GENEALOGIES OF POWER: ARCHITECTURAL RESPONSES TO CRISIS IN HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

GENEALOGÍAS DEL PODER: RESPUESTAS ARQUITECTÓNICAS A LAS CRISIS EN CONTEXTOS HISTÓRICOS Y CONTEMPORÁNEOS

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Since its beginnings, architecture has served not only as a means of providing shelter but also as a significant manifestation of power. Starting with definitions of both architecture and power, this paper traces a potential genealogy of their relationship across four distinct historical periods: Antiquity, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the modern era. The analysis situates architecture as a medium of control, surveillance, and social organization, revealing how power structures are embedded within architectural forms and practices. The study concludes by addressing two key challenges of power in architecture: the environmental crisis and war.

architecture, power, surveillance, environmental crisis, war

Desde sus inicios, la arquitectura ha funcionado no solo como un medio para proveer refugio, sino también como una manifestación significativa del poder. Partiendo de las definiciones tanto de arquitectura como de poder, este artículo traza una posible genealogía de su relación a lo largo de cuatro periodos históricos distintos: la Antigüedad, el Renacimiento, la Ilustración y la época moderna y contemporánea. El análisis sitúa a la arquitectura como un medio de control, vigilancia y organización social y muestra cómo las estructuras de poder se encuentran incrustadas en las formas y prácticas arquitectónicas. El estudio concluye abordando dos desafíos clave del poder en la arquitectura: la crisis ambiental y la guerra.

Arquitectura, poder, vigilancia, crisis ambiental, guerra

INTRODUCTION

Architecture does more than design and construct shelter to protect humans from conditions such as weather, violence, or the gaze of others. It also builds and sustains communities. Architecture plays a crucial role in shaping both private and public spaces, facilitating—or disrupting—human interaction. As a practice, it is inherently woven into the collective fabric of society, and it has been so since its very beginnings. As Walter Benjamin once remarked:

> Buildings have been man's companions since primordial times. Many art forms have developed and perished [...] But the human need for shelter is lasting. Architecture has never been idle. Its history is more ancient than that of any other art, and its claim to being a living force has significance in every attempt to comprehend the relationship of the masses to art. (Benjamin, 1969, p. 18)

This paper aims to explore some of the roles architecture plays in society. While Benjamin acknowledged its function as shelter, he was primarily interested in how architecture provides a unique materialist perspective on society—serving as a mirror, an overview set in stone, of its fundamental contradictions. Building on his insights, the present study seeks to move further by focusing on a specific dimension of the relationship between architecture and the masses: the question of power. Rather than accepting Benjamin's well-known claim that the masses perceive and engage with architecture only superficially, in a state of distraction, we examine how architecture functions as both a source and a symbol of power. Our aim is to question a seemingly self-evident assumption in philosophy and architectural theory—namely, that architecture, through its multifaceted effects, inevitably constructs the spatial dimension of power—and to discuss the notion of power in architecture.

Drawing from a critical tradition within philosophy, this paper proposes a reading of key ruptures and contradictions in the history of architecture that have shaped its complex relationship with power. Given the vast and multifaceted nature of this topic, the present analysis necessarily adopts a broad—though inherently limited and therefore generalized—perspective on the notion of power in architecture. This framework is informed by elements of continental philosophy and architectural theory, particularly within the European intellectual tradition (Foucault, 1980; Tafuri, 1973/1999).

Beginning with definitions of both architecture and power, this paper traces a potential genealogy of their relationship across four distinct historical periods: Antiquity, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the modern era. We briefly examine how each period reflects a *shift* in the ways architecture has embodied, mediated, or contested political systems and power structures. The study concludes by focusing on two contemporary crises—environmental collapse and warfare—as critical arenas where the contradictions in the relationship between architecture and power become most visible. Considering these immense challenges, which have inevitably forced the discipline to reconsider its own operational logic, we argue that architecture, both as discipline and practice, now stands at an unprecedented historical crossroads in confronting the question of power.

METHODOLOGY

A vast and insightful body of academic literature has critically examined the relationship between architecture and power. Among the more recent contributions are Paul Hirst's *Space and Power: Politics, War and Architecture* (2005) and Michael Minkenberg's *Power and Architecture* (2014). These are complemented by foundational texts such as Hilde Heynen's *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique* (1999) and Douglas Spencer's *The Architecture of Neoliberalism* (2016), which interrogates the intersections of architecture, ideology, and contemporary capitalist power structures.

Equally significant are earlier theoretical contributions. Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974/1991) and *The Right to the City* (1968/1996) examine how spatial production is intimately bound to social relations and structures of power. Manfredo Tafuri's seminal *Architecture and Utopia* (1973/1999), along with other works, offers a critical account of architecture's role within capitalist development and ideological production. Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*, introduced in *Of Other Spaces* (1967/1986), has significantly contributed to the understanding of power in postmodern space. However, it was with *Power/Knowledge* (1980) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977/1995) that Foucault introduced a more explicit critique of the spatialization of power and the role architecture plays in that process. Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) similarly provides a crucial cultural critique of the built environment under late capitalism, framing architecture as both a material and symbolic expression of global economic and political power. Although

Edward Said did not write a book specifically focused on architecture, his work—especially *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)—has been highly influential in shaping scholarly perspectives on architecture, power, and colonialism. Together, these texts provide the framework that this paper seeks to build upon in exploring the contemporary entanglements of architecture and power.

This study starts with the hypothesis that architecture has shaped the spatial dimension of power since its very beginnings, though the relationship between architecture and power has crucially changed in contemporary times.[1] We support this claim by proposing that architecture has historically responded to societal challenges by undergoing structural and fundamental shifts within the discipline—shifts that have often reflected the prevailing political systems of their time.

The paper opens by exploring the terms "architecture" and "power," offering a preliminary outline of their possible meanings. This is followed by a genealogical study into their intersection, tracing the evolution of their relationship from the origins of classical architectural practice in Antiquity to the modern era. The analysis focuses on key ruptures in the development of the discipline within the European context. Particular attention is given to the political systems and power structures of each period, particularly in terms of their imprint on the production processes of the predominant architectural styles or "languages" of the time.

Through this attempted genealogy, the paper seeks to establish concepts for understanding the interplay between architecture and power in contemporary contexts, while drawing attention to the differences with earlier historical periods. These contexts are marked by pressing challenges such as the environmental crisis and war. While the notion of "crisis" is not exhaustively analyzed, it is adopted—admittedly in a somewhat blunt manner—as a condition that has characterized architectural practice.[2]

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1 This paper is a modified and adapted version of my introduction to the Slovenian edited volume *On Power in Architecture* (Kurir, 2024). While it does not specifically address feminist perspectives on power and architecture, I consider these perspectives to be extremely important.

2 The practice of architecture finds itself in a profound state of crisis, as evidenced by extensive discussions across disciplines and recent scholarly works. While a

Positioned at the intersection of philosophy and architectural theory, this paper engages with abstract concepts and reasoning to offer a perspective on some of the pressing social questions surrounding architecture. It proposes a broad—therefore inherently limited and necessarily generalized—view of power in architecture. In doing so, the study seeks to open up critical and timely discussions for architectural practice—discussions often sidelined in an era dominated by a neoliberal logic that prioritizes only the practical and material dimensions. Given the vast and multifaceted nature of this work's ambitions, it is perhaps understandable that not all the larger questions it raises can be fully addressed within the scope of a single paper.

THE MEANING OF ARCHITECTURE AND POWER (AND THEIR INTERSECTION)

"Power" and "architecture" are complex, broad, and polysemous concepts; hence, we begin with a minimal definition of these two terms and analyse their intersection.

Architecture gives shelter; it embodies the knowledge that shapes and designs the space to protect human beings from external impacts. The term architecture (*architectūra*) was first used in Latin; its root comes from the Greek *archē* (ἀρχή), meaning *beginning*, *origin*, or *first principle,* and *téktōn*, associated with knitting, weaving, and building (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). In its primary definition, architecture is the activity of designing space, conducted by an architect, with the purpose of establishing a boundary between the outside and the inside to protect human life.

However, as a form of knowledge, architecture always transcends its primary purpose. Wherever it stands, it exerts dominance over

comprehensive bibliography on the concept of crisis—even limited to recent years—would be vast, several key references provide critical insight. From a philosophical perspective, the arguments of Thomas Kuhn and Massimo Cacciari offer essential frameworks to contextualize this crisis, while a recent socialist framework is provided by Holgersen in Against the Crisis: Economy and Ecology in a Burning World (2024). Within the field of architecture, the editorial "Culture of Crisis" in Architectural Histories provides an examination of this theme, highlighting the challenges currently facing contemporary architectural practices (Pyla & Özkaya, 2013). Additional perspectives can be found in Shank's (2008) analysis of crisis as a productive category in historical discourse and in Koselleck and Richter's (2006) seminal exploration of the term's conceptual evolution.

nature, space, and place. Knowledge about construction shapes a space intended not only for the provision of shelter from the outside but also for prestige and social power. Not every building is architecture. Architecture does not only create shelters; as a form of knowledge, it is oriented toward more than merely providing refuge. It conceives space in ways that always already "interprets a way of life valid for a certain period," as defined by Sigfried Giedion (1954). From this perspective, we propose defining architecture as the discipline that designs a perfected space, a space in its *surplus*. Architecture is not only a shield against the external but, above all, the (designing) surplus that—as knowledge—stands on the border between technics (engineering) and aesthetics (art).

Power likely permeates every aspect of life, which is why any attempt to define it might inevitably fall short. It is practically everywhere: it seems to emerge the moment two people enter into a relationship. It shapes political,[3] social, cultural, economic, and even private relationships.[4] In philosophy, the conceptualization and definition of power has been addressed by nearly every philosopher—from Socrates and Plato to Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau; from Hegel and Marx to Arendt, Agamben, and Žižek—which is why it can only be compared with sex in terms of its popularity. And even sex is ultimately a matter of power.[5]

If we try to define power by starting with its sheer etymology, the English word *power* originates from the Latin *potere* and is related to the French *pouvoir*, both meaning 'to be able'. However, the term *power* seems to encompass a much broader meaning than the simple capacity to do something, and etymology alone cannot capture the full complexity of the concept.

In his seminal work *Power: A Radical View* (1974/2005), Steven Lukes described power as a highly contested concept. According to Lukes,

[3] In discussions about the organization of political power, we typically refer to three classical forms—monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy—as well as concepts such as the state, sovereignty, and the separation of powers. However, these implications of political theory and philosophy are not the subject here; instead, our interest is in power in a broader context.

[4] For further reading, see: Foucault (1980, 1986, 2008), Luhmann (2017), and Arendt (1961, 2006).

[5] As Alenka Zupančič states, "Everything is about sex except sex. Sex is about power" (Zupančič, 2020, p. 5).

power is a challenging and disputed term because it is shaped by relations of power themselves, which are intrinsically tied to the positions of its theorists and their philosophical standpoints. These standpoints, in turn, are often linked to the differing methodologies and perspectives employed to understand power.

Power has numerous definitions, the most common of which arguably presents it as domination, or "power-over." Max Weber, for instance, defined power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" (Weber, 1978, p. 53). Similarly, Michel Foucault argued, "If we speak of the structures of the mechanism of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others" (Foucault, 1983, p. 217). In contrast, power is also conceptualized as a capacity, or "power-to." Thomas Hobbes, for example, described power as a person's "present means … to obtain some future apparent good" (Hobbes, 1651/1985, p. 150).

In a very similar fashion, Hannah Arendt defined power as a capacity, suggesting that "power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse" (Arendt, 1958, p. 200). Here, power is portrayed as a fundamental element of society, emerging whenever two or more people interact.

Power is often closely associated with terms such as domination, sovereignty, ideology, violence, and authority. While it is sometimes conflated with those terms, it is crucial to distinguish power in its most essential sense from these related notions. Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault have proposed some of the most compelling theories of power in the 20th century. In her seminal book *On Violence*, Arendt emphasized the need to think of power in its singularity, defining it as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" (Arendt, 1970).

Arendt (1961) argued that Western political concepts are rooted in the Roman foundations of the political realm in Antiquity. She placed the "Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority" (p. 125) at the core of these foundations prior to the modern era. According to her, the crises of modernity originated from the loss of tradition and religion, combined with the eventual loss of authority—the latter enduring longer but experiencing a decisive break during the Enlightenment. For Arendt, the question of what authority *is* in modern times must be reframed as what authority *was*. Modernity, she contended, is

characterized precisely by the loss of authority. Importantly, Arendt noted that authority implies obedience but is not synonymous with violence: "Since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion. Where force is used, authority itself has failed!" (Arendt, 1961, p. 93).

In what follows, we reflect on power not only as might and governance but also as resistance, defiance, and struggle. In this context, we treat "power" and "might" as closely related—at times even interchangeable. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's understanding of power, we aim to explore its nuances by examining how it differs from related concepts such as violence, authority, and sovereignty. Power, then, may be defined as a concentration of might, rights, rules, and various tools of repression employed to enforce those rules within a given domain. Considering the violence that often accompanies power—whether as a visible act or an invisible threat of punishment—power also closely intersects with authority and sovereignty.

How can we think about the intersection of architecture and power? The formulation of *power in architecture* may be understood in at least two ways: as might and power operating *within* architecture and as tensions *external* to it. Within architecture as knowledge, there have always been tensions—power plays for the predominance of concepts, principles, or ideals—shaping the structural conception of architecture as a discipline and, consequently, the design of space based on those concepts. Power relations within architecture are manifested in the conception of the core of architectural knowledge (that is, the main lexicon of architecture, such as the orders of columns and the proportions of classical architecture, which remained central for over a millennium), the affirmation of building techniques (from stone and wood to concrete and steel, and so on), and the professional formation of architects, including the modes of conveying knowledge through education.

When we talk about power relations external to architecture, we talk about politics, society, and economy—domains that architecture spatializes. In this sense, architecture can be understood as an activity that represents power and designs the image of power in space. The main body of architecture—consisting of places of worship (such as the Athenian Parthenon, Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, and St. Peter's Basilica in Rome) and civic buildings (including the Colosseum in

Rome, the Panthéon in Paris, the Altes Museum in Berlin, the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and the Bird's Nest Stadium in Beijing)—may be read as expressions of ruling power spatialized by architecture across very different periods of history. Architecture has always provided the spatialization of power, erecting buildings that were sometimes very similar despite being designed for quite different political systems. One might say that architecture has produced varied materializations of political systems: from the sacred to the spectacle, from dictatorship to democracy, from slavery to capitalism, from social politics to neoliberal investments.

If we turn to the origins of the possible readings of power in architecture, the first distinct landmark emerges in the period when, with classical architecture, the discipline took shape as knowledge in Rome. In terms of their main features, the power relations at work in architecture were formed during that era. For this reason, our attempt at a genealogy of power in architecture begins precisely there: in Rome.

THE ALLIANCE OF ARCHITECTURE AND POWER: FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE RENAISSANCE

The Foundations of Architecture: Antiquity

As discussed in John Summerson's brilliant work *The Classical Language of Architecture* (2006), the purpose of classical architecture was to achieve formal harmony among all parts of a building through the use of column orders and proportions. The first orders of columns—foundational to classical architecture—originated in ancient Greece, where they adorned temple colonnades. Among these, the Doric order stands out as the earliest and most austere. Before the emergence of Roman architectural expression, the grammar of the Doric temple can already be seen as a fragment of the grammar of power—specifically that of the Dorians, a group of tribes who invaded ancient Greece around 1200 BCE. The architectural language of the Doric order reflects not only structural rigor but also the cultural values, authority, and social organization of the Dorian communities. This genealogy of classical architecture thus begins with the Greek orders, tracing how architectural forms became embedded expressions of political power, long before they were systematized and expanded in the Roman context. Once this knowledge was transmitted to the Romans, it transcended sacred contexts to permeate public spaces.

In Antiquity, the Roman writer and architect Vitruvius detailed these orders, proportions, and construction principles for both private and public buildings in his seminal treatise *De Architectura Libri Decem* translated as *On Architecture* (1931/1983). For Romans, architecture was synonymous with the orders of columns; they believed there could be no architecture without them. The Roman innovation of the arch enabled the construction of multi-story sacral and civic buildings. They systematized architectural knowledge, standardizing construction through mathematical and geometric principles. They built temples and civic buildings of unprecedented scale, including amphitheaters, theaters, bathhouses (thermae), basilicas, and triumphal arches, integrated with both civic and sacred spaces. These were complemented with a network of aqueducts and other exemplary feats of engineering, all constructed uniformly by a political organization that represented power—whether during the kingdom, the republic, or the empire. The classical architecture developed and systematized by the Romans introduced an entirely new standard for the representation of power. It surpassed the thousand-year reign of the great monuments of the Egyptian state, spreading across the known world of Antiquity. This new architecture introduced a monumental quality intricately linked to the orders of columns. As a result, architecture evolved into a systematic discipline, becoming the predominant spatial language of power in the Roman world. In this sense, architecture embodied the spatialization of power.

Alongside column orders and the arch, the Romans introduced architectural typologies that became foundational to Western architecture: the triumphal arch, later adapted by Renaissance architects for churches; the Colosseum, which combined multiple orders with arches; and the Pantheon, an archetype that inspired buildings such as Bernini's Santa Maria Assunta.

Exactly due to these monumental achievements, Foucault regarded Roman civilization as a "civilization of spectacle" (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 216). He approached architecture not as a merely historical-architectural narrative but as an activity addressing the challenge of making "a small number of objects accessible to a multitude of men" (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 216). This perspective helps explain why architecture, closely aligned with the ruling class, developed temples and circuses that connected communities through often violent rituals. Architecture, in Foucault's interpretation, was not just a site for the community; it was also a crucial medium that

enabled the existence of such communities. It was the ruling class's main expression of power and authority in the space for the common people, for the masses.

At this point, at least two additional analogies between architecture and power may be drawn. The first is the emergence of classical architecture as a systematic body of knowledge, directly tied to the Roman era referenced by Arendt (1961). This architecture was not merely aesthetic; it physically manifested the power and authority of the state, marking the centralization of political control. According to Arendt (1961), the concept of power, as we know it, began in Roman times, with Western political concepts rooted in the Roman foundations, as noted above. Arendt traced the origins of an explicit relationship, which is decisive for power, between religion, tradition and authority, to Roman times. For her, it is precisely the unity of those three elements that constitutes the core of power relations prior to the modern era.

Roman architecture, which sprung at the same time as the Western concept of power, distinctly shaped the image of the state by organizing space for public and political life, thus helping to shape authority and making it visible and tangible. Temples, basilicas, and triumphal arches were not just functional spaces; they were symbolic representations of the collective political identity, reinforcing the state's power. Hence, Roman classical architecture can be understood as a key instrument in the spatialization of power, embodying Arendt's notion that power is constructed through collective action and the physical spaces that reflect and enforce it.

Following Antiquity, temples, basilicas, triumphal arches, and forums were replaced by churches and cathedrals. Yet the message remained the same: power possesses the wealth and knowledge to create imposing architecture, whose spatial consistency reinforces its dominance.

The Renaissance: Canonization of Classical Architecture

Classical architecture entered its next stage during the Renaissance, an era whose main object of interest was Antiquity—revived in the thoughts of humanistic thinkers as both an ideal and a great phantasm, to such an extent that the Middle Ages were almost erased,

cast as the unmarked "other."[6] The architectural Renaissance took place especially in Italy, where classical architecture was canonized through numerous treatises that guided the construction of a new Renaissance architecture: one closer to Roman models than to Gothic or Romanesque ones. This revival was accompanied by the publication of several architectural treatises[7] and an arsenal of new translations of Vitruvius. Central to the pursuit of harmonious perfection were the orders of columns, which architects studied with particular intensity. In *De Re Aedificatoria* (*On the Art of Building in Ten Books*), Alberti (1485/1991)—who also defined architecture as the science of protecting cities through fortification, thus making its defensive role a key contribution to society—added a fifth, so-called "mixed" order of columns to the existing four. This "new" order was probably the first in a series of formal tendencies aimed at creating additional orders of columns that was supposed to reflect the identity and power of the era.[8]

In addition to new architectural designs and a boom of treatises, a significant factor in the changing conception of architecture was its introduction into university curricula in the 15th century, when it became one of the *artes liberales*.[9] In the Renaissance, the architect's knowledge extended into the humanities: no longer considered merely as a specialized craftsman, the architect emerged as a universal scholar,

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6 As Fredric Jameson argues, the Renaissance's relationship to the Middle Ages marked the first real break with a preceding period. For him, the Renaissance was defined by this decisive break: the Middle Ages became that which is unwanted, the era from which the new age sought to distance itself as much as possible. The void left this erasure was then filled by Antiquity—particularly the Roman period—in the fields of art and architecture (Jameson, 2002).

7 Over the course of two centuries, architects and architectural theorists wrote enough treatises to fill an entire library, with the most important being: Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* (1485/1991), Sebastiano Serlio's *I sette libri dell'architettura* (1584/1978), Giacomo Barozzio Da Vignola's *Regola delli cinque ordini d'architettura* (1562/1640), Andrea Palladio's *I quattro libri dell'architettura* (1570), and Vicenzo Scamozzi's *L'idea dell'architettura universale divisa in X libri* (1615).

8 In the 17th and 18th centuries, French architects were very busy with creating the "French" order of columns. Other European nations also sought to establish national orders of columns or ones marked by a specific power that would show their grandeur (but these efforts were ultimately in vain).

9 Alberti repeatedly stressed that an architect also has to master rhetoric, as it provides access to all other forms of knowledge. It is no coincidence that it was precisely that architect Giorgio Vasari who, in 16th-century Florence, encouraged the establishment of the *Accademia di Belle Arti*.

possessing the humanistic *virtú*—one who knows the materials, the principles of construction, and the language of classical architecture. For the construction, the architect needs other people, workers, and craftsmen who report to him. With this hierarchical division, which emerged with the institutionalization of architecture at the university level and the transformation of the professional framework, architecture was established as art, as creation, separated from the practical implementation.

In the Renaissance, architecture did not just change as a profession; it was restructured and placed on new foundations, offering a different framing that produced a new image of power structures. The era focused mostly on churches and other manifestations of the sacred, notably in the work of Andrea Palladio, whose architecture emphasized the classical temple form as a symbol of divine order. A well-conceived church was expected to inspire piety in the believer and evoke a sense of the sacred, bringing God to the masses. It was during this time that Filippo Brunelleschi conceived the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, still the largest masonry dome in the world. He is said to have envisioned it as a space vast enough to gather all the city's inhabitants beneath it, symbolizing both civic unity and divine order. A contemporary source praised it as "vast enough to cover the entire Tuscan population with its shadow" (King, 2000).

At a time when bourgeois society was beginning to carve out enclosed spaces of freedom from the feudal constraints of the Middle Ages, the Absolute—embodied in the figure of a ruling God—continued to dominate social and political life and also received the attention of architects. Paul Hirst, in his book *Space and Power: Politics, War and Architecture* (2005), discusses how Renaissance architectural design began to reflect and facilitate emerging forms of governance and social control. He observes that the era's emphasis on symmetry, proportion, and order in architecture mirrored the centralization of political power and the rise of more structured societal hierarchies. This alignment of architectural aesthetics with political authority exemplifies how built environments can both embody and reinforce specific power dynamics. By analyzing these historical developments, Hirst highlights the crucial role of architecture in shaping and expressing power relations. Building on Michel Foucault's insights into the spatial dimensions of power, he demonstrates how architectural practices of this period were deeply intertwined with mechanisms of control and authority.

After the Renaissance, during the age of absolutist monarchies, the new architectural canon enabled a breakthrough of architecture above all other arts. Architects designed city mansions, gardens, country villas, and fantastical spaces enhanced by *trompe l'oeil*. During the *Ancient Régime*, when absolutism and architecture breathed together, the Royal Academy of Architecture was founded in France in 1671. Under the king's supervision, the profession of the architect was formally professionalized; architects became academics, and some obtained the status of bourgeois aristocracy due to their profession. After the periods of Mannerism, Baroque, and Rococo, this march of architectural knowledge in close connection with power structures, which originated in the Renaissance, was eventually disrupted a century later in the Enlightenment.

THE BREAK OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT: ARCHITECTURE AS THE INVISIBLE FORCE OF POWER

With the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, the cultural landscape became significantly more complex. It seems that this was precisely the period that molded the fundamental elements of modernity and modern architecture. The Enlightenment's main slogan, *Sapere aude!* (Dare to know!) reflects the core of the cultural process that swept across Europe, seeking to form an autonomous and free subject for the new era. The Enlightenment of the 18th century was not only the era of Immanuel Kant's philosophical affirmation and the culmination of social ideas in the French Revolution. It was also an ambitious and multifaceted cultural process that extended beyond one-dimensional concepts, identified as liberation, progress, reason, and freedom. This was an ambiguous process for at least two reasons, as noted by Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas. On the one hand, it involved all of humanity and its inherent tendency to develop, but on the other hand, with its *Mehr Licht!* (More light!), it advocated a subjective maxim that bound individuals the duty to use their own reason instead of leaning on a higher postulate or external authority (Kurir, 2019).

In this new society, where the sacred, the authority, and the absolute—once embodied by God or King—were replaced by the unlimited rule of reason, science entered the victorious march. Individuals were tasked with daring to use reason. During this time, old customs and myths failed, the previous constellation of the subject broke, and a new period began—one that was open and indefinite, all guided by Reason.

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The Enlightenment stands as the first period in history to name itself, thereby legitimizing its own existence. Reason, abstracted as a primary tool, introduced an all-encompassing rationalization, making the world understandable and no longer a source of anxiety. Science, as the embodiment of this rationalization, attained complete primacy over truth. From this time onward, freedom—albeit with the restrictions imposed by Kant—dominated bourgeois society.

The Changing Concepts of Space and Place

During the Enlightenment, the understanding of space and place underwent a radical transformation. The prior unity provided by the Absolute—correlated in the homogeneous and enduring practices of classical architecture that lasted for centuries— fractured into tensions and cracks. These transformations not only redefined the concepts of space and place but also influenced architecture. With the dominance of bourgeois society, the first significant break occurred between the public and the private in both space and society. The Enlightenment space is marked by sharp contrasts: order and chaos, regularity and irregularity. After the long supremacy of classical architecture, a crisis in architectural form began to emerge; these cracks would leave their mark all the way to modernity.

The architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri wrote extensively on the contradictions that arose in architecture during this period. His work focuses particularly on the Enlightenment because he regarded this epoch as fundamental for understanding architectural ideology. For Tafuri, the Enlightenment was formative and constitutive for modernity, especially for modern architecture (Kurir, 2019). He noted that "it is significant that systematic research of the Enlightenment architecture has been able to identify, on a purely ideological level, a great many of the contradictions that in diverse forms accompany the course of contemporary art" (Tafuri, 1973/1999, p. 3).

Tafuri regarded the Enlightenment as a decisive period for the emergence of modernism in architecture. In this era, the main postulates of modernism were established, and its essential elements and contradictions began to take shape. These postulates, elements, and contradictions would later come to prominence in the first half of the 20th century.

The Raptures: French Currents in Architecture

We might say that the most significant changes in architectural discourse took place in France, where two currents predominated. At the Royal Academy of Architecture, architects studied classical authors and published numerous treatises.[10] By the 18th century, the Academy's discussions primarily revolved around the concept of "good taste."[11] Architects adhered to the Academy's doctrines, which were committed to rationality and the purist application of the orders of columns—principles that remained dominant until the French Revolution. One of the most emblematic examples of these principles in practice is the western façade of the Louvre (1667–70), designed by Claude Perrault, Louis Le Vau, and Charles Le Brun. This façade initiated a trend of imitating the design of Roman temples for administrative buildings—a model that spread first across France, then throughout Europe, and eventually to the Americas. This approach became one of the most recognizable architectural expressions of power.

However, Claude Perrault's position was far more complex than a simple embodiment of academic orthodoxy. He was also a key figure in the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, a cultural debate in which he questioned the presumed objectivity and universality of classical standards, particularly the codified system of the five column orders. Perrault's own French translation of Vitruvius challenged the dominant interpretations upheld by figures like François Blondel and the Royal Academy. He argued that architectural beauty was neither inherent nor fixed, but rather dependent on cultural convention and subjective judgment. His work signaled an internal rupture within the classical tradition, emerging from its most authoritative institutions. The western façade of the Louvre—with its colossal colonnade—thus stands not only as an assertion of classical authority but also as an act of critical reinterpretation.

A contrasting movement, openly opposing the Academy and classical architecture, was initiated by figures such as Michel de Frémin,

[10] Claude Perrault published one of the most influential translations and commentaries on Vitruvius. His version is accessible in a later reprint (Vitruvius, 1684/1979)

[11] The discussion initiated by François Blondel on the New Year's Eve in 1671, as part of his inaugural address as the first director of the Royal Academy of Architecture, and supposedly ended a week later with the definition of good taste in architecture as that which suited intelligent people, brought to light all the cracks in the Academy in the following 70 years.

Jean-Louis de Cordemoy, and Marc-Antoine Laugier. These architects and theorists questioned classical architectural elements, sparking a minor revolution. In *Nouveau Traité de Toute l'Architecture*, Cordemoy (1706/2012) analyzed the orders of columns, advocating for discontinuing their ornamental use or what he called "architecture in relief." At the height of Rococo, he argued for architecture devoid of ornamentation, becoming one of the first opponents of ornament in architecture. His ideas significantly influenced Laugier, who, in *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753/1972), illustrated the concept of a "primitive hut" on its cover. This hut, composed of four tree trunks supporting a rudimentary roof, symbolized a merger of culture and nature, offering humans shelter. For Laugier, the primitive hut represented a rational prototype for the use of columns, independent of established doctrine. He even suggested replacing walls with columns, foreshadowing architectural modernism and the advent of skeleton construction.

From these premises, Neoclassicism emerged as a new architectural style characterized by the use of columns without ornamentation. This rationalist style was also deeply influenced by archaeological discoveries and increasingly comprehensive studies of ancient ruins. The call to return to the authentic use of columns spurred a fervent search for their origins in ancient Greece. The first illustrated books of the Parthenon, which circulated in Europe at the end of the 18th century, inspired numerous reproductions and adaptations of the portal of this ancient Greek temple, making it a model for administrative buildings across the British Empire. Following John Summerson's analysis, the essence of this period might be distilled into this formula: *Neoclassicism = reason + archaeology* (Summerson, 2006). These elements of rationality and archaeology sharply distinguished Neoclassicism from the Baroque and established its dominance throughout the 19th century. However, before it became widespread in European cities, Neoclassicism was primarily the style of the revolutionary period. After the Revolution, Neoclassical buildings housed the newly established institutions of bourgeois society, meeting the needs of the nascent republican state.

The revolutionary transformations in Enlightenment architecture and urban design were analyzed by scholars, including Thomas Markus in *Buildings and Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (1993). Markus identified this time as a critical period of change, with the Industrial Revolution introducing the production metropolis and triggering a proliferation of new building types.

Foucault: Architecture as Power in the Modern Age

For Foucault, the Enlightenment represented an additional level of change that he termed a "social turn": the society of spectacle of Antiquity was replaced by the society of surveillance. Among the new building typologies of the 17th and 18th centuries, the Panopticon—designed by Jeremy Bentham—became emblematic of the Enlightenment. In this circular prison design, a central surveillance tower illuminated each surrounding cell, ensuring that prisoners remained constantly visible. Foucault observed that this architecture reversed the dungeon's principle of darkness, substituting it with the principle of light. He argued that the Panopticon exemplified a machine of power that "induces in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 201).

In Foucault's view, architecture in the modern age functioned not only as a physical tool of surveillance but also as a means of managing space at the macro level. This transformation marked a shift in the discipline's role—from designing buildings to arranging space, both serving as invisible mechanisms of power. In *The Eye of Power*, Foucault (2008) further argued that modern architecture engages in producing *pleasure and aesthetic enjoyment* alongside *surveillance and control*. This duality, he suggested, lies at the heart of the modern architectural crisis—a tension between knowledge and power, surveillance and pleasure, shaping architecture from the modern age onward.

In this modern age, a quote, often attributed to Foucault, that encapsulates the relationship between architecture and power in a single sentence, has become more evident than ever: "The history of space is always a history of power."[12] His reflections on the relationship between space and power, particularly through his concept of heterotopias—spaces that reflect and influence societal structures—are crucial. In his 1967 lecture "Des espaces autres" ("Of Other Spaces"), Foucault (1967/1986) explores how different spaces, or heterotopias, function

[12] Actually, the direct quote from Foucault, which has been used in literature as a paraphrase of the above sentence, is: "A whole history remains to be written of *spaces* —which would at the same time be the history of *powers* (both these terms in plural)— from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations" (Foucault, 1980, p. 149).

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within society, suggesting that the organization of space is inherently linked to power dynamics. How, then, do such dynamics manifest in the present day?

THE CONTEMPORARY CRISIS: THE ENVIRONMENT AND WAR

Moving to contemporaneity, I would like to bring Fredric Jameson into the discussion. He characterized our current era of postmodernity through a specific power relationship within architecture—its close ties with capitalism. In his notorious argument, Jameson defines postmodernism not as a style, but as a cultural dominant, one that begins in architecture:

> Of all the arts, architecture is the closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually unmediated relationship. It will therefore not be surprising to find the extraordinary flowering of the new postmodern architecture grounded in the patronage of multinational business, whose expansion and development is strictly contemporaneous with it. (Jameson, 1991, p. 5)

Since its inception and continuing into present days, architecture has been closely intertwined with power. Almost forty years after Jameson first proposed this hypothesis, it is evident that in today's neoliberal and globalized world, the relationship between architecture and the power structures of capital has only intensified, raising significant ethical questions for the practice. Architecture is now tasked with fulfilling a multiplicity of roles and addressing an array of demands, extending far beyond its fundamental function of providing shelter. Historically, it has sought to meet society's needs through both the knowledge it carries and the structures it creates. Drawing on Foucault's notions of surveillance and pleasure and considering the challenges of contemporary architecture at a micro and macro level, we identify two key challenges emerging at the intersection of power and architecture in contemporary times: the environmental crisis and war.

The Environmental Crisis: Architecture, Carbon, and Power

We argue that architecture—through its materiality, rooted in the tradition of modernist architecture, and its production logic, closely intertwined with the power structures of capital—is facing an unprecedented macro-level challenge: the environmental crisis.

The environmental crisis has been frequently framed as an abstract or diffuse challenge, yet its material implications are quite concrete. A clearer understanding of its stakes emerges through the Planetary Boundaries framework (Richardson et al, 2023), which outlines nine critical Earth system processes defining the safe operating limits for human activity. As of 2023, at least six of these boundaries—climate change, biodiversity loss, and land system change among them—have been exceeded, pushing the Earth system toward instability. Architecture, and the broader construction sector, are deeply implicated in this crisis. The material foundation of modern architecture—concrete, steel, and glass—has been central to the carbonization of the built environment, a process that started more than a century ago and remains in full operation today. As Barber et al. (2024) observe, "architectural history is a history of carbonization" (para. 2), with modernism not only amplifying energy flows but also embedding carbon dependency into daily spatial practices. The United Nations Environment Programme, & Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction (2024) confirms this ecological burden: in 2022, buildings accounted for 34 % of global energy demand and 37 % of energy- and process-related CO_2 emissions.

The carbon logic of architecture is not merely technical or environmental—it is profoundly political and connected with power systems. The built environment is governed by systems of power that privilege capital accumulation over ecological sustainability or social equity. Within this framework, architecture is mobilized as a tool for profit maximization, reinforcing extractive economies and growth-driven ideologies. It predominantly serves the privileged classes who control land, resources, and capital, thereby exacerbating inequality while accelerating environmental breakdown (Huber, 2022).

As Claude Kuittinen (2023) and many others emphasize, addressing the current crisis demands a paradigm shift in architectural thinking and practice—one that moves away from prioritizing new construction as the default solution to spatial needs. Instead, greater emphasis must be placed on renovation, reuse, and adaptive strategies. The Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction (GlobalABC) highlights that rapid decarbonization of building materials is essential for achieving zero-carbon goals by mid-century (United Nations Environment Programme, & Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction, 2024). However, despite decades of warnings and an expanding body of

research, the industry persists in operating under a logic of extraction and growth.

War: The Urban Front

The second challenge we highlight as critical for contemporary architecture—at a micro level—arises from the profound societal transformations that have significantly reshaped architectural practice. With the highest number of armed conflicts globally since World War II—currently, 92 countries are engaged in conflicts beyond their borders (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024)—and the increasing shift of warfare into urban areas, architecture now faces unprecedented challenges in human history.

Architecture has long served as a tool of control—whether built to defend, assert authority, or conquer. From the ancient fortifications described by Vitruvius in *De Architectura* to the Renaissance insights of Leon Battista Alberti, architecture has been not only a means of shelter but also a crucial instrument of military strategy. Alberti, in particular, emphasized that military success depended more on architects than on military commanders, asserting that victories were owed less to strategic leadership than to the ingenuity of architects, who planned the fortifications to secure the conquest of wars. This perspective frames architecture as an active participant in the theater of conflict, shaping the outcome of wars through the spaces in which they are fought.

In the 21st century, the role of architecture has evolved beyond mere defense and fortification. It now plays a direct role in defining, controlling, and reshaping spaces to further the objectives of war, as is visible in Gaza and Ukraine. Wars are no longer won or lost solely by soldiers and strategists, but through the design and destruction of space itself. Architecture has become a primary battleground for both visible and invisible violence, reaffirming Alberti's thesis in contemporary times: wars can be won because of architecture. The design of borders, the construction of fortifications, and the weaponization of urban spaces highlight the powerful role architecture plays in contemporary conflicts. Following the war in Sarajevo (1992–1996), Herscher (2008) coined the term "warchitecture" to describe the contemporary, close relationship between war and architecture: "Blurring the conceptual border between 'war' and 'architecture,' the term provides a tool to critique dominant accounts of wartime architectural destruction

and to bring the interpretive protocols of architecture to bear upon that destruction" (p. 35).

Today, the frontlines of war have shifted from traditional battlefields to urban environments. Architecture has, in many ways, transformed from a means of shelter into a tool for asserting control over contested urban spaces. This shift is particularly evident in the ongoing socio-political conflicts in the Americas, Europe, and especially in Israel, where architecture is tested and used not only to defense but to enforce political dominance and control. Groups like Forensic Architecture (Weizman & Fuller, 2021) have documented how urban architecture is weaponized in modern warfare, with buildings, infrastructure, and everyday spaces becoming targets of destruction and manipulation.

In the context of urban warfare, architecture becomes a global tool for surveillance, segregation, and suppression. Its role is not limited to the physical destruction of buildings; it extends to the reconfiguration of spaces to control populations and erase histories. The violence inherent in this architecture shapes both the physical environment and the social fabric of war-torn cities. Urban settlements in these zones become spaces of trauma, where the architecture of oppression persists long after the fighting has ceased. Architecture and its production work as enduring markers of power relations.

CONCLUSION

In contemporary times, architecture remains deeply intertwined with power and faces unseen challenges. With the expansion of warfare into urban settlements, architecture has become a central battleground and a site for the violent expression of power. Power structures now use architecture not only as a tool for surveillance but also as a means of exerting control and exercising violence against the masses. The environmental crisis presents architecture with an unprecedented challenge—one that is deeply political and closely tied to existing power structures. The carbon logic embedded in architectural practice is intrinsically linked to a profit-driven capitalist paradigm. As long as architecture remains within these traditional frameworks, serving primarily a narrow socio-economic segment, it will continue to exacerbate social inequalities.

The shift in architectural practice, advocated for at least the last 20 years, is inherently political. Such a shift must be supported by the power structures that dominate architecture. However, it seems highly unlikely that capital—rooted in the logic of carbon, profit maximization, and resource extraction—will support it. Consequently, for the first time in history, architecture may align itself with power, contributing not only to the environmental breakdown of the planet but also to its own annihilation. Hence, it seems that the question of power in architecture has, in our contemporary context, transformed into a question of existence.

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