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# ΟΪΔΑ ΟΥΚ ΕΙΔÓS

The question of an ingenious design, of a 'Design Intelligence' which arises here, is at the same time a question of a special power, perhaps a hidden one, a secret lore of the architect, out of which all architecture develops. The architect appears here as a magician using a very specific knowledge of which only he has command, and which is exclusively born in his architectural laboratory. I'd like to start with a provocative assumption, namely that the architect actually can't be sure about the cognitive expertise which is attributed to him. Despite that uncertainty he constantly continues designing architectural spaces and one could guess that this uncertainty is even connected with an additional value.

The famous phrase *oída ouk eídós*—*I know that I don't know* exemplarily represents this assumption.<sup>1</sup> The quotation from Plato's *Apology*, attributed to the Greek philosopher Socrates, represents a general critical questioning of that which one claims to know. Socrates suggests that this alleged knowledge is an unprovable assumption, which under closer scrutiny is often revealed as indefensible pseudo-knowledge. A secured knowledge, Socrates suggests, is in principle non-existent.<sup>2</sup> That such exclusive and conclusive pre-emptive notions also appear in the agendas of architectural concepts reflects the intentions of this paper.

In detail, it is 'dwelling' itself that should be questioned, dwelling, which is mostly conceived of as an anthropological constant with unchanging values and which is assumed as being almost resistant against every social or technological progress. Rather it is perceived as an archaic refuge connected with everlasting

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1 This does not refer to the generally used but imprecise translation of the phrase, i.e. *I know that I know nothing*. This phrase comes from a translation error, misses the point of the statement and would be translated into Ancient Greek as *oída oudén eídós*.

2 Cf. Platon: *Apologia Sokratous. Kriton. Euthydemos. Menexenos. Gorgias. Menon*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1990, p. 15.

traditions. Of course there are the essential requirements, such as weatherproofing, which meet the demands of dwelling and which indeed always dictate the practice of human habitation. However, the ‘how’ of this practice is thereby not yet defined. This changes—and that is the thesis—the cultural conditions which influence this practice accordingly.

### **Change of Mind, Change of Meaning**

This can go so far that apparently conventional (and in this sense also statically distinguished) models for dwelling reappear in some cases as their complete opposites. Terence Riley demonstrated this exemplarily with the history of development of the relationship of the public vs. private.<sup>3</sup> In a first step, he describes the private house as a spatial articulation of introspective isolation, a quality which seems to be one of the basic meanings of dwelling. In this way, the ‘well looked after’ private space seems to evolve consistently through the human need for refuge, safety and protection, in contrast to the surrounding public sphere. The apartment is understood as a “receptacle for the person”,<sup>4</sup> a segregated interior space “whose relationship to the outside world is maintained solely through strictly defined openings”.<sup>5</sup> The distinct, accompanying concept of privacy and its spatial-architectural analogies went through a very important phase at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Pictorially, this is clearly represented in the aquarelle painting *Cosy Corner* (1894) by the Swedish artist Carl Larsson as part of a series of aquarelle works inspired by his interior living spaces. The picture very accurately reflects the interpretation of the day of home, further illustrated in Larsson’s own words: “Here I experienced that unspeakably sweet feeling of seclusion from the noise of the world”.<sup>6</sup>

In his reflections on radical changes in contemporary society, Riley contrasts traditional interpretations with an almost diametrically calculated concept of dwelling. He is referring to the development of the private home into “a perme-

3 Riley, T.: *The Un-Private House*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999.

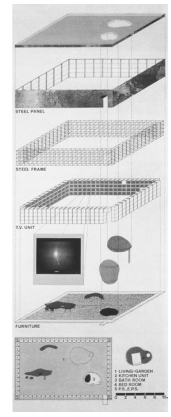
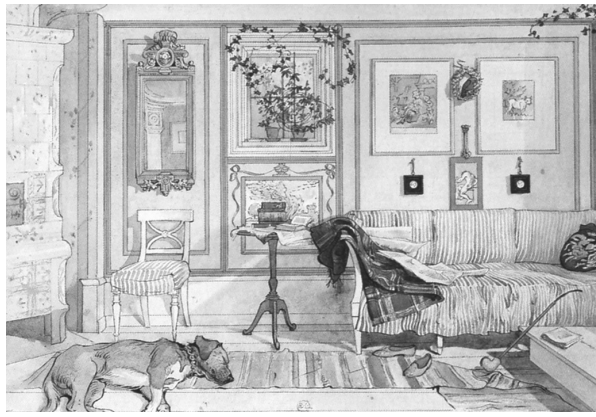
4 Benjamin, W., *The Arcades Project*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., London, 2002, p. 220.

5 Vetter, A. K.: *Die Befreiung des Wohnens: Ein Architekturphänomen der 20er und 30er Jahre*, Wasmuth, Tübingen, Berlin, 2000, p. 17. Translated by the author.

6 Carlsson C. cit. after Facos M.: *The Ideal Swedish Home: Carl Larsson’s Lilla Hyttånäs*, in: Reed C., *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1996, p. 86.

Left: Fig. 1: Carl Larsson: *Cosy Corner* (1894).

Right: Fig. 2: Takahide Nozawa: *TV GARDEN* (project, 1991).



able structure, receiving and transmitting images, sounds, text, and data”.<sup>7</sup> In this context, Riley discusses a clear transformation in the relationship between the private home and media beginning in the second half of the 20th century. The private as an opposite pole of the public seems to have had its day. The infiltration of the public into the private has reached the point where the two are now difficult to discern. As an example of this shift in borders, as well as the ‘natural’ relationship between media and the residents of a house, Riley employed Takahide Nozawa’s *TV GARDEN* (project, 1991), a house plan inspired by the famous stone garden of Ryoan-ji in Kyoto. 245 television screens form the outside wall of the house, allowing for a relationship between the residents and the media “equal (to) that found ‘among natural elements in the garden’”.<sup>8</sup>

### Inverse Dwelling

If, based on such shifts of values, a paradigm change in architectural design and practise in the late 1990s is apparent, then now, in the process of the current change in the structure of our society, we can observe this paradigm change coming into its full fruition. Under the influence of increasing economic and technological penetration, unstoppable media linkages and improved mobility, it shows that the shift of borders described by Riley is not an isolated case. Rather, multitudinal dualisms grouped together around the concept of the private house in the course of the last few centuries attract our attention by losing their clarity. Using the examples of previously clear distinctions, such as inside/outside, individual/community, dwelling/working, house/city, place/non-place, and reality vs. the virtual, it will be shown how such dualisms are not only becoming less distinctive, but are also creating, through their reversal of conditions, a quasi inverse living concept.

7 See note 3, p. 11.

8 L.c., p. 12.

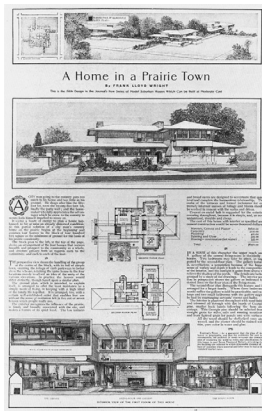


Fig. 3: Frank Lloyd Wright: *A HOME IN A PRAIRIE TOWN* (project, 1900).

## 1. Dwelling vs. Working

In 1951, for example, Martin Heidegger described the separation of dwelling and working as an unmistakable element of the dualities responsible for the feeling of being human.<sup>9</sup> And as such it is reflected in the image of a ‘functional city’.<sup>10</sup> But just a few decades after Heidegger’s comments, the situation began a fundamental change. In the mid-1980s electronic text and data editing made headway into the working environment. Around 15 years later digital technologies led to a reintroduction of the working environment into the home. Ben van Berckels MÖBIUS HOUSE (Het Gooi, 1993–98) is an example of how originally opposite areas can be melded into one continuous space. Based on his model, the single surfaced, non-orientable form of the Möbius Strip, previously spatially and architecturally separate activities, such as dwelling and working, are realised within one building.

## 2. House vs. City

It is possible to make several generalisations: firstly, that during this process the distinction between house and city lost some of its credibility; secondly, that the dissolution of these two foundational values began much earlier; and thirdly, that the cause of this was a medium, if but a conceivably simple one. While Frank Lloyd Wright was still adamant about walling in his HOME IN A PRAIRIE TOWN (project, 1900) from the surrounding city space using a diverse range of architectural techniques to create absolute privacy,<sup>11</sup> at the same time however, the

9 Cf. Heidegger, M.: *Bauen Wohnen Denken*, in: Conrads, U.; Neitzke P. (eds.), *Mensch und Raum: Das Darmstädter Gespräch 1951*, Bauwelt Fundamente Bd. 94, Vieweg, Braunschweig, 1991, p. 89.

10 Cf. Hilpert, T.: *Die Funktionelle Stadt: Le Corbusiers Stadtvision - Bedingungen, Motive, Hintergründe*, Vieweg, Braunschweig, 1978; Hilpert T. (ed.): *Le Corbusiers „Charta von Athen“: Texte und Dokumente*, Vieweg, Braunschweig, Wiesbaden, 1988.

11 The house itself is set back from the property line, a wall and a strip of vegetation function as a threshold between street and the approach to the house. The entrance to the house is recessed and further shielded by low eaves. The window openings facing the street are small and located

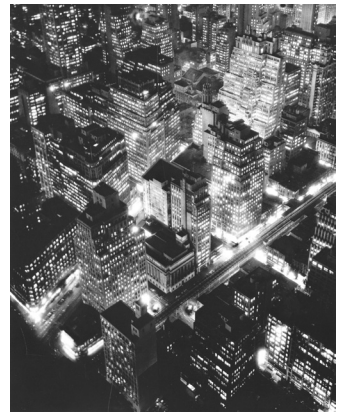


Fig. 4: Berenice Abbott:  
*Nightview, New York*  
(1932).

spread of electricity through urban areas<sup>12</sup> began a process of unification between the city and private homes. Light, previously limited to the secure, private sphere of the home, created an *Extension of Man* moving beyond the borders of the residence. It shines out and grasps the city, defined by Marshall McLuhan as creating a “space without walls”,<sup>13</sup> interconnecting the inner and outer regions by means of illumination. The previous differentiation of the bright, protected interiors and the dark, threatening exterior becomes obsolete.<sup>14</sup>

This development continues to evolve in our contemporary cities when in tall urban structures, such as in Tokyo, decentralisation, density and the partial outsourcing of dwelling zones come together to create an entirely new perspective of the city as a succession of interior spaces. Within these infrastructure landscapes, dwellings are reduced to a minimum, becoming mere cocoons, a base for daily movements through the urban environment. The AURA HOUSE (Tokyo, 1995-96), which would not even function without the surrounding city due to its uncompromising reduced form, is an eloquent example of this method. Alternatively, a rethink, not only of the way both systems are used but also of their spatial expression, will only become necessary in the moment when the home and the city are no longer diametrically opposed and the metropolis has become an integral part of the residential sphere. Shigeru Ban's CURTAIN WALL HOUSE (Tokyo, 1995) sets a course in this direction, in that this interconnection is not only visually realised, as achieved by Mies van der Rohe, Ban's inspiration, but can also be physically experienced.<sup>15</sup>

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high up, closely under the eaves to avoid a direct contact between inside and outside.

12 Cf. Schivelbusch, W., *Lichtblicke: Zur Geschichte der künstlichen Helligkeit im 19. Jahrhundert*, Carl Hanser, Munich, Vienna, 1983.

13 Cf. McLuhan, M.: *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Mass., London, 1994, p. 128.

14 Cf. Selle: G., *Die eigenen vier Wände: Zur verborgenen Geschichte des Wohnens*, Campus, Frankfurt a. M., New York, 1993, pp. 78–84.

15 Cf. Hennig, R.: *Tokyo Homezooms: Die Stadt als Wohnung*, in: Eckardt, F.; Zschocke, M.

### 3. Place vs. Non-Place

Also in the sense of being ‘familiar places’, the home and city are experiencing an increasing shift in meaning. For Otto Friedrich Bollnow dwelling still clearly represented the idea of “being at home in a particular place, having roots there and belonging to that place”.<sup>16</sup> Today, one must firmly contend this statement, in that mobility has completely overtaken the idea of traditional sedentary dwelling and the classic geographical reference.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the ‘areas of action’ have taken on increasingly global dimensions, but at the same time are still shaped by a peculiar vacuum in respect to identity dividing reference areas, by a terrain of non-places apparently without identity.<sup>18</sup> The traditional equation of dwelling, place and architecture seems once and for all to be invalid. Björk further confirmed this in her answer to the question of where she hangs up her hat, capturing in words the spirit of the times: “Home is where my laptop is”.<sup>19</sup> In the flippancy of contemporary existence, the self is reflected not in a place or a house, but is played out in an electronic gadget.

This is all clear evidence of an increasing shift in the art of dwelling from the relationship between body, place and housing. Instead of this, tiny living environments emerge which can be directly controlled and changed according to need. Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm sees this as a minimisation of the playing field of the social construct of dwelling in which the close-up view of these aforementioned micro-worlds (mobile telephones, laptops etc.) has more meaning than the actual spatial and architectural surroundings.<sup>20</sup> Today, establishing identities through place is less an issue of earthbound architectural gravity than of ubiquitous technology.<sup>21</sup>

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(eds.): *Mediacity*, Verlag der Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Weimar, 2006, pp. 115–144.

16 Bollnow, O. F.: *Mensch und Raum*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, 1990, p. 125.

Translated by the author. Cf. also Norberg-Schulz, C.: *Genius loci: Landschaft, Lebensraum, Baukunst*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 1982, 6, pp. 22–23.

17 Cf. Urry, J.: *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty First Century*, Routledge, London, New York, 2000.

18 Cf.. Augé M.: *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso, London, 2000; Augé M.: *Orte und Nicht-Orte der Stadt*, in: Haus der Architektur (ed.), *Spaces of Solitude*, Haus der Architektur, Graz, 1997.

19 Björk cit. after Maresch, R.: *Empire Everywhere: On the Political Renaissance of Space*, in: Biesenbach, K.; Franke, A.; Segal, A.; Weizman, E. (eds.): *Territories: Islands, Camps and Other States of Utopia*, König, Cologne, 2003, p. 15; [www.rudolf-maresch.de/texte/60.pdf](http://www.rudolf-maresch.de/texte/60.pdf), November 25, 2008.

20 Cf. Hoffmann-Axthelm, D.: *Wohnen als fixe Idee*, in: Daidalos, Architektur Kunst Kultur, June 1996, issue 60, *Urbane Behausung*, p. 41.

21 Cf. also de Kerckhove, D.: *The Architecture of Intelligence*, Birkhäuser, Basel, Boston, Berlin, 2001, 28.



#### 4. Reality vs. Virtuality

This shows, once again, that for a long time the virtual has been an obvious and integral part of everyday reality.<sup>22</sup> Even so, the paradoxical separation of the two is repeatedly insisted upon in relation to apparently traditional concepts of dwelling and their spatial references. It would otherwise be impossible to explain the fact that new technologies only hesitantly find a place in the residential sphere due to their link to the aura of the virtual. Closely linked to dwelling are the anxiety and confusion surrounding the border between medial and residential space, as also occurred at the time of introduction for now banal technology such as the telephone or the television.<sup>23</sup>

Even Gisue and Mojgan Hariri's DIGITAL HOUSE (project, 1999) designed for the magazine *House Beautiful* still addresses this. Although it does respond to the explicit demand of integrating everyday media into its surrounding architecture, thereby creating a direct symbiosis, conceptually the house operates in quasi polar opposition. This manifests itself in the form of special, isolated spaces, forming a counterpart to the virtual world of digital images which significantly shape the house. "(These rooms) allow the inhabitants to unplug themselves momentarily, as they move between tasks and from the virtual to the actual world. Here, the eye takes in a layering of realities as one can look into other parts of the house, to the landscape beyond, or to the images on the walls".<sup>24</sup> But that the view of the image on the wall also gives us a view into a virtual reality clearly shows how fluid the borders are. Frank Eckardt comments insightfully here: "It seems hard to imagine that reality is to some extent fictional and that virtualities are not mere products of fiction, but real".<sup>25</sup>

The—conscious or unconscious—daily experience of the symbiosis between reality and the virtual, including the successful history of the integration of audiovisual media into the private sphere (from the 'family cinema', the television, through to computers) is perfectly represented in Gary Chang's MY OWN APARTMENT (Hong Kong, 1998). Old and new 'windows' are layered on top of or behind one another, giving them all the same value. In this manner, Chang's apartment has

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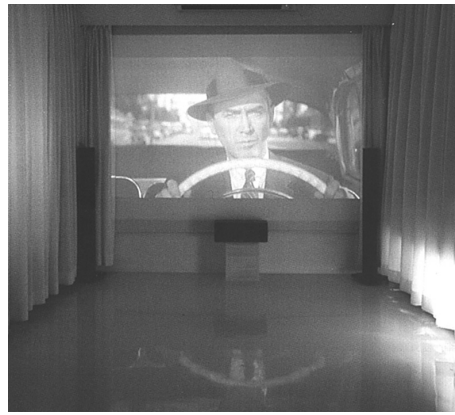
22 Cf. Weber, S.: *Die Dualisierung des Erkennens: Zu Konstruktivismus, Neurophilosophie und Medientheorie*, Passagen, Vienna, 1996, p. 158.

23 Cf. Colomina, B.: *Das Wohnhaus als Schaustück*, in: Ferguson, R. (ed.), *Am Ende des Jahrhunderts: 100 Jahre gebaute Visionen*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit, 1999, p. 159.

24 Hariri, G.; Hariri, M. cit. after Riley 1999, p. 56.

25 Eckardt, F., *E-City: From Researching the Virtual towards Understanding the Real Urban Life*, in: Bucher, U.; Finka, M. (eds.), *The Electronic City*, Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, Berlin, 2008, p. 10.





not only a surrounding environment like all other dwellings, but also a view out the window representative of many different perspectives of the world: the actual view out the window (of the Chinese metropolis), or 'through' the widescreen TV to the fantasy world of Hollywood, the real world of the news or the electronic world of the internet. The window becomes an interface. Media function here not only as vehicles for overcoming spatial distances, but also as a critical examination, using the different 'views', of the communicative potential of private space. Using remote control, an 'environment of your choice' becomes available.<sup>26</sup>

### 5. Individual vs. Community

Even with the stubbornly held assumption that dwelling is a thing of the community and the familiar, the lived reality is confronted with a social dissimulation of the extended family and the distinctive individualisation of society.<sup>27</sup> Projects such as Piercy Connor's MICROFLAT (project, 2002) or Richard Horden's MICRO COMPACT HOME (Munich, 2001) manifest this as architectural-spatial expressions of solitary living. But even here it is media that allow for a concurrent tendency in that they open the closed apartment, the capsule of the solitary, from the inside. Peter Sloterdijk leads us to this unavoidable fact pictorially, by revealing that all media engaged within the private apartment are tools for group simulations, which the solo dweller uses daily to recreate the 'lost community' in his imagination, whether through the newspaper, a book, the TV, the telephone or the internet. Media document the interconnectivity of the private subject in the societal system which evolves against all tendencies of individuality.<sup>28</sup>

26 Cf. Chang, G.: *In the Age of Indeterminacy: Towards a Non-visual Pragmaticism*, in: *Architectural Design*, September/October 2003, issue 5, *Urban Flashes Asia: New Architecture and Urbanism in Asia*, p. 61.

27 Cf. Beck U.: *Individualisierung, Globalisierung und Politik: Eigenes Leben in einer entfesselten Welt*, in: *Arch+*, Zeitschrift für Architektur und Städtebau, December 2001, issue 158, *Houses on Demand: Mass Customization in der Architektur*, pp. 54–55.

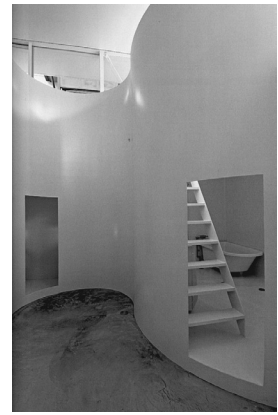
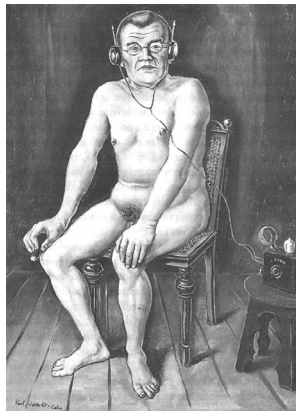
28 Cf. Sloterdijk, P.: *Sphären: Plurale Sphärologie*, vol. 3, *Schäume*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt

*Opposite page:*

*Fig 5: Gary Chang: MY OWN APARTMENT (Hong Kong, 1998).*

*Left: Fig. 6: Kurt Weinhönd: Mann mit Radio (1929)*

*Right: Fig. 7: Katsuhiko Miyamoto: CLOVER HOUSE (Nishinomiya, Hyogo, 2006).*



The internalisation of this fact has contributed significantly to the growth in interest of architects in the establishment of new forms of societal living. With growing intensity, spatial configurations of the behaviour of individuals vs. society are being handled differently, whether combining small living spaces with communal fittings, (BKK-3, MISS SARGFABRIK, Vienna, 1998), a layering of individual and communal forms of living, as well as their completion with additional integrated potentialities (Stücheli Architekten, KRAFTWERK 1, Zurich, 1993–2001) or ideas of communal living conditions inspired by the loft (Graft, LOFT GLEIMSTRASSE, Berlin, 2003–2004 and Flöckner & Schnöll, HOUSE NEAR ADNET, 2005–2007).

Katsuhiko Miyamoto's CLOVER HOUSE (Nishinomiya, Hyogo, 2006) can be seen as the most experimental realisation of a spatial concept in this area. It attempts to reduce individual requirements to a minimum by maximising the principle of community. Traditional, clearly defined spaces are not to be found in this house. Instead, residents are forced to share the only partially divided space day and night. Missing doors, the stairway positioned in the bathroom—a provocation against traditional efforts for intimacy—as well as a spatial concept that makes movement within the building almost visible to everyone, renders the idea of a spatially clearly defined individual retreat useless. Aside from this communal attempt of almost pathological appearance, the building of course offers strategies for providing privacy, although they are extremely finely nuanced. These strategies have nothing in common with the classic individual space, as shown for example by the open sleeping alcoves on the upper floor, which offer at least the suggestion of a room through the surrounding balustrades, and thereby also a certain screening effect and the possibility of some privacy.

## **Conclusion**

However, now wanting to persist with a concept of this kind, a concept of dwelling emphasising the opposite element of the respective dualism, would not be

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a. M., 2004, p. 592.

fair to reality. For as we know from Socrates: also the knowledge of ignorance is knowledge that we can't be sure about. In the end, the dynamics characterising the concept of dwelling against all expectations render the idea of unchanging architectural principles of dwelling completely useless. This leads to the assumption that the only power commanded by the architect in this scenario is to *realise*, that actually there is no 'secured base' (i.e. no secured knowledge) to proceed from and to build a house on.

Antoine Picon indicates this when discussing the change in codification systems of architectural design. He vividly describes here how new rules are evolving again and again. Every position, once found, is replaced by a quasi counter position after a certain time. As an example, he mentions the impeachment of the Vitruvian principles on the threshold of 18th and 19th centuries and the appearance of composition and type as new leading principles of (French) architectural practice. He also realises a second comparable and likewise radical transient situation closely related to the current digital revolution, assuming a similar important change through the contemporary spread of digital culture within architecture. Picon suggests that the successful establishment of a rule is followed sooner or later by a crises of that rule, succeeded by a new freedom (of design), which is condensed again to new rules: "Of course, the freedom granted by the crises of architectural rules cannot last forever. New rules which replace the lost ones are being established; and new liberties which soften these rules are gradually evolving".<sup>29</sup>

I do not only emphasise this, but wish to go one step further with the assumption that these upheavals delineated by Picon are strictly speaking only the 'earthquakes' which ravage the principles of architectural design from time to time, and in this sense they are of course clearly distinguished. But 'under the surface', things are moving constantly. In this context, the role of the architect is less one of someone presenting his (architectural) knowledge as ready-made, but rather that of a seismograph constantly recording even the quietest changes within the operating forces of society, in this way constantly updating his knowledge and using it accordingly in architectural design.

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29 Picon, A.: *Das Projekt: Von der Poesie der Kunst zur Entwurfsmethode*, in: Arch+, Zeitschrift für Architektur und Städtebau, October 2008, issue 189, *Entwurfsmuster: Raster, Typus, Pattern, Script, Algorithmus, Ornament*, p. 13. Translated by the author.