

Politics of Self-reference. Self-sufficient Discourses in 1980s Architecture

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Keywords: escapism; dissidence; self-reference; paper architecture; discourse

Foreword

Attempting to define the concept of politics in architectural practice and theory, one may first search for the relationship between architecture (built or unbuilt) and political power. Undoubtedly, architecture has always served as a receptacle and as a narrative tool for institutions of power, accompanying revolutionary visions or reinforcing the strong image of a political regime. However, what this paper will try to outline is a far more subtle and particular topic, related to architecture and self-discourse. We shall begin from a common ground shared by politics and architecture alike: *discourse*.

The notion of discourse used in this paper is considered from a critical Foucauldian point of view, as an inherent instrument which defines and accompanies a discipline - in this case, architecture. Crossing over the domains of text, linguistics and sociology and entering the field of theoretical disciplines and professional practices, this notion of discourse refers to the concepts that constitute a field of study and how they are interpreted to produce a particular manifestation in the history of a discipline. Assimilated in the field of architecture, the notion of architectural discourse refers to the defining concepts of the discipline - concepts like *form* and *space* - and how they are related and interpreted at a certain historical moment to create a critical and exemplary architecture. The communication tools specific to the field of architecture to which we will refer are the visionary graphical representation and the manifesto building.

Once the first operating element has been established, we will introduce a second one - the concept of *self-reference*. The meaning of self-reference here is an ability of architecture to speak or refer to itself - its own history, styles and theoretical stances. The idea of a self-referential approach is of interest to our subject because, similar to political theory and discourse, architecture has experienced extensive periods of introspection and self-referencing which have determined its identity. The selected case studies belong to a particular period of the history of architecture, the late postmodern period. This period is relevant due to the return to a certain rich cultural heritage, a heritage that the avant-gardes of the 20th century and the later international modernism opposed.

Before we introduce the case studies, a certain narrative thread should be emphasized: *utopian thinking* and the role of drawings in shaping architectural discourse and built environment. Utopian thinking is currently misinterpreted in two ways: either labelled as a pathological and unproductive attitude or condemned as an absolute and oppressive instrument, being mistaken for the antithetic concept of *dystopia*. The kind of utopian thinking that one must see here is structural and constitutive in its ideals and manifestations.

Considering a contextualized definition, Nathaniel Coleman believes that “utopias theorize transformation”¹ and that “a provisional definition of utopia emphasizing its generative potential might be: utopias articulate possibilities intended to clarify work toward their realization under

¹ Nathaniel Coleman, *Utopias and Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 24.

existing conditions. So defined, a utopia is a clarifying model that suggests the kinds of conduct that might lead to its eventual fulfilment.² Ultimately, utopian thinking nurtures a need for change and transformation and is interested in the invention of exemplary architecture. These optimistic views of utopian thinking in architecture are borrowed from author Nathaniel Coleman and his book titled *Utopias and Architecture* (2005) and will be further used to analyze the process of creating visionary architectural manifestation in the three case studies.

Whilst Brodsky and Utkin draw a dissident architecture that speaks of future perspectives through nostalgia and communication with an imaginary past, Darden borrows a poetic meaning from literature to create architecture infused with mythologies and beliefs; with a similar agenda, Günther Domenig realizes manifest architectures that follow precisely that certain invention of exemplary architecture that Coleman speaks of. The idea that I want to argue is that these three case studies, considered from the perspective of their critical discourse and viewed through the perspective of utopian thinking, are three particular manifestations of the same intention of change, transformation and invention of representative architecture in the 1980s. Furthermore, they can be seen as three stages of architectural invention, [1] a dissident architectural practice in the case of Brodsky and Utkin - a reaction to an oppressive political environment, [2] an alternative architectural practice in Darden's case - a theoretical and graphical research into architecture and the field of literature - and [3] a critical professional practice in the case of Domenig.

An important idea of this argument is that utopian architectural manifestations reveal a certain emphasized model of designing, its ultimate form of existence being drawings and writings. Following this particular thread, a search for meaning in architectural discourse through drawn architecture may reveal particular fascinating results.

In order to further reveal the nature of these architectural discourses, which rely on drawings and graphical representations, we shall exhibit a parallel drawn discourse by presenting the drawings through the author's own interpretation and reprocessing. This part of the study will be composed of six interpretations of the drawings that encapsulate some of the main themes that the studied authors approached in their works. The purpose of these drawn studies is to offer a more profound and personal analysis of certain themes or narrative and compositional aspects. By this, we argue that architecture must not only be analyzed through writing but also through drawings.

Case studies

[1] In the 1980s, the Russian schools of architecture from Moscow and Novosibirsk developed an escapist current that initially received a pejorative name, *Paper Architecture*. The name was chosen by Yuri Avvakumov, an architect from the group who curated some exhibitions about these particular visionary architectures. Nostalgic for a historic past when Russian architecture served a narrative purpose for the revolutionary movement, Avvakumov found inspiration in the works of architects such as Konstantin Melnikov or Vladimir Tatlin, his drawings strongly reflecting this personal proclivity for Constructivism.

Among the representatives of this escapist current, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin are distinctive figures due to their profoundly nostalgic attitude and unique engraved drawings. As architect Aleksandr Mergold³ notes in a preface for a collection of scanned Brodsky and Utkin engravings, the strong narrative power of these graphic representations is given by a combination of the gravity of a page from an ancient treatise and the delivery mechanism of a modern poster.⁴ By channeling and referring to a particular tradition of visionary architecture, through representatives like Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Jean-Laurent Le Geay or the *Architecture Parlante*

2 Coleman, *Utopias and Architecture*, 24.

3 Ronald Feldman, Lois Nesbitt and Aleksandr Mergold, *Brodsky & Utkin, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015).

4 *Ibid.*, 9.

phenomenon (through Claude-Nicolas Ledoux and Jean Jacques Lequeu), Brodsky & Utkin align and synchronize themselves with a particular architectural political stance whose keyword is *utopia*.

These Italian and French references that inspire Brodsky and Utkin belong to periods preceding social and political upheaval, announcing the French Revolution and the Revolutions of 1848. In a similar manner, the works of these two artists are symptoms of future change, preceding the Revolutions of 1989. Some of their most representative engravings are as follows:⁵

<i>Columbarium Architecturæ</i> , 1984	<i>Contemporary Architectural Art Museum</i> , 1988
<i>Town Bridge</i> , 1984	<i>Ship of Fools or a Wooden Skyscraper for the Jolly Company</i> , 1988
<i>Glass Tower</i> , 1984	<i>Island of Stability</i> , 1989
<i>Glass Tower II</i> , 1984	<i>Columbarium Habitabile</i> , 1989
<i>Wandering Turtle</i> , 1984	<i>Crystal Palace</i> , 1989
<i>Villa Claustrophobia</i> , 1985	<i>Diomedé I</i> , 1989
<i>Nameless River</i> , 1986	<i>Diomedé II</i> , 1989
<i>Stageless Theater</i> , 1986	<i>Dome</i> , 1989
<i>Untitled (House with Stag's Head and Dog)</i> , 1986	<i>Untitled (Amphitheatre)</i> , 1989
<i>Forum de Mille Veritas</i> , 1987	<i>Theater</i> , 1990
<i>Electronic Donjon</i> , 1987	<i>Doll's House</i> , 1990
<i>Bridge</i> , 1987	<i>Dwelling house of Winnie-the-Pooh</i> , 1990
<i>Intelligent Market</i> , 1987	<i>Villa Nautilus</i> , 1990
<i>Hill with a Hole</i> , 1987	<i>Opera de la Bastille</i> , 1990
<i>Comfort in the Metropolis</i> , 1988	<i>Twelfth Street Pedestrian Bridge, City of Tacoma</i> , 1991

Regarding the chosen medium of Brodsky and Utkin, copperplate etching has a particular tradition in Brodsky's family (his father was a book illustrator) and in the book illustration industry of the Soviet Union. As Brian Hatton observes in a preface article for Alexander Brodsky - Works, "there was something more in etching - dark, earthly, intense and deliberate - that appealed to the young architects' disaffection with the arid schemes of Soviet building."⁶ The chosen medium itself has a profound meaning, being a favored narrative tool for Soviet bookmaking, used here in the service of an escapist and dissident message. Looking in the past to the practice of Piranesi, the architect of the imaginary prisons of Rome, the mediums seem even more evocative.

Engravings such as *Columbarium Habitabile* (Fig. 1) reveal a nostalgic thirst for architectural complexity and significance, in an era in which current practice calls for repetition and uniformity. This engraving presents a megastructure which holds all the old and forgotten houses from the generic "large modern city." The composition is broken into two registers,

5 The engravings are extracted from *Brodsky & Utkin, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015). The table presents them in a chronological order, by date of creation.

6 Brian Hatton, "Alexander Brodsky: A Carnival of Long Moments," in *Alexander Brodsky - Works*, edited by Tchoban Foundation (Berlin: Tchoban Foundation. Museum for Architectural Drawing. 2015), 22.

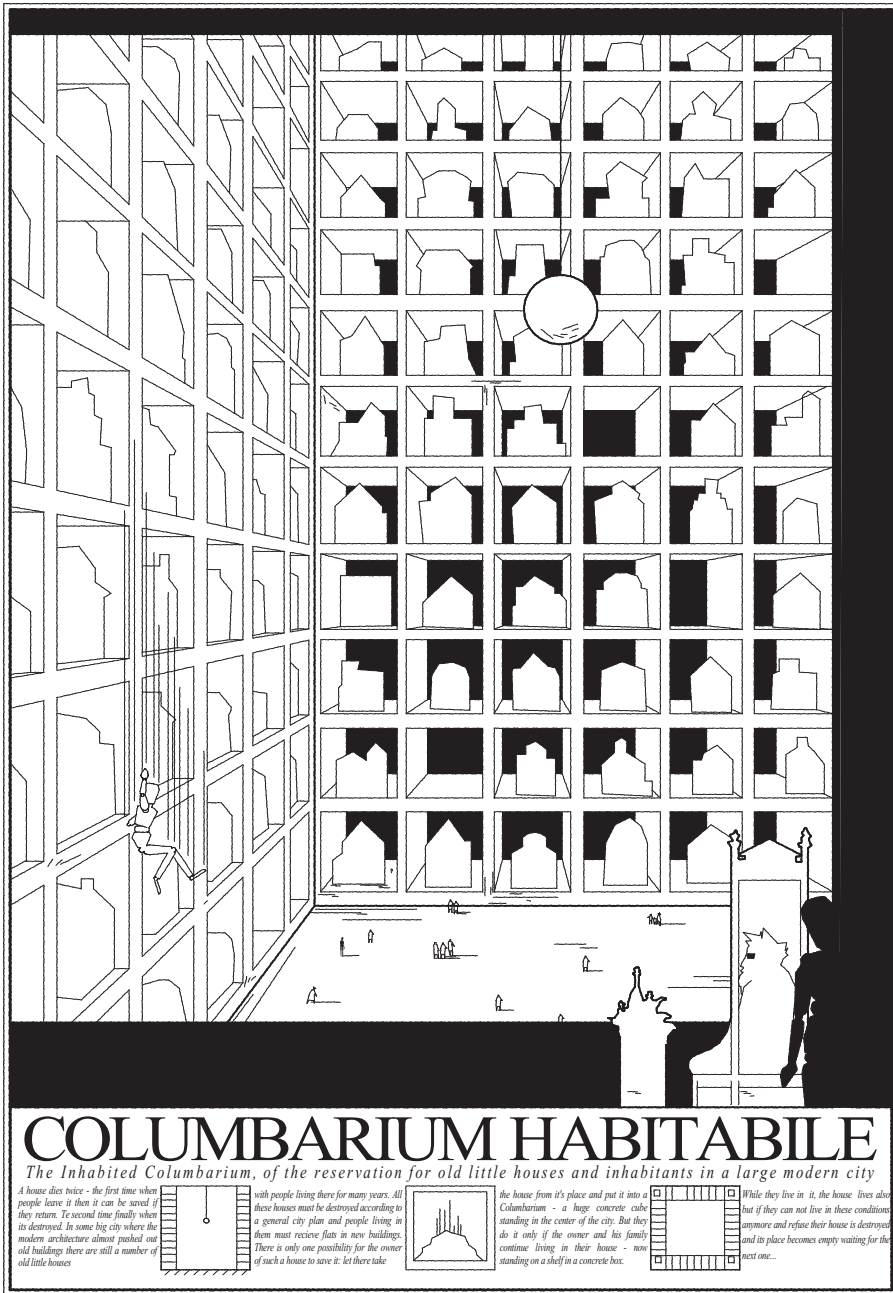


Fig. 1: Redrawing of Columbarium Habitabile - The inhabited Columbarium, of the reservation for old little houses and inhabitants in a large modern city

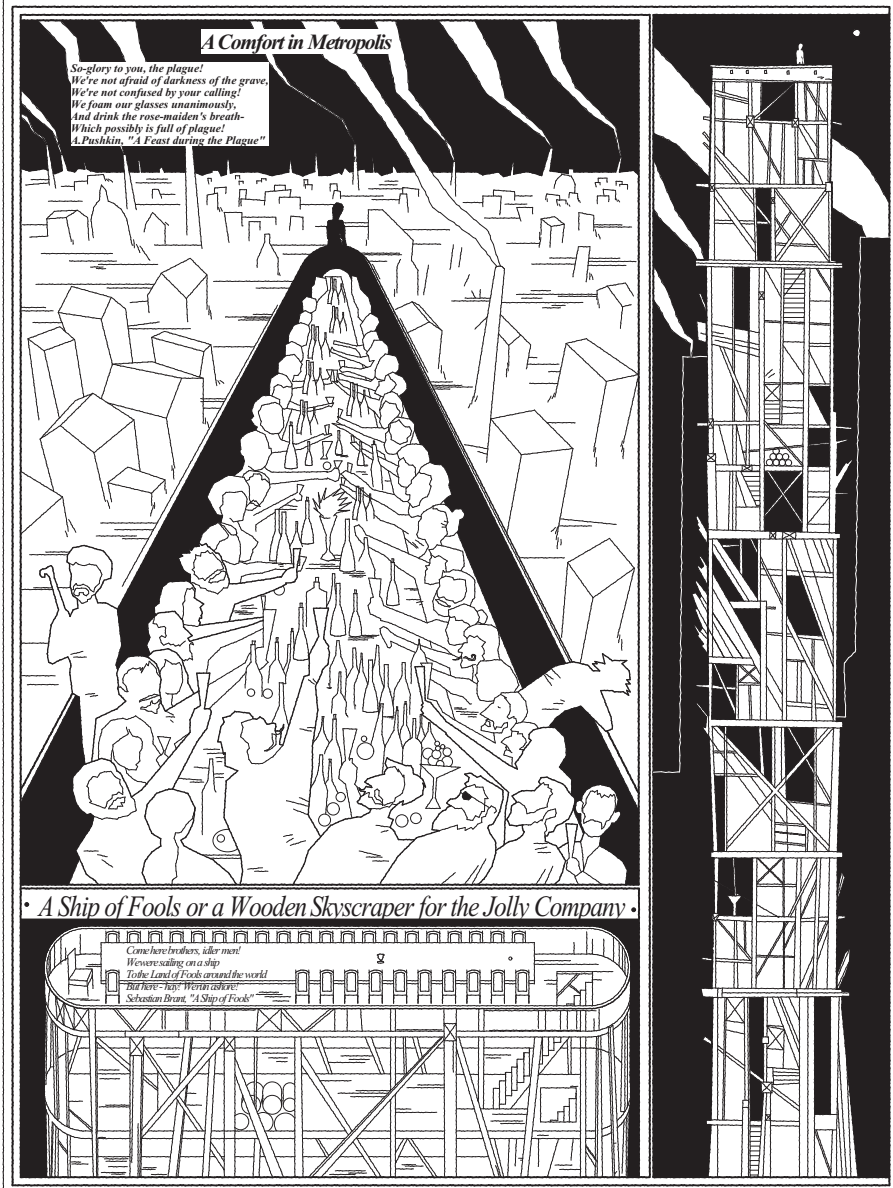


Fig. 2: Redrawing of A Comfort in Metropolis - A Ship of Fools or a Wooden Skyscraper for the Jolly Company

the upper one being the centerpiece, a simple one point perspective from a niche overlooking the inner space of the Columbarium. The lower register is composed of a written conceptual description and three orthogonal views, a section, a front view of a niche and a plan view. The architecture shown is a monument designed to host disappeared old houses from the city, transmuted together with their tenants. As soon as the tenants desire to leave those houses and thus abandon them, a giant wrecking ball begins to demolish them. The allegory behind this form of expression reveals a form of mute protest in the face of changes that alienate Moscow's built architectural environment, with the growth of uniform collective dwellings and the disappearance of a way of life, along with the people who practiced it. The composition itself is a simple one-point perspective from one of the gigantic rectangular cells, looking towards the inner courtyard defined by the four walls and the twelve stories of rectangular columbarium niches. In the foreground, there is a person sitting in an old decorated chair and looking towards the square. In the background, the black wrecking ball floats threateningly in the middle of the space. On the lower part of the drawing, there are three small schemes representing a section, a front view of a cell in which a house is demolished and a plan view of the columbarium. The text accompanying the engraving extends along the lower register, between these three small drawings.

In a similar manner, by analyzing the *Ship of Fools or a Wooden Skyscraper for the Jolly Company* (Fig. 2) engraving, it is fascinating to observe the form of opposition manifested through this imagined architecture. Compositionally, the engraving has three panels. It illustrates a ship-like skyscraper built from an irrational and uncertain structure of wooden elements. The main interest of the composition lies in the one-point perspective from the top floor terrace, capturing a banquet in which people are toasting a glass of wine. Among the guests, we can see the authors and their friends. The left panel is a one-point perspective from the top floor, capturing a moment of delight, a banquet in which people are toasting glasses of wine. The background of this seemingly joyful display is overshadowed by chimney towers that release toxic smoke in the atmosphere. The right panel is an orthogonal view of a façade of the wooden skyscraper, revealing its exuberant assemblage of elements. The lower panel is a top axonometric view of the terrace and last upper level of the building. The irrational and uncertain nature of the structures that make up this wooden skyscraper presents each piece of wood as individual and personalized elements whilst in antithesis we can imagine the mainstream professional practice of precast concrete elements and repetitive schemes.

[2] In 1986, the Austrian architect Günther Domenig started building a house he would later call *Steinhaus*, on the shores of Lake Ossiach in Austria (Fig. 3). The concrete, metal and glass 'house' is located on a piece of land overlooking the lake. Composed as a cluster of distorted and twisted volumes, the house was built in multiple stages, reflecting Domenig's interests in certain archetypes or expressions over a timespan of two decades. The *raison d'être* of this house was never to serve the architect as a dwelling, but to have the singular purpose of being an architectural object, the receptacle of the architect's formal and spatial experiments. As the American visionary architect Lebbeus Woods notes, regarding Domenig's Steinhaus, "Architecture... should demand from us a level of invention of our own lives at least equal to the level of invention that brought it into being."⁷ Woods speaks of the essentially self-referential and dislocated discourse that Domenig practices in his search for different interpretations of space and function. What does such an obsessive exploration of non-programmatic architectural space reveal about Domenig's take on the role of architecture? One may read the desire to explore the meaning of architecture in the absence of a fixed reason to exist.

Domenig graduated from the Graz University of Technology, where he became an Assistant Professor of architecture before setting up his own practice and returning as a Professor

7 Lebbeus Woods, "Stonehouse," <https://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2008/10/02/stonehouse/>, accessed October 2018.

later in his life. His own spatial and formal searches and some other like-minded architects such as Szyszkowitz and Kowalski and Volker Giencke have formed the so-called Grazer Schule. This technological expressionist current gave birth to works of architecture like the *Schulschwestern* multi-purpose hall designed by Domenig and his associate, Eilfried Huth in 1973. This organic, creature-shaped hall with its ribbed, exoskeleton-like roof seems to channel expressionist architectures such as Erich Mendelsohn's *Einstein Tower* or Rudolf Steiner's concrete *Goetheanum II*. The following year, Domenig together with Emanuel Anders and Volker Giencke would design the *Zentralsparkasse Bank* in Vienna, an eccentrically beautiful bank headquarters. For this particular piece of architecture, the barely rational folding metal façade gives way to a bizarre interior space that resembles the inner anatomy of a living creature and at some point in the upper floors, visitors can see a huge molding in the shape of a hand - the architect's own oversized hand.⁸

[3] In 1993, the American architect Douglas Darden publishes a work he started composing since the 1980s, a remarkable book⁹ which exhibits ten objects of allegorical architecture, evocative of what Darden called architecture's underbelly - a reversal of architectural concepts to reveal their profound meanings. Its chapters and themes are structured as follows:

8 Domus Magazine "Remembering Gunther Domenig." Domus (2012), <https://www.domusweb.it/en/from-the-archive/2012/06/23/remembering-gunther-domenig.html>, accessed April 2018.

9 Douglas Darden, *Condemned Building: An Architect's Pre-text: Plans, Sections, Elevations, Details, Models, Ideograms, Scripttexts, and Letters for Ten - Allegorical Works of Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993).



Fig. 3: Steinhaus, Lake Ossiach, Austria, lateral perspective and top view

Title: <i>Museum of Impostors</i> Subtitle: A Portrait of Last Identity	Architecture posits the <u>authentic</u> . Architecture posits the <u>fake</u> .
Title: <i>Temple Forgetful</i> Subtitle: A Sanguine tête-à-tête	A monument is for <u>remembering</u> . A monument is for <u>forgetting</u> .
Title: <i>Clinic for Sleep Disorders</i> Subtitle: A rondo on the Study of Sleep	Architecture <u>domesticates</u> our fears. Architecture <u>locates</u> our fears.
Title: <i>Night School</i> Subtitle: A Surgical Lesion in Spectatorship	<u>Light</u> is the revealer of form. <u>Darkness</u> is the revealer of form.
Title: <i>Melvilla</i> Subtitle: An Underline Reading	Architecture is the <u>reconciliation</u> with nature. Architecture is the <u>irreconciliation</u> with nature.
Title: <i>Hostel</i> Subtitle: A Sliding Scale for Habitation	Architecture <u>takes possession</u> of a place. Architecture <u>displaces</u> .
Title: <i>A Saloon for Jesse James</i> Subtitle: A Ballad with Two Endings	Architecture is <u>accommodation</u> . Architecture is <u>confrontation</u> .
Title: <i>Sex Shop</i> Subtitle: An Immodest Proposal	Architecture <u>fulfills</u> desire. Architecture <u>objectifies</u> desire.
Title: <i>Confessional</i> Subtitle: A Station at Cross Purposes	Man is <u>at the center</u> of divine creation. Man is <u>off-centre</u> of divine creation.
Title: <i>Oxygen House</i> Subtitle: A Near Triptych on the Act of Breathing	A house is for <u>living</u> . A house is for <u>dying</u> . ¹⁰

The architectural objects and allegories created by Darden are influenced by prose and literature such as Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, the works of the Marquis de Sade (*Justine*, for example), prose characters, such as Addie Bundren of William Faulkner's *As I lay dying* or controversial characters from the history of the United States, like *Jesse James*. Similar to Brodsky and Utkin's engraved designs for international competitions, Darden's architectures are pursuing a common goal of blurring and renegotiating the boundaries of architecture.

One of the strongest examples, *Oxygen House* (Fig. 4), where *A house for living* becomes *A house for dying* presents the reader with a narrative situation in which an imaginary man called Bundren Abraham (observe the name Bundren, borrowed from Faulkner's novel *As I lay dying*) has a lung injury in a train accident and is subsequently confined to an oxygen tent. The house designed for him is placed in the same spot in which the accident occurred, and it resembles an industrial capsule in which oxygen is continuously being fed as Abraham lives. Once he dies, the house becomes his final resting place, his tomb. This concept is even more evocative considering that the design for this house was being made at a time when Darden was struggling with his own illness, leukemia, which led to his early death at the age of 44, in the year 1996. The beautifully drawn sectional view illustrates the client's room and the apparatus which keeps supplying the room with oxygen.

Regarding his references to literary works, Darden wrote "Literature continues to create an agenda for representation which I deem to be pertinently as large as life. I wish architecture to have that same agenda, and literature has thus been my inspiration and, effectively, my

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

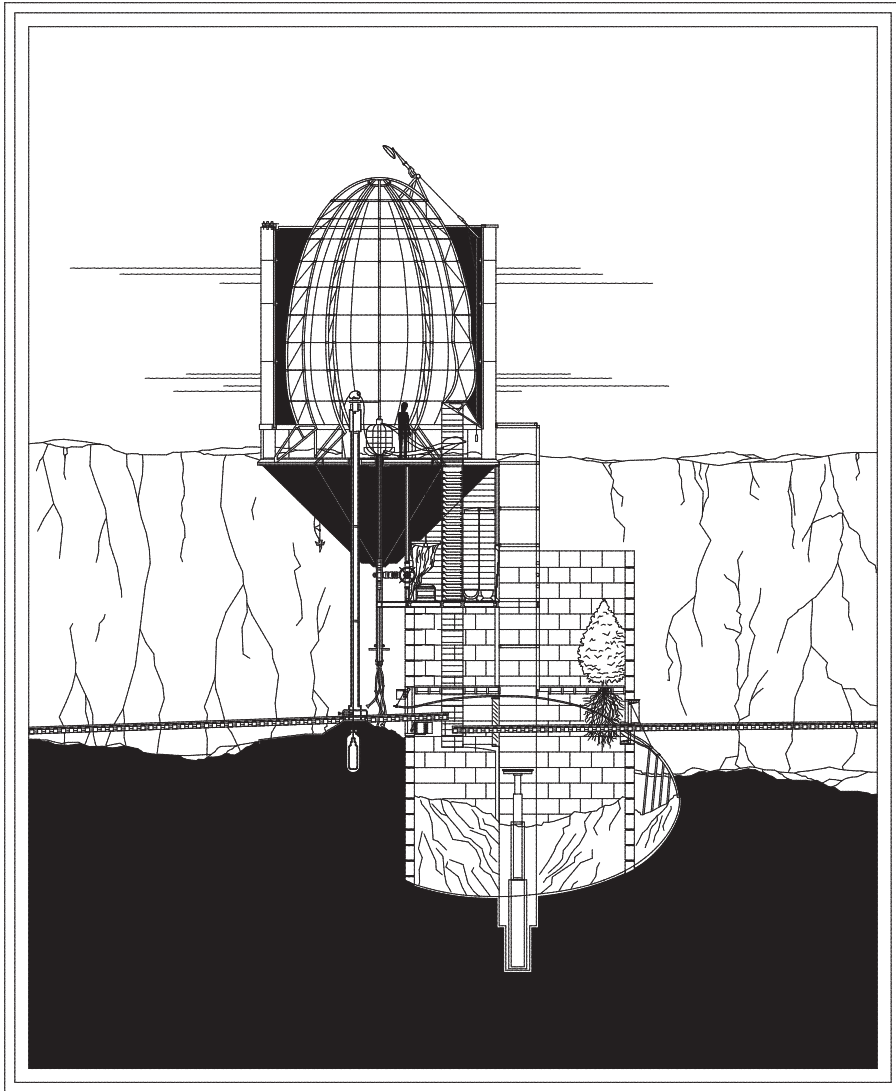


Fig. 4: Redrawing Oxygen House, Condemned Building - sectional view

sponsor.”¹¹ It should be noted that prior to enrolling at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1979, Darden graduated in English and Psychology at the University of Colorado, explaining his literature inspired references. By the time he graduated at Harvard in 1983, he had started working on the *Saloon for Jesse James - A Ballad with Two Endings* allegory. As a student, he studied under the postmodernist architect and teacher Stanley Tigerman and was strongly influenced by his teachings. As a testimony to this influence, *Condemned Building* has the following dedication written on the third page:

¹¹ Peter Schneider, “Douglas Darden’s *Sex Shop*,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 58, 2 (2004): 10.

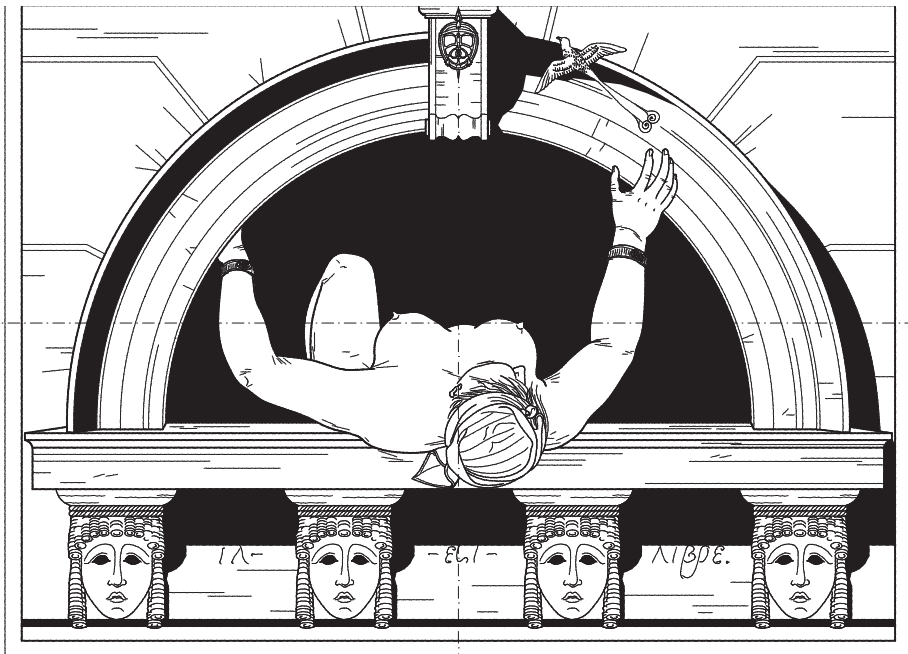
To my Mother and Father
 for their undying support
 and
 Stanley Tigerman, who taught
 me that architecture can never touch
 bottom¹²

Darden had a very interesting method of composing architectural objects. The method involved four images that create the so-called *discontinuous genealogy* - a guide to produce the form of the building. In an article titled *Melville* and published for The Melville Society of America in 1992, Darden presents the concept of a project that translates the novel *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville into architectural language. Here, the construction section results from overlapping a side view of an English locomotive, a side view of an upside-down New England meeting house, an Indian meeting hut and an Iroquois hand loom. The choice of these objects is a result of a personal way of interpreting the novel and reveals a fascinating way of defining the image of an architectural object through complex graphically interpreted references and allegories. In the case of *Oxygen House*, the discontinuous genealogy is formed through four images: an engraving with the American Civil War, a train brake, the Hindenburg Zeppelin and an old water cooler with a basin.

In the second half of the decade, before his untimely death, Darden was working on a collaborative architectural graphic novel called *The Laughing Girls of Troy*. The concepts of the book revolved around sites placed in Ancient Troy, Troy, New York and a future Troy. Some

¹² Darden, *Condemned Building*, 3.

Fig. 5: *Il Est Libre*. Redrawing of the watercolour by Jean Jacques Lequeu



characters are inspired from Euripides's classical drama, *The Trojan Women* - Hellen, Polyxena and Cassandra.¹³ An interesting intention of the novel was to reveal internal processes of architecture and a correlation of architectural concepts with physiological expressions such as *laughter*.

Reflection

The common ground of these three case studies is their discursive dimension. Brodsky and Utkin seek an escape from Russia's sordid pre-glasnost architectural profession and reality, being an opposition to a state policy that governs the production of architecture. Beyond the typical professional practice of designing an architecture meant to be built, Brodsky and Utkin are experimenting with marginal manifestations of architecture, with a nostalgic look at Moscow's history and similar atypical practices from past ages, such as Piranesi's engravings. Through this self-referential discourse, nostalgically turned towards the past, through their content and representational technique, their works seem to talk about architecture in a stronger way than a real construction.

Standing on the opposite spectrum of Brodsky and Utkin, in the freedom of the American continent, architect Douglas Darden experiments a speech that focuses on prose, theatre, poetry, and arts to create allegorical architectures to which he attributes, as American architect Ben Ledbetter notes, an act of *mythopoesis*¹⁴ (*mythopoeia* - an act of creating artificial mythology within a work of art). This mythmaking that Darden uses to replenish architecture resonates with the dissident practices of Brodsky and Utkin, not only through common ancestry (*Architecture parlante*, Ledoux, Lequeu, Piranesi), but through a common need to enact change in architectural thinking.

On a different spectrum, Günther Domenig, through *Steinhaus*, strips the architectural object of function and usual meaning, placing it at the fine boundary between architecture and sculpture. This approach can be interpreted as a fatal outcome of the deconstructive discourse, which, following a sophisticated and complex argumentation, produces a self-referential receptacle, akin to a Möbius band. From a stylistic and aesthetic point of view, the architectures Darden imagines seem more related to Domenig's built works, being rooted in a similar western trend of technologically sincere aesthetics. One important difference between Darden and Domenig remains the necessity for these creations to be built. Darden's artworks clearly conjure up the intended message without any such need for a real, built manifestation, whilst Domenig's works need to be transposed into reality to fully convey the message.

As Michael J. Ostwald observes there are two manifestations of political response through design: the revolutionary utopian project and the dissident utopian impulse.¹⁵ By channeling the concepts of the French philosopher Alain Badiou, Ostwald explains the significance and importance of the *dissident impulse*, through the works of Brodsky and Utkin. This particular impulse is presented through allegorical, poetic and narrative drawings, based on fabrication and make-believe elements, but still, they speak of a need for change and illustrate a sincere utopia. This is probably the most politically influenced and engaged of the three illustrated case studies, given the sensitive nature of the social and political environment in the 1980s Russia.

From a different perspective, in *Melville*, Darden speaks of architecture as an instrument: "if architecture provides anything at all, it is a platform for inquiry."¹⁶ Taking Herman Melville's

13 J. Marc Neveu, "The Laughing Girls," *Chora Seven - Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture* 7 (2016): 232.

14 Ben Ledbetter, book review of Douglas Darden's *Condemned Building* in *Harvard University Graduate School of Design News*, (1993): 42.

15 Michael J. Ostwald, "The Event, Politics and Dissent: Alain Badiou and the Utopian Provocations of Brodsky and Utkin," *Architecture and Culture* 2, 1 (2014): 13.

16 Douglas Darden, "Melville," *The Melville Society of America* 91 (1992): 05.

novel and transforming it into a client, not just creating “subservient illustrations”¹⁷ descriptive of the novel’s themes, Darden seeks a profound weaving of architecture and literature, blurring and crossing borders between these two disciplines. On a more sensitive side, Darden seeks an extension of architectural interests, transforming works of literature into clients.

Finally, Domenig imagines his experimental *Steinhaus* as a “shrine to architecture”, as Peter Cook writes in his obituary.¹⁸ Having the privilege of becoming built architecture, this solidified architectural discourse speaks of limits and margins, of meeting points between sculpture, philosophy and architecture. Domenig’s works channeled some specific formal visions from the 1920s expressionist architecture, not through some feeble citing of organic form, but through a contemporary use of materials juxtaposed with some daring spatial concepts.

In the manner of a surrealist exercise of *cadavre exquis*, a Dadaist assembly of collaborative words or images that together form a particular whole, the adjoining of these three hypostases outlines a form of architectural discourse at the end of the twentieth century, dislocated, peripheral and self-referential. Brodsky & Utkin’s and Darden’s discourses present a particular important element: *drawings*. An instrument inherent to the discipline of architecture, *graphical representations* are a formidable receptacle for the architectural discourse of these individuals. In the case of Brodsky and Utkin, their works recall some previous obscure practices from the eighteenth century architects Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Jean-Laurent Le Geay or Claude Nicolas Ledoux.

Darden had a special sensibility for the French architect and artist Jean-Jacques Lequeu, citing his *Il est libre* (Fig. 5), a drawing from 1798 in the frontispiece of *Condemned Building* (Fig. 6).¹⁹ The watercolor drawing by Lequeu represents a classical arch with a decorative keystone, resting on four female figures has Lequeu sitting in the center of it, portrayed in a female body. Lequeu has produced a rich body of drawings, the theme of self-portraits in female gender being quite recurrent. Citing Jean Jacques Lequeu’s drawing, Darden turns the composition by ninety degrees. Regarding his representation of himself, he follows the composition of another portrait of Lequeu’s entitled *Et nous aussi serons mères*. Another interesting element to be identified in this composition is the turtle symbolistic and its relation to architectural concepts. Darden writes on the contents page of the *Condemned Building* the following lines:

I am inclined while watching the
turtle to turn it over and study its
underbelly. From this unnatural
position I see how this platonically
solid creature makes its way
through the world.

Dweller by the Dark Stream²⁰

Adding the postmodern teachings of his mentor Stanley Tigerman alongside the bizarre lessons of artists as Lequeu and filtered through the background of his literary studies, Darden creates a complex mythology of forms and spaces which rely profoundly on contiguous domains like prose or poetry.

In the case of Brodsky and Utkin and Darden, we can identify common references to literature: in *A Ship of Fools*, Brodsky and Utkin are citing poems from Alexander Pushkin (*A Feast during the Plague*), the founder of modern Russian literature, whilst Darden designs architecture by analyzing Herman Melville, a towering figure of American literature, and his novel, *Moby Dick*.

17 *Ibid.*, 01.

18 Peter Cook, “Günther Domenig 1934-2012,” *Architectural Review* 232, 1386 (2012): 19.

19 Darden. *Condemned Building*, 4.

20 *Ibid.*



Fig. 6: *Is he free?* Redrawing of the Frontispiece from *Condemned Building*

In both cases, literature informs and contributes to the depth of the imagined architecture. In a similar manner, the aesthetics that Darden uses in his imagined architecture draws its similarities with Domenig's works, through a common technological aesthetic - for example, using expressive apparent metal structures - rooted in a common postmodern background. By placing Domenig's expressive metal structure of *Zentralsparkasse Bank* next to the impromptu *Ship of Fools* imagined by Brodsky and Utkin, one can identify a common organic sensibility. And further, by comparing Domenig's *Schulschwwestern* multi-purpose hall with Darden's *Night School* project, one can sense a similar organic quality, resembling an insect's exoskeleton or, if we are to consider Darden's sensibility for a specific animal, it would resemble the shell of a turtle.

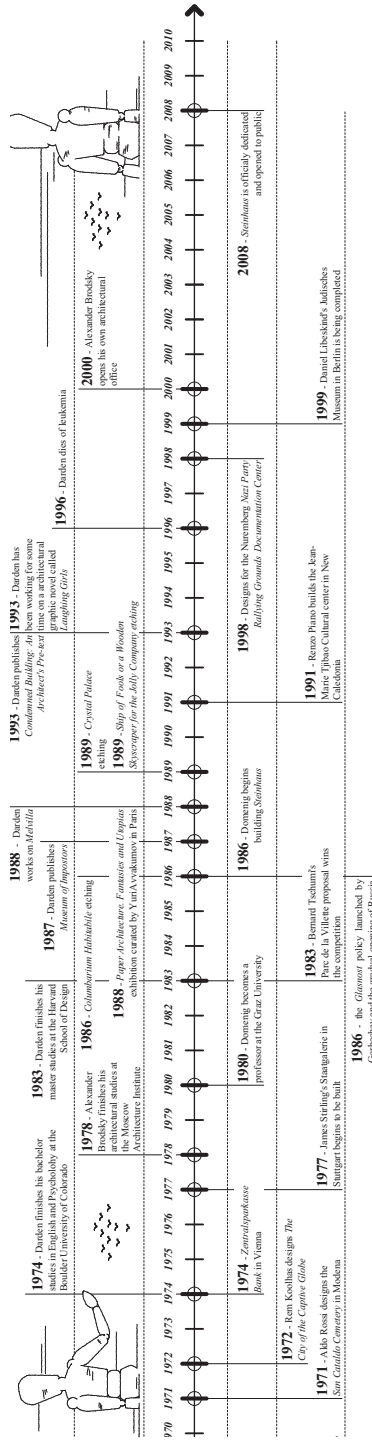
The narrative thread to be pursued here concerns critical thinking filtered through a form of utopian thought - supported by a dissenting artistic act, by transforming literature into the client of an imaginary architecture or by a scientific deconstruction of the meanings of architecture. These three stages of the architectural discourse manifested in the 1980s, viewed together through the concept of critical discourse and utopian thought, reveal a form of critical architectural thinking.

Conclusions

Reading architecture through its relationship with politics and exhibiting the constituent elements by comparison with specific elements of politics, such as *discourse*, may reveal exceptional aspects of the discipline. These three unrelated case studies, analyzed through the concept of architectural discourse, show us a common quest and ultimately, their common ground.

Such manifestations tend to dictate a certain way of thinking. Darden's manner of composing an architectural object by overlaying different, seemingly unrelated elements of enlarged or decreased sizes to form a sectional view (the *discontinuous genealogy*), as is the case of Melvilla, reveal an exuberant manner of obtaining unique spaces and archetypes. His works are often cited in the American schools of architecture as examples for students on how to compose and present their studio projects. Brodsky and Utkin's nostalgic engravings reveal a simpler, more direct way of transforming architectural objects into metaphors and receptacles of social and political critique. Perhaps the most political of all the studied cases, these engravings are instruments of escapism and dissidence, of silent protests against an oppressive regime. In a similar argumentative manner, Domenig's personal manifesto - *Steinhaus* - represents a need to enact change in architectural practice, driven by a will to experiment spaces and forms in the absence of any given functionality.

By analyzing these utopian and visionary manifestations in architecture and the importance they hold in presenting a hypertrophied model of design, one can conclude that these discourses based on allegorical drawings and a dislocated, non-programmatic research are a particular breed of architecture that define a way of thinking and reshaping the limits of the architectural discipline of the 1980s. The three case studies can be understood as three stages of critical discourse in architecture: [1] a dissident architectural practice in the case of Brodsky and Utkin - a reaction to an oppressive political environment; [2] an alternative architectural practice in Darden's case - a theoretical and graphical research into architecture and the field of literature; and [3] a critical professional practice in the case of Domenig - where built architecture truly becomes a receptacle for discourse. Juxtaposed in this manner, as stages and gradual aspects of a common search for meaning in architectural thinking, the case studies form a certain picture, revelatory of architecture and its position as a complex and critical instrument. (Fig. 7)



1986 - the *Glasnost* policy launched by Gorbachev ends the *Glasnost* Spring of Perestroika

1999 - David Lieberknecht, architect of Museum in Berlin is being completed

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Fig. 1-7: Alexandru Sabău, Ioana Ceornodolea