (p.161). His aim is to understand the limits of this conception working around
41 the concept of flows. By means of a sophisticated philosophical journey, the chapter claims
42 the necessity of understanding the architecture of the past not from the contemporary
43 perceptions of right and wrong, superior and inferior, but to look at architectural forms as
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3 contingent objects of history, which should be seen from the contextual moment of their
4 production. Through this, Basson is able to link the matter of flow with time and context,
5 refusing conventional ways of historically viewing architectural form and arguing for an
6 “architectural history of the everyday” (p.175). The chapter is therefore extremely
7 fascinating and innovative, and it is certainly one of the few in the book that directly
8 questions the matter of time. However, Basson’s work lacks concrete exemplifications that
9 might have created a clearer and more accessible understanding of his argumentations,
10 especially to readers who are not familiar with the wide range of philosophical trains of
11 thought with which he engages.
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14 In Chapter Ten Fahmi examines the connection between the virtual space of the
15 blogosphere and the city, and in particular to street protests. In order to do so the author
16 undertook an original ethnographic study of the virtual and real experiences of Egyptian
17 bloggers, both in terms of their political activism and their civil participation. His essay is a
18 narrative of the flows that take place between the virtual and physical spaces of the protest,
19 and it shows how the two are co-constituted and mutually interrelated, forming a new
20 grammar of space that needs to be understood in terms of continuous flows in order to be
21 fully acknowledged.
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24 In his “The (not so) smooth flow between architecture and life” (Chapter Eleven), Loo
25 investigates the space of flow that connects architecture and life. In this sense, the chapter
26 questions how the potential of the multitude is related to its material enactment and to
27 performative action. Starting from the architectural imaginary of Rem Koolhaas, which
28 “relies upon the irreducibility of movement within the smooth space of neoliberal
29 capitalism” (p.200), Loo engages with thinkers like Deleuze, Guattari, Agamben, Negri and
30 Simondon, showing that there is no spatial adjacency or temporal flow that occurs between
31 the potential and the actual. The role of Architecture in the space of flow is therefore to
32 actualize abstractions (as the multitude) into transformative acts. However the chapter is
33 quite obscure and does not fully portray the relevance of its final findings, especially when
34 the author refers to the role of “resistance” in Architecture.
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37 Tawa’s Chapter Twelve, which is the only chapter in PART III (“Envoi”), closes the
38 book with a philosophical essay on the “Limits of Fluxion”. In this essay Tawa reinforces
39 the arguments contained in the first chapter, arguing for an architecture that should be
40 produced out of the different flows (of desires, capital and political power, activity and
41 usage, culture, ideas, places, etc.) that actually constitute every building. For him the point
42 of discussion is not to understand what this architecture might look like, but to “setting up
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enabling conditions” - a point, in the end, which could possibly be seen as the main argument of the whole book.

The major strength of *Architecture in the Space of Flows* comes from the different kinds of material therein presented, which range from pure philosophical speculations, to descriptive case studies. In a true post-structuralist fashion, this variety is not a limitation but a resource - or, rather, a line-of-flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) - which stimulates the reader to engage with old and new ideas in a free way. There are, however, some limitations too. One in particular reflects a common problem: the boundaries between different disciplines. With the partial exception of Craig, surprisingly not one of the authors refers to the work of post-structuralist geographers such as Nigel Thrift (1996), Steve Pile (1995), Sarah Whatmore (2002) or Jon Dewsbury (2000) who have for the last fifteen years or so been re-shaping concepts like space, relations, contexts and subjectivities from a post-structuralist point of view (the so-called “non-representational theories”, which in the end seems perfectly in line with the argumentations raised in Ballantyne and Smith’s book). What is lacking in the end is an engagement with a wider range of disciplines and literatures.

In conclusion this is a book that can appeal to a wide-range of audiences, although it definitely could not easily be adopted on an undergraduate course. Scholars and post-graduate students interested in the concepts of *space* and *time* read from a post-structuralist perspective will find Chapter 1, 9, 11 and 12 theoretically stimulating. All the other essays can offer empirical and, to a certain extent, methodological insights for scholars interested in Architectural practices, more-than-human topologies and concrete ways to investigate *flux*. This is a reasonably priced book (£29.99 for the paperback edition) definitely worth a read, even by scholars who have never come across Deleuze or who have never engaged with ideas of spaces and fluxes, but are looking for a compelling introduction to them.

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