

TRUTH AS A DISCURSIVE OBJECT IN ARCHITECTURE:  
COMMUNICATION THROUGH AESTHETICS IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TRUTH AS A DISCURSIVE OBJECT IN ARCHITECTURE: COMMUNICATION THROUGH AESTHETICS IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA**

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One of the ways in which the post-truth era affects architecture is the question of communication and exchange. Architecture does not translate into tangible and objective forms with ease. The discipline is susceptible to losing value, depth, and truth in being subjected to measurement and judgment standards. The post-truth era is entangled with the problem of communication in architecture. It brings about a wholesale-like environment for the processes of exchange and communication, where universal standards for commensuration are lacking.

In the context of post-truth, this thesis scrutinizes an object-oriented architecture for its potential to provide the discipline with a form of universal communicability based on aesthetics. More particularly, this study reviews Mark Foster Gage's translation of the contemporary philosophy of Object-Oriented Ontology into architecture. His criticism involves architecture's reduction to the more marketable, easily comprehensible, over-simplified concepts, relations, and narratives that disjoin the speech, truth, and being in the conversion of the discipline into more commensurable forms.

Firstly, the thesis provides an examination of money-sign, which serves a double function in the scope of architecture: (a) to understand how money and rhetorics

operate in the contemporary discipline—not solely for deception and profit, but also for “objective” facilitation of communicability and exchangeability; (b) to provide a comparative model for the examination of aesthetics in Object-Oriented Ontology. Following an examination of an object-oriented architecture in general, the study scrutinizes the case study of M. F. Gage Architects’ “The Tower on the 57th Street, NYC” project, the listing and kitbashing techniques.

Keywords: Post-truth, Aesthetics, Object-Oriented Architecture, Rhetorics, Architectural Communication

## ÖZ

### MİMARLIKTA BİR SÖYLEMSEL NESNE OLARAK HAKİKAT: HAKİKAT SONRASI DÖNEMDE ESTETİK ARACILIĞIYLA İLETİŞİM

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Hakikat sonrası dönemin mimarlık üzerindeki etkilerinden birisi iletişim ve bilgi alışverişi sorunsalıdır. Mimarlık kolaylıkla somut ve nesnel biçimlere çevrilememektedir. Bu disiplin ölçüm ve muhakeme standartlarına tabi tutulduğunda değer, derinlik ve doğruluk kaybına uğramaya açıktır. Hakikat-sonrası dönem iletişim ve bilgi alışverişi için evrensel ölçülebilirlik standartlarının eksik olduğu toptancı tarzı bir ortama yol açmaktadır.

Nesne yönelimli mimariyi, bu tez estetik bazlı evrensel bir iletişim biçimini mimarlık disiplinine sağlama potansiyeli açısından irdelemektedir. Daha detaylı olarak, bu çalışma Mark Foster Gage'in çağdaş Nesne Yönelimli Ontoloji felsefesini mimarlığa tercüme edişini incelemektedir. Gage'in eleştirisi mimarlığın ölçülebilir formlara tercümesi esnasında daha pazarlanabilir, daha kolay anlaşılır, daha basitleştirilmiş kavram, ilişki ve söylev-gerçek-varlığı birbirinden ayıran anlatılara indirgenmesini içermektedir.

Bu tez ilk olarak, mimarlık kapsamında ikili bir işleve hizmet eden para simgesinin bir incelemesini sunar: (a) para ve retoriğin çağdaş disiplinde nasıl işlediğini anlamak (yalnızca aldatma ve kâr amaçlı değil, aynı zamanda iletişim ve alışverişin “nesnel” olarak gerçekleştirilebilmesine olanak tanımak amaçlı); (b) Nesne Yönelimli Ontoloji’de estetiğin incelenmesi için karşılaştırmalı bir model sağlamak.

Bu alıřma, nesne ynelimli bir mimarinin genel bir incelenmesinin ardından M. F. Gage Architects'in “The Tower on the 57th Street, NYC” projesini ve projenin ierdiđi listeleme ve “kitbashing” tekniklerini irdelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hakikat Sonrası, Estetik, Nesne Ynelimli Mimari, Retorik, Mimari İletiřim

To those who inspired it.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

### ABBREVIATIONS

OOO – Object-Oriented Ontology

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Definition of the Problematic

The underlying premise of this thesis is that the modalities of exchange and communication occurring in the architectural discipline deserve significant attention, especially in the context of contemporary debates revolving around the notion of post-truth. The operating channels of architecture are intertwined with how various things are addressed, such as objects, disciplinary knowledge, or even social, environmental, or political concerns. The post-truth condition is undertaken in this thesis, particularly from the scope that it suggests a wholesale environment of information production and dissemination. It also includes anxiety over the constitution of common sense, implying that present systems of judgment are in a state of crisis and failing to provide a standard of commensurability in this wholesale environment. Architecture is a field that operates through a composite of both tangible and intangible knowledge, and not all disciplinary knowledge can be subjected to various forms of measuring/judgment standards without any deficiency. Consequently, the mediums of communication and exchange in architecture gain relevance in the context of post-truth.

This thesis problematizes architecture's reduction to "a series of consumable sound bites"<sup>1</sup> for translating both the tangible and intangible domains of the discipline into calculable formats.<sup>2</sup> The term "a series of consumable sound bites" is used in this

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<sup>1</sup> The term is borrowed from Mark Foster Gage, "Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture," *Log*, no. 33 (2015): 104.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, the problematization of architecture's "reduction" is addressed in the fashion M. F. Gage formulates the subject. The following is an example paragraph that touches upon this issue:

thesis in referring to the discipline's reliance on ever more marketable, easily comprehensible, over-simplified concepts, relations, and narratives.

To supply the intensive wholesale environment of information production and exchange in the post-truth era, architecture is subjected to various modes of coding.<sup>3</sup> These processes of encoding serve the purpose of making the obscure domains communicable, assessable, and exchangeable, providing them external objectivity, measurability, or commensurability. In many cases, architecture is subjected to various narratives.<sup>4</sup> The discipline becomes communicable through various languages, including rhetoric. Furthermore, in many instances, the discipline is exposed to various standards and external metricities for providing a demonstrable, common mode of judgment to supply objectivity.<sup>5</sup> This thesis exhibits an uneasiness with how architecture is introduced into the communication systems. The facilitation

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“Yet as architecture straddles the lines of engineering, art, design, and science—it is immune from criticism on an individual level as it does not exist within the purview of any particular category. So, architecture exists in a vacuum-state, immune from artistic criticism by virtue of it being a scientific and engineering-based endeavor, and likewise immune from true science and engineering criticism and analysis as it is seen as an artistic endeavor. As such, it largely went unnoticed when architecture became a primarily rhetorical endeavor and perhaps now even a mere large-scale outgrowth of advertising. As in advertising, products propose to solve individual problems, perhaps problems users weren't even aware of having, until they were told they did. So too is architecture today expected to solve specific and easily understandable problems, rather than considering how it might produce equitable and just spaces of our future co-existence in broader social registers. That architecture can and should solve problems is not in question, that individual and easily represented problems outweigh larger pursuits of social humanitarian engagement perhaps should be.”

Mark Foster Gage, *Designing Social Equality: Architecture, Aesthetics, and the Perception of Democracy* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 29-30.

<sup>3</sup> The terms “coding” and “code” are used in this thesis regarding the terms meaning in semiotics.

It is crucial to note that the act of coding is different than translation. For more please see Evangelos Kourdis, “The Notion of Code in Semiotics and Semiotically Informed Translation Studies. A Preliminary Study,” 2018, 311–25.

<sup>4</sup> The buildings entangled by various “narratives,” exemplified by the architect M. F. Gage, involve Santiago Calatrava's World Trade Center Transportation Hub resembling a bird and Daniel Libeskind's Denver Art Museum emulating the contour of the neighboring mountains.

<sup>5</sup> Given the importance of sustainable design, assessment, and accreditation platforms such as LEED are indispensable for current architectural practice, but they also have drawback, some of which M. F. Gage frequently addresses.

of communication in objective means involves the creation of an impersonal cogito over the subject's consciousness which is indifferent to its objects, including truth as an object of exchange. One of the challenges of constructing an objective coding of architecture is to avoid jeopardizing truth and reducing the discipline in the process.

Considering the concerns above, this thesis examines how aesthetics, as proposed by Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO),<sup>6</sup> promises to function as a universal language, granting universal literacy and commensurability encompassing all domains of reality, including even the most obscure corners. Within the Object-Oriented Ontology discourse, aesthetics is argued for holding the potential to aestheticize everything, and the Object-Oriented Ontology is discussed to be capable of becoming "A New Theory of Everything,"<sup>7</sup> as Graham Harman's book title suggests. Within this context, aesthetics seeks to become the principal medium through which all kinds of interactions occur. This involves, but is not limited to, the interactions of the architectural discipline with reality. Therefore, the reconsideration of aesthetics in Object-Oriented Ontology offers architectural discipline a renewal of its functioning mechanisms by establishing aesthetics as its primary medium of

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<sup>6</sup> Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) is a philosophical school of thought emerged in the late 1990's, founded by Graham Harman. It is widely known for being against anthropocentric and correlationist approaches, and for placing objects as the most basic constituent parts of reality.

It is strongly associated with the speculative realist philosophy and influenced by Martin Heidegger. The Object-Oriented Ontology is against anthropocentrism and correlationism. It is critical of the approaches that define the reality in correlation to the human subject. In OOO, all things in the reality exist equally in a non-hierarchical order. It shifts the focus away from people and toward objects as the central figure.

While opposing the correlationist tendency, in which objects are exclusively considered in terms of how they relate to humans, OOO advocates the idea that objects exist independently from humans and all other objects. It emphasizes the idea of real objects being autonomous and withdrawn from everything else. Objects include fictional, immaterial, and cultural entities such as corporations, governments, people, societies, cities, and even literary figures, in addition to real and natural objects. In examining how objects interact with one another, OOO embodies a speculative approach based on aesthetics as an alternative to the literal approaches to the objects.

<sup>7</sup> Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Pelican Books, 2018).

interaction. The interest of this study involves particularly how this “aesthetic turn” operates in the context of architecture.

In examining aesthetic turn, this thesis refers extensively to an architectural project with a significant role as an actor in the Object-Oriented Ontology discourse, namely The Tower on West 57th Street. The Mark Foster Architects designed this project in 2015. The company’s principal architect, M. F. Gage, is also an Associate Professor at Yale School of Architecture and an active OOO participant. The project itself is unrealized, and it could be termed paper architecture, not as a standalone product but as an active agent in the architectural discourse’s interactions with OOO.

The Tower on West 57th Street<sup>8</sup> inherits concern over the architectural discipline’s loss of values in seeking to establish justifiability and commensurability. It is concerned that the architectural discipline is losing its actual effectuality and richness while subjecting itself to various narratives.<sup>9</sup> This involves an unbalanced proportionating of individual architectural concerns of a project over its entirety of the architectural qualities. A recurring example in Gage’s works is the issue of sustainability. While he has no objection to sustainability and acknowledges that it is extremely important, he critiques circumstances where sustainability becomes an effortless way to justify an architectural project’s success. Being sustainable is a highly tangible, easily comprehensible, and even more easily advertisable domain of architectural concerns. To avoid architecture from being reduced to individual figures for easier communication, the Tower on West 57th Street embraces aesthetics as its form of engagement with humans and the remaining entirety of reality. In doing so, aesthetics is not a replacement for anything, such as sustainability, but an overarching medium for everything. This project is discussed in depth because

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<sup>8</sup> For the official project website, please see “W 57th Street Residential Tower,” MFGA, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.mfga.com/khaleesi>.

<sup>9</sup> The term “narratives” is used for referring to the texts accompanying objects in ways other than descriptions.

it argues for the feasibility of architecture as an autonomous discipline that does not seek its validity in other sources. Gage, the principal architect of the project, speaks of an architecture emerging from nothing in his article “Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Design in Architecture” as follows:

“Under the banner of OOO, architecture has the responsibility to emerge from the careful study of - absolutely nothing. Architecture can be justified only by its existence and not by reductively isolated key relationships.”<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, this article focuses on the design technique utilized in the project, known as kitbashing, to clarify how Tower on West 57th Street proposes establishing such an architecture. Kitbashing constructs a method through which architecture can emancipate from its dependence on various narratives that transform the discipline into “a series of consumable sound bites.”<sup>11</sup> Through this technique, the tower project aspires to be sustainable, context-aware, socially engaged without ever being confined to any of these features. Furthermore, the technique becomes one of the ways that the building embraces aesthetics as its medium of exchange and communication.

In this thesis, the notion of aesthetics is referred to in parallel to the conceptualization within the Object-Oriented Ontology discourse. Gage writes in his book *Designing Social Equality* that aesthetics is frequently perceived in the contemporary context as “a mere question of beauty and the ‘taste’ required to judge it.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, he also notes that aesthetics for OOO “describes the means that govern our very access to reality, and what may be withheld from us, as humans, from that reality.”<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, aesthetics is a means of engagement with reality, and all

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<sup>10</sup> Gage, “Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture,” 104.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 4.

included within.<sup>14</sup> In parallel to OOO’s approach to the concept, Gage refers to how Jacques Rancière refers to aesthetics as the “distribution of the sensible”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Gage outlines what aesthetics entails to Rancière as a “framework” of social reality:

“Rancière describes the very aesthetic framework of our social reality as the 'sensible order that parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world' and that it sets “horizons and modalities of what is invisible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made or done’.”<sup>3</sup>

Object-Oriented Ontology’s view of aesthetics, particularly that of Gage, on whom this study focuses heavily, is centered on the issues of access to, engagement with objects, and distribution of sensible things. In response to opposing approaches to aesthetics that tend to assign labels such as elitist or illusory, Gage proposes the following formulation of aesthetics:

“Aesthetics today is being understood as nearly the exact reverse: the discourse that governs our understanding of our existential and social realities, with how we understand our rights, how we identify our equality, and how we can express beliefs in a free and open ‘distribution of the sensible’.”<sup>16</sup>

The motivation behind the focus on Object-Oriented Ontology lies in the mutual interest in between architecture and this philosophical discourse and in their fruitful cohesion. Graham Harman (1968–), the leading figure in OOO, notes in his book *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* that architecture has been one of the disciplines which promptly and passionately embraced OOO.<sup>17</sup> In addition

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<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that aesthetics is etymologically linked to the Greek term “aisthētikos,” which is derived from the words “aisthēta,” meaning “perceptible things” and “aisthēsthai,” meaning “perceive.” Please see “Definition of aesthetic,” in *Lexico.com* (Oxford University Press, 2021), <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/aesthetic>.

Aisthētikos means “of or for perception by the senses.” Please see Harper Douglas, “Etymology of aesthetic,” in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/aesthetic>.

<sup>15</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Harman, *Object Oriented Ontology*, 246.

to the participation of many architects in the OOO debates, the level of contact is best put by the fact that the philosopher Graham Harman himself, the most prominent figure in OOO, is working at Southern California Institute of Architecture<sup>18</sup> as the Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Liberal Arts Program Coordinator, where he joined the faculty in 2016.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the OOO discourse in architecture does not operate in-between an enclosed group of interested people. It also includes an interdisciplinary atmosphere where external figures also get involved in critical ways. Examples of such events are the writings of Patrik Schumacher about OOO,<sup>20</sup> his discussions with Gage (not about OOO, but with a figure involved in it),<sup>21</sup> and the architectural exchange event in London, 2013 titled *Graham Harman: Is there an Object-Oriented Architecture?*<sup>22</sup> All six participants in the discussion on OOO—namely, Peter Carl, Jonathan Hale, Lorens Holm, Patrick Lynch, Peg Rawes, and Adam Sharr—are prominent figures in the contemporary architectural discourse but they are not involved with OOO, unlike Gage. In short, the particular focus on the formulation of aesthetics in OOO stems from its potentially beneficial exchanges with architecture. It is a discourse that offers crucial to architecture in the post-truth

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<sup>18</sup> Southern California Institute of Architecture has been an important hub for the dialogue between architecture and OOO. Not only Graham Harman but also other names including David Ruy, one of the early adopters of OOO in architecture, are associated with this institution.

<sup>19</sup>“Philosopher Graham Harman to Join SCI-Arc,” February 23, 2016, <https://www.sciarc.edu/news/2016/philosopher-graham-harman-to-join-sci-arc/>.

<sup>20</sup> One of Patrik Schumacher’s papers on OOO is published in the book where Graham Harman and Mark Foster Gage are also contributors. Please see Patrik Schumacher, “Critique of Object Oriented Architecture,” in *CENTER 21: The Secret Life of Buildings*, ed. Michael Benedikt and Kory Bieg, 2018th ed. (Center for American Architecture and Design, n.d.).

For another paper by Schumacher on OOO, please see Patrik Schumacher, “Architecture’s Next Ontological Innovation,” *Tarp: Architecture Manual*, no. Spring (2012): 97–110.

<sup>21</sup>“Two Leading Architects Talk about Their Divergent Public Policy Views,” Arch, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://newsarchive.arch.tamu.edu/news/2017/4/5/leading-architects-divergent-views/>.

<sup>22</sup> For more information about the event, please see “*Graham Harman: Is There an Object-Oriented Architecture?*,” *Architecture Exchange*, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://architecture.exchange/exchange/graham-harman-object-oriented-architecture/>.

For the publication, please see Joseph Bedford, *Is There an Object Oriented Architecture?: Engaging Graham Harman* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).

era: a new form of access to reality (/of objects), including access to societal concerns, sustainability requirements, and all other domains.

In looking into aesthetics in OOO and the Tower on West 57th Street, this study aims to question how aesthetics can be an alternative medium for architecture concerning the problems of communication and exchange stemming from the lack of commensurability in the architectural discipline. To supply a framework for a better understanding of how aesthetics operates, the second chapter of the thesis visits Marcel Hénaff's book *The Price of Truth: Money, Gift, and Philosophy*<sup>23</sup> and Brian Rotman's book *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*.<sup>24</sup>

Hénaff's book *The Price of Truth* studies how money becomes a universal language that can subject everything to itself. The money-language is examined for its ability to subordinate tangible items to itself. Hénaff investigates how money achieves to attribute a price to everything, even to the impossible and the withdrawn, which is truth itself. As a result of the economization of everything, even truth obtains momentary objectivity and becomes speakable of through the medium of the money economy. Truth becomes involved in the social exchange system. Understanding the economization of everything in OOO is remarkably relevant and helpful in both understanding and gaining a critical lens toward the proposed aestheticization of everything.

The idiosyncrasy of the money economy is not limited to its subordination of truth to a price but also how this process does not sacrifice the truth in the process without damaging its non-anthropocentric fabric. It only gains a temporary tangibility in the form of a coating or fashioning, which does not interfere with its essence/reality. Furthermore, this fashioning is always temporary and detachable. Speaking of truth

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<sup>23</sup> Marcel Hénaff, *The Price of Truth: Gift, Money, and Philosophy*, trans. Jean Louis Morhange (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan Press, 1993).

and exchanging it without sacrificing anything is pertinent to discussions on how the architectural discipline is encountering numerous shortcomings when translating itself, especially its intangible domains, into speakable and exchangeable bits and pieces.

Hénaff's book provides a critical lens into the Object-Oriented Ontology's aesthetic approaches to truth. Aesthetics in OOO seeks to achieve a similar level of literacy to the money economy. On the other hand, their treatment of the nature of their products fundamentally differs. Aesthetics aims to become more than a means of communication and intends to supply access to reality and become a theory of everything. In contrast, the money economy only serves as a medium of exchange, uninterested in the nature of its products.

For this reason, money-economy can integrate truth into an anthropocentric domain without harming its essence. The truth does not become exposed to the human realm but survives through the means of the external coating provided by the price. The commentary on Hénaff's book helps examine how the aestheticization of everything occurs and to what degree it provides a sustainable form of exchange without harming the truth.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework & Literature Review**

To begin, I would like to briefly mention the sources on post-truth in accompany with sources referring to the concept of truth itself. A significant quantity of literature on the history and theories of truth has been published since the development of post-truth debates. To mention a few, philosopher McIntyre's book *Post-Truth*<sup>25</sup> examines contemporary conceptions of truth and their postmodern roots. A different approach is seen in Julian Baggini's book *A Short History of Truth*, where he

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<sup>25</sup> Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2018).

explores a taxonomy of “sources and justifications of truth-claims,” such as eternal, authoritative, moral, and empirical truths.<sup>26</sup> When it comes to the influence of postmodernism in the formation of the current idea of truth, Yael Brahms adopts a similar point of view with McIntyre.<sup>27</sup> Even if both scholars’ goals are to analyze the post-truth era, their books also provide a detailed examination of the truth discourse.

McIntyre reviews the post-truth era, focusing on its development, causes, and consequences in his book *Post-Truth*. He describes post-truth with the following words: “Contention that feelings are more accurate than facts, for the purpose of the political subordination of reality.”<sup>28</sup> According to his research, science denial and cognitive bias are key factors in the emergence of the post-truth. He mentions that the post-truth era suffers from an eclecticism in the information usage. Furthermore, he argues that post-truth is closely related with postmodernism. A brief glossary of the key concepts McIntyre uses in speaking of post-truth is as follows: Alternative facts, Backfire effect, Cognitive dissonance, Confirmation bias, Dunning–Kruger effect, Fake news, False equivalence, Information silo, Motivated reasoning, Prestige press.<sup>29</sup>

Yael Brahms shares McIntyre’s act of relating the post-truth to postmodernism. She highlights the relevance of postmodernism with the following words:

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<sup>26</sup> Julian Baggini, *A Short History of Truth: Consolations for a Post-Truth World* (London: Quercus Publishing, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Yael Brahms, “Philosophy of Post-Truth,” *Institute for National Security Studies*, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>29</sup> In parallel to the problematization of falsity and deception, the Post-Truth discussions draw upon rhetorics and bullshitting due to their indifference to the truth (in contrast to lying, which precisely sets itself against the truth). For the discussion of bullshit in the context of Post-truth, please see Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2018), 9. An article on bullshit and rhetorics in the context of architecture is Sarp Tanrıdağ, “A Constructive and Speculative Case of Bullshit Art: The Etchings of GB Piranesi,” ed. Leszek Sosnowski, *The Polish Journal of Aesthetics* 63, no. 4 (2021): 157–71.

“It is customary to attribute to postmodernism the rejection of a single objective truth in favor of a multitude of subjective and relative truths, and the argument that there is no single true scientific theory and no single meta-narrative, but rather a multitude of theories and narratives that are created from a variety of perspectives, none of which take precedence over the other.”<sup>30</sup>

Apart from the contemporary discussions, it is also valuable to revisit the works of the canons better grasp the correlation of the post-truth and postmodernism. One of such sources is the book written by Gilles Deleuze on Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>31</sup> In the book *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze evaluates Nietzsche’s conception of truth as more concerned with challenging the idea of truth per se than tackling the question of veracity.<sup>32</sup> Deleuze’s interpretation of Nietzsche suggests a problematization of the will to truth: “He asks what truth means as a concept, what forces and what will, qualified in that way, this concept presupposes by right.”<sup>33</sup>

Michel Foucault is another postmodern philosopher who shows interest in truth. He is especially focused on truth as a product of power relationships. Daniele Lorenzini quotes Foucault’s view of truth as follows: “a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements.”<sup>34</sup> In light of Foucault, truth is referred as a discursive object that is constantly reproduced.

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<sup>30</sup> Brahms, “Philosophy of Post-Truth,” 11.

<sup>31</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “The Concept of Truth,” in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, ed. Hugh Tomlinson (NY, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 94–97.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Daniele Lorenzini, “What Is a” Regime of Truth”?,” *Le Foucauldien* 1, no. 1 (2015).

Rayner,<sup>35</sup> Heikkinen,<sup>36</sup> Prozorov,<sup>37</sup> and Foucault<sup>38</sup> are some other sources on the discursivity of truth.

A substantial body of literature exists on architecture's relation to truth. Karsten Harries' works involve a stress on the correlation of truth and truthfulness with architecture.<sup>39</sup> His investigation of perspective notion and the reality, concentrating on ontology and aesthetics, illustrates the transformations from the medieval to the modern and postmodern periods. His works show that the architectural debates linked to reality notion also relate to discussions about truth. Eisenman's critique of fictionality in architecture is an important source in this regard.<sup>40</sup>

The article "Architecture Thinking in a 'Post-Truth Era': Recalibrations through Analytic Philosophy"<sup>41</sup> highlights the underappreciated role of analytical philosophy in architectural history and theory. Even if architectural thought has been benefiting from philosophy for a long time, the authors claim that in the late 1980s "architecture positioned itself as meaningful cultural intervention with reference to many philosophical perspectives on the social and the aesthetic."<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the

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<sup>35</sup> Timothy Rayner, "Foucault, Heidegger, and the History of Truth," in *Foucault and Philosophy*, ed. Christopher Falzon and Timothy O'Leary (Wiley Online Library, 2010), 60–77.

<sup>36</sup> Sakari Heikkinen, Jussi Silvonen, and Hannu Simola, "Technologies of Truth: Peeling Foucault's Triangular Onion," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 20, no. 1 (1999): 141–57.

<sup>37</sup> Sergei Prozorov, "Why Is There Truth? Foucault in the Age of Post-Truth Politics," *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 26, no. 1 (2019).

<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109–33.

<sup>39</sup> Karsten Harries, "On Truth and Lie in Architecture," *Via*, no. 7 (1987): 47–57; *Infinity and Perspective* (MIT Press, 2002); *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art,"* vol. 57 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Peter Eisenman, "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, The End of the End," in *Theorizing A New Agenda For Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965-1995*, ed. Kate Nesbitt (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> Karan August and Lara Schrijver, "Architecture Thinking in a 'Post-Truth Era': Recalibrations through Analytic Philosophy," *FOOTPRINT*, 2017, 1–10.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

authors criticize architecture for being excessively constrained by continental philosophy. While the central topics of continental philosophy are developed further—metaphysics and ethics—other domains of philosophy, such as epistemology and logic are neglected. The authors draw attention on the link between analytical philosophy and architecture—mostly focused on Gottlob Frege (1848–1925).

Truth can also be undertaken as part of the discourses on the production of knowledge in architectural discourse. In this context, Foucault’s books are again highly relevant, particularly *The Archeology of Knowledge*<sup>43</sup> and *The Order of Things*.<sup>44</sup> Some of the additional literature on this topic are O’Farrell’s analysis of Foucauldian truth<sup>45</sup> and Foucault’s work on Nietzsche and genealogy.<sup>46</sup>

Following the sources on post-truth and truth in general, I would like to mention several of the sources and figures in Object-Oriented Ontology and its connections with architecture. There have been prominent architectural figures somehow involved in OOO discourse: David Ruy, Mark Foster Gage, Tom Wiscombe, Michael Young, Kutan Ayata, and Ferda Kolatan, to name a few. In addition to the individual figures that show interest in OOO, there has also been valuable interest shown in the OOO by major figures in contemporary architecture. One of the most prominent figures is Patrik Schumacher, who authored the essays “Critique of Object Oriented Architecture,”<sup>47</sup> and “Architecture’s Next Ontological Innovation”<sup>48</sup> and

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<sup>43</sup> Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1972).

<sup>44</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> Clare O’Farrell, “Truth and Culture,” in *Michel Foucault, Core Cultural Theorists Series* (SAGE Publications, 2005), 83–95.

<sup>46</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald D. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 139–64.

<sup>47</sup> Schumacher, “Critique of Object Oriented Architecture.”

<sup>48</sup> Schumacher, “Architecture’s Next Ontological Innovation.”

participated in a discussion with Mark Foster Gage, a leading figure in OOO in architecture, on built environment public policies at Rudder Theatre on the Texas A&M campus in 2017.<sup>49</sup>

Apart from the interest shown in OOO by architects, it is important to note that this coherence is somehow reciprocal, best exemplified by the fact that Graham Harman, the most prominent figure in OOO is working at the Southern California Institute of Architecture as the Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Liberal Arts Program Coordinator, where he joined the faculty in 2016.<sup>50</sup>

In the book *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, Graham Harman discusses what OOO is and how he reads the notion of aesthetics.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, he describes the underlying characteristics of OOO's conceptualization of reality according to OOO in "Realism without Materialism."<sup>52</sup> He considers aesthetics "the root of all philosophy," and fundamental for grasping the reality. His books *Art and Objects*,<sup>53</sup> as well as *The Quadruple Object*<sup>54</sup> are also heavily cited in this study. In addition to Harman's writings, Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology*<sup>55</sup> and *Hyperobjects*<sup>56</sup> are two more important sources on OOO.

Mark Foster Gage is an influential figure in the OOO-architectural dialogue. His academic works and practical projects demonstrate the potential for aesthetics to

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<sup>49</sup> "Two Leading Architects Talk about Their Divergent Public Policy Views," Arch, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://newsarchive.arch.tamu.edu/news/2017/4/5/leading-architects-divergent-views/>.

<sup>50</sup> "Graham Harman," SCI-Arc, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.sciarc.edu/people/faculty/graham-harman>.

<sup>51</sup> Harman, *Object Oriented Ontology*, 246.

<sup>52</sup> Graham Harman, "Realism without Materialism," *SubStance* 40, no. 2 (2011): 52–72.

<sup>53</sup> Graham Harman, *Art and Objects* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).

<sup>54</sup> Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>56</sup> Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

function as a mediator for architecture, humans, and reality. He states in *Designing Social Equality*:

“Through writing this book, it is my hope that the observations that follow offer no concrete claims as much as act as an invitation for us to reconsider the intertwined social and spatial relationships between individuals, their assumptions of truth and reality, and the unknown fields of potential that surround those assumptions.”<sup>57</sup>

Gage problematizes architecture’s unsuccessful social engagement and seeks novel ways for its improvement. Despite Gage’s involvement in the OOO discussions, this book does not stress upon the promotion of OOO but focuses on exploring ways for architecture to respond the social inequality problems. Throughout the book, he adopts an approach based on Object-Oriented Ontology and argues about aesthetics in the context of architecture. Gage, like Harman, views aesthetics as a way of understanding reality, asserting that aesthetics affirms a certain barrier between humans and reality. His book encourages the reassessment of “the intertwined social and spatial relationships between individuals, their assumptions of truth and reality, and the unknown fields of potential that surround those assumptions.”<sup>58</sup> Architecture has the capacity to act as a link between reality and people. Moreover, the architectural objects are discursive involved with the society’s “assumptions of truth.”

Another significant work by Gage is “Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy In Architecture.”<sup>59</sup> In this article, he discusses his observation on an inclination to characterize and limit architecture by its relations. He advocates an Object-Oriented Architecture in exploring the possibility of an architecture existing autonomous from its external relations. He refers to Object-Oriented ontology as a philosophical realism which opposes to the idealist tendency to

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<sup>57</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Gage, “Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture.”

consider the reality as a mental construct. In OOO, the reality exists independent of the human mind. He also points out that Idealism has predominantly governed Continental and Analytical philosophies. Furthermore, he draws attention on the contrast between Philosophical Realism and Naïve Realism. The latter holds that the existence of objects is limited to the human perception.

Graham Harman's theory of OOO is heavily dependent upon Martin Heidegger's tool-analysis, which he claims to undertake the approach to the tools differently than Heidegger.<sup>60</sup> According to this theory, real object withdraws from the sight in serving a purpose, such as the bodily organs that a person is unconscious about in everyday life. Only when the equipment fails and its function is disturbed, then the tool breaks and the object appear to the consciousness in other forms—like the bodily organs appearing to the consciousness in the case of a medical problem.<sup>61</sup> One of Harman's remarks is the distinguishing of an object to its practical activity from the substance of a thing preceding the function. Any attempt of revealing an object in entirety remains shallow and superficial in comparison to its complexity:

“Whereas Heideggerians hold that the usefulness of objects for humans precedes their independent reality, it is clearly the reverse. The point of the tool-analysis is that reality always runs deeper than any objectification.”<sup>62</sup>

Gage integrates the tool theory of Heidegger into the form-function debate in architecture. He discusses that when function precedes the form of the architectural object, it renders the object invisible. The real complexity of the object is disregarded in subjecting architecture to simple and deterministic functions. He proceeds the function discourse delving into the issue of problem diagnosis by architects—social diagnosis, more particularly:

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<sup>60</sup> For Harman's in-depth commentary on Heidegger's theory, please see Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2002).

<sup>61</sup> Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 36.

<sup>62</sup> Graham Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism: Essays and Lectures* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2010), 118.

“The critical-cum-architectural translation of this means that the strategy of social diagnosis by the privileged perceiver, the architect, despite the best of intentions, can simply never truly address questions of social equality-as it inherently assumes a hierarchy which produces the very same inequality it seeks to remedy.”<sup>63</sup>

He argues the aesthetic theory as an alternative approach that can emancipate architecture from losing its effectuality. Nevertheless, reductionism and eclecticism are praised in contemporary architecture, abandoning reality’s profoundness and complexity. For him, aesthetics is capable of liberating architecture from its defining set of pseudo-scientific operating mechanisms. He turns to aesthetics looking for an “expansion rather than reduction of architectural ambitions.”<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, he questions people’s understanding of reality to reveal some of the foundational principles of inequality. He underlines the stabilizing activity in knowing a thing, referencing Elaine Scarry, Jacques Rancière, and Harman. Knowing has much to do with the power relations which subordinate the perception. Moreover, it is related to the act of categorization of things, granting the ability of judgement to decide whether something falls into a class or not. Despite the existence of things in a gradient-like spectrum, social inequality is founded on the ambition to fixations and categorizations. Knowing what a human is means determining a measure for humanness and what distinguishes individuals. Gage makes it very clear by citing the philosopher Jacques Rancière that equality cannot be established from non-equality and by improving the categorization mechanisms in the society. It is not possible to eliminate racism while children learn what humans are and how do they are distinguished as a distinct race within the continuum of beings. Consequently, he advocates the elimination of any category for the sake of liberating the complete spectrum of beings.

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<sup>63</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*, 47.

<sup>64</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*, 55.

Gage delves into the concept of Object-Oriented Ontology in reference to the problem of inequality because in OOO, objects exist in the reality nonhierarchically—they call this a flat ontology. Furthermore, as in Kantian things-in-themselves, OOO locates objects in a realm that is inaccessible to humans. Gage discovers the prospect of preventing inequality in the inaccessibility of things, since the inaccessibility is for everyone, and nobody is able to profess supremacy. Following the discussion on inequality, Gage infers that architecture has the capacity to be an archetype of the social equality:

“Architecture, in this sense, can be redefined, not as the production of individual buildings for shelter, or even collections of those buildings into urban environments; but instead as the very mechanism through which humans, directly or tangentially via allusion to the unknown and unknowable, access, see, and experience the realities in which they exist.”<sup>65</sup>

Some of the sources on OOO based architectural approaches worth mentioning are, in addition to the previously referenced sources, David Ruy’s “Returning to (Strange) Objects,”<sup>66</sup> and “Weird Realism,”<sup>67</sup> Ferda Kolatan’s symposium paper “A Revised Real Or How to Move beyond a Paradigm of Facts,” Simon Weir’s conversation with Harman in “Architecture and Object-Oriented Ontology”<sup>68</sup> and an OOO architecture conference book *Is There an Object-Oriented Architecture*.<sup>69</sup>

Apart from the individuals who are participating in OOO in various ways, I would like to highlight some external sources of information, particularly those who have critical viewpoints. One of such materials is the “Metaphors for Nothing”<sup>70</sup> by Bryan

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<sup>65</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*, 120.

<sup>66</sup> David Ruy, “Returning to (Strange) Objects,” *Tarp Architecture Manual*, Spring 4 (2012).

<sup>67</sup> David Ruy, “Weird Realism,” *The Estranged Object*, Edited by Michael Young, 2015, 7–9.

<sup>68</sup> Ferda Kolatan, “A Revised Real. Or How to Move beyond a Paradigm of Facts,” in *Transvaluation: Making the World Matter*, 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Graham Harman and Simon Weir, “Architecture and Object-Oriented Ontology: Simon Weir in Conversation with Graham Harman,” *Architecture Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2021).

<sup>70</sup> Bryan E Norwood, “Metaphors for Nothing,” *Log*, no. 33 (2015): 107–19.

E. Norwood. Hélène Frichot is another key figure to mention. She takes a critical look at OOO and its dialogue with architecture in her book “Creative Ecologies: Theorizing the Practice of Architecture”:

“The problem is rather the kinds of claims that come to be made so as to legitimize a form-finding experiment, and the excuses made so that an architect might wash their hands of the implications of installing a design project on the ground in relation to its specific environment-world. A further, no doubt irritable, complaint is, yet again, the lack of representation of women and minorities in these ventures.”<sup>71</sup>

She also further notes a criticism over the descriptive poetics and the technique of list-making, both of which are thoroughly discussed in the scope of this thesis:

“Descriptive poetics and list-making frenzies replace more complex accounts of the truly messy relational matrix that entangles things and their transformations. To this I want to cry out in response, OOOh! No!”<sup>72</sup>

Lastly, in speaking of OOO, it is also potentially worthwhile to count in some of the student works from various architectural schools. In the thesis titled “The Anxiety of Architecture: Design Uncertainty in a Subjective World,”<sup>73</sup> Timothy Lobsinger focuses on subjectivity and the absence of truth in the postmodern era, and the anxiety that comes with that within the context of architecture. Subsequently, he notes that his thesis “considers how a philosophy of realism can inform the architect on understanding and working within the bounds of a world where subjective experience rules.”<sup>74</sup> Another document is “Mount of Things: An Expedition in Object-Oriented Ontology Architecture”<sup>75</sup> by Laurence Crouzet. This graduation

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<sup>71</sup> Hélène Frichot, *Creative Ecologies: Theorizing the Practice of Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 108.

<sup>72</sup> Frichot, *Creative Ecologies: Theorizing the Practice of Architecture*, 109.

<sup>73</sup> Timothy Lobsinger, “The Anxiety of Architecture: Design Uncertainty in a Subjective World” (Master’s Thesis, Ottawa, Ontario, Azrieli School of Architecture & Urbanism Carleton University, 2015).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>75</sup> Laurence Crouzet, “Mount of Things : An Expedition in Object-Oriented Ontology Architecture,” Graduate Research [Non-Thesis], May 2020.

project examines OOO with a concern over the equality of all things and beings, negating the concept of ontological privilege.

Overall, these recent studies, as well as a few canonical works cited in between, show how post-truth, truth, OOO, and architecture as a subject are all explored and problematized in the framework of this research. Furthermore, they intend to be more than a one-sided examination of the major discourses referred to in this study.

### 1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the aim and structure of the thesis, contextualizing and presenting the associated existing literature as well as to framing it.

The second chapter delivers a commentary on Marcel Hénaff's book *The Price of Truth: Money, Gift, and Philosophy*<sup>76</sup> to provide framework and assistance in understanding how aesthetics functions as a universal language in Object-Oriented Ontology. Hénaff's work deconstructs the relationship between money and truth in the backdrop of the Sophists in Ancient Greece. It shows how money gains temporary commensurability by being labeled with a price. Before looking into *The Price of Truth*, this thesis explores the first two chapters of Brian Rotman's *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*<sup>77</sup> to get a better idea of how the money economy works as a meta language and how items are coded through a price.

The second chapter is divided into three sections. The first introduces the problematization of the lack of commensurability in architecture and the problem of exchange and communication in post-truth. Consequently, it looks at how aesthetics works in OOO and how it relates to post-truth. The second subchapter focuses on

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<sup>76</sup> Hénaff, *The Price of Truth: Gift, Money, and Philosophy*.

<sup>77</sup> Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*.

Hénaff's work, led by a discussion on Rotman's books first two chapters. The final subchapter remarks on why OOO's aestheticization of everything is critically pertinent to architecture in the setting of post-truth.

The third chapter explores M. F. Gage's problematization of the narratives and the reduction of architecture. In doing so, it looks at OOO's general problematization of object reduction, examining the conceptualization of aesthetics in OOO in depth, elucidating how aesthetics provides indirect access to reality, and why an aesthetic turn is an alternative for architecture to overcome its reduction. Furthermore, this chapter supplies a theoretical basis for the examination of the case study, the West 57<sup>th</sup> Street, NYC project by M. F. Gage Architects, in the following section.

The fourth chapter scrutinizes the tower in west 57<sup>th</sup> street, NYC—a project of the architectural company led by Gage. The building is relevant to the context of this study, regarding that it seeks to embrace aesthetics as its primary medium of communication and exchange. One facet of the building contributing to the aestheticization of architecture is the kitbashing technique, an architectural correspondence of the listing notion in OOO.

Prior to the analyses of the case study, this chapter reviews the techniques of kitbashing, listing, and the Latour litanies, all of which are interwoven concepts.<sup>78</sup> In addition to G. Harman's and Gage's works, this part gives considerable attention on Ian Bogost's book *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing*<sup>79</sup> to better grasp the kitbashing and listing notions.

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<sup>78</sup> Although this thesis discusses the listing technique as outlined in OOO, Harman points out that the lists are not his creation. Moreover, they are sometimes referred to as Latour Litanies, particularly Ian Bogost. Nevertheless, Harman points out that they are date earlier than Bruno Latour. Bogost refers to them as such because Latour employs them so well. For Harman's speech about the lists and litanies, please see "More Speculative Realism," interview by Bruce Sterling. *Wired*, June 17, 2011. <https://www.wired.com/2011/06/more-speculative-realism/>.

<sup>79</sup> Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

The concluding chapter gives an overview by superimposing the preceding chapters' topics, reiterating on the relevance of aesthetics in OOO for the problem of communication and exchange in architecture in the post-truth era.

## CHAPTER 2

### AESTHETICS AS A MEDIUM FOR EXCHANGE AND COMMUNICATION IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA

Along with the recent developments in information technologies, complemented by political turmoil on a global scale, the name post-truth was coined to refer to information bias, the devaluation of objectivity and facts over subjective and personal opinions. Although none of the problems are occurring for the first time and the discourse on truth is ages old, one aspect that potentially gives the post-truth era its own identity is the advancements in technology, the consequences, and the possibilities unraveled. There are inevitable consequences of this post-truth era in architecture and many other disciplines that function through more tacit knowledge that can hardly be subjected to the criteria of factuality. Within the current discourses of post-truth, the issue is not only how to produce more knowledge, more facts, or even to say more truths. Post-truth is a condition stimulated by social media, the communication technologies at large, and how ideas and opinions are being shared and exchanged in an out-of-control manner. Consequently, a notable aspect of this era seems to revolve around the acts of exchange and communication.

The notion of post-truth problematizes the sharing of information, suggesting that the process of sharing is not pristine but rather disseminated through various power relations, consequent manipulations, and normative filter bubbles. The philosopher McIntyre describes the essence and character of the term in these words: “Post-truth amounts to a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe in something whether there is good evidence for it or not.”<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, the ideological normativism criticized in this context is not only

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<sup>80</sup> McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, 12.

limited to the deliberate actions of singular actors, such as in the infamous cases of post-truth—Brexit and Trump’s presidential election in the USA in 2016. The correlation between the exchange of information and power is not limited to individual figures or institutions. It equally consists of a multiplicity of power relations and games of truth.<sup>81</sup> The development of communication technologies allows tremendous amounts of data to be shared and constantly exchanged, leading to an extraordinarily convoluted web of exchanges between people.

In the processes of exchange and communication, the objects are encrypted in various ways; questions such as how this encryption occurs, and which forms of coding are at work are essentially relevant for examining post-truth. Rhetorical coding is one way of encrypting objects to promote exchange and communication. During this process, the objects are not naked; instead, they are fashioned through a rhetorical language that facilitates communication and makes it possible to reference them. The clothing of the objects creates an intermediary layer between the objects and the subjects, which does not alter the nature of the object or deal with the object-in-itself. This layer is not for fashioning it to manipulate its perception and alter its values. With the good and bad, the rhetorical coding takes place to allow further communication about the objects. It aims at ultimately allowing us to speak of all kinds of objects, regardless of their real qualities. The rhetorical code in the case post-truth is mostly problematized as being uninterested in the object’s real qualities and serving a purpose only as a coating on the object’s exterior.

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<sup>81</sup> The Foucauldian term “multiplicity” is helpful in scrutinizing the underlying heterogeneity of figures, relations, and truths that form the post-truth era. A description of how Foucault uses the term can be found in Erinn Gilson, “Multiplicity,” in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 304.

“Thus, multiplicity not only signifies the undoing of the unity and the identity of a human subject, an object of knowledge, a discourse, a practice, and so on, but also, and more importantly, entails the discovery of the heterogeneous relations that condition, constitute, and give rise to these seemingly unified forms.”

In the discipline of architecture, there is a stress between two types of information and their exchange: one pole is the more tangible and easily graspable method of speaking of things, and the other is the more obscure, enigmatic, and inexplicable. In many cases, all kinds of architectural knowledge do not translate into calculable bits and pieces. As the discipline seeks enhanced communicability and objectivity in the face of the crucial topics that architecture needs to address—including global warming, massive population growth, immigration, and other global crises—the influence of the rhetorical coding gains relevance for the architecture.

The truths of the problems are bound to the rhetorical coding for being shared throughout society. As a nonhuman and non-discursive domain, truth stands alone and external to the correctness and situatedness of knowledge. Nonetheless, it can be organized around a cypher, through which value can be encoded, creating economics of values for the sake of communication. In the face of the rapidly changing first decades of the twenty-first century, bringing a variety of crisis environments to which architecture must adapt and reflect, coating the truths of the problems with a value system requires attention. One way to look at the current quandaries is to ask how architecture could overcome limitations of engagement and communication to speak of all contemporary aspects and concerns of everyday life, including its tangible and intangible layers.

Within this context, one philosophical discourse is becoming increasingly popular among architects: Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). The conversations between OOO and architecture exhibit an ambition to provide architecture with an all-embracing mode of communication, engagement, and exchange based on aesthetics. One possible underlying motivation behind many architects' enthusiastic embrace of this approach is that Object-Oriented Ontology aims to reconsider aesthetics as the root of all philosophies and to reconcile it with everything else, including science. OOO looks to providing an all-encompassing theory, based on aesthetics as the title

of the book by Graham Harman, a chief figure in *OOO: A New Theory of Everything*.<sup>82</sup> The system of thought through which Harman aims at re-orienting philosophy towards objects, setting aesthetics as the most accurate model in which humans can engage with objects. The OOO thinkers claim to significantly abandon idealism and correlationism from their works, criticizing these approaches for being excessively subject-oriented. A principal goal of OOO is to reconcile a mode of more accurate engagement between objects through the medium of aesthetics.

OOO posits a flat ontology in its search for a communication channel between all objects. It disregards the contemporary dichotomy of beings, wherein nature and culture, matter and thought are kept apart.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the flat ontology's universality is not achieved through naturalizing culture or culturizing nature. It also does not intend to reconcile the poles. Instead, the idea of isolated sets of beings is opposed from the beginning and replaced with hybrid networks of objects (see fig. 1.1.). Considering that architecture is a discipline that does not confine to the modern dichotomy of beings and operates beyond such isolations, OOO has a particular value in the context of the communication problems in architecture.

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<sup>82</sup> Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Pelican Books, 2018).

<sup>83</sup> The modern endeavor of purifying the nonhuman and human spheres is motivated in part by the desire to free the tangible, explicable, and calculable from subjectivity. This is done in order to prevent the mystification or mixing of the natural phenomena with cultural epiphenomena. Levi Bryant, "Object-Oriented Ontology and Scientific Naturalism," *Larval Subjects* (blog), August 26, 2009, <https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2009/08/26/object-oriented-ontology-and-scientific-naturalism/>.

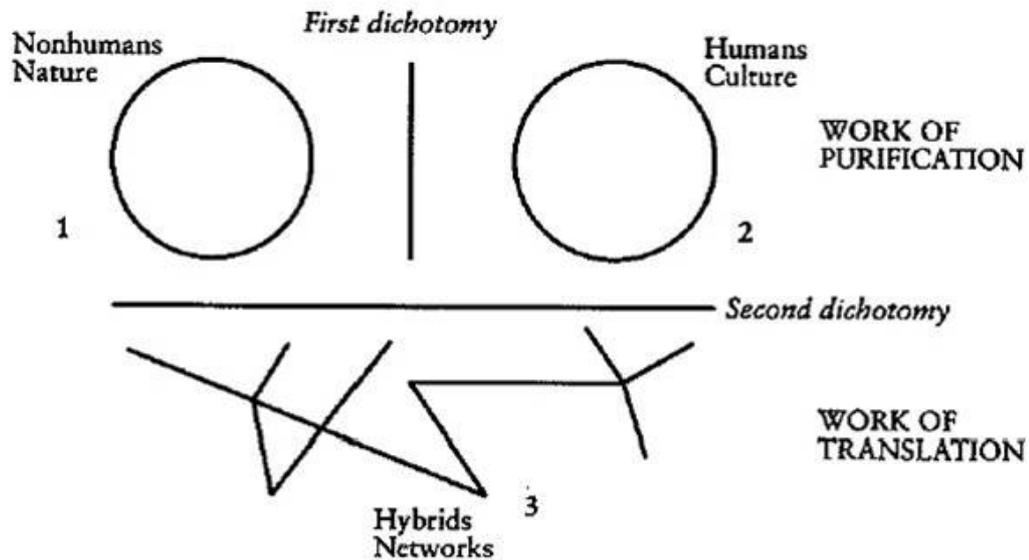


Figure 1.1. Purification and Translation Diagram. Levi Bryant, “Object-Oriented Ontology and Scientific Naturalism,” personal blog, *Larval Subjects* (blog), August 26, 2009, <https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2009/08/26/object-oriented-ontology-and-scientific-naturalism/>.

Harman spotlights the stress between truth and reality in the introduction of his book *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, where he openly addresses the post-truth crisis. He writes that the contemporary problem of post-truth is not arising from a struggle with truth or knowledge but from reality.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, in writing the book, his aim is “detecting the gap between knowledge and reality.”<sup>85</sup> Accordingly, the overarching goal of OOO is also to uncover modalities of interaction with the reality that deviate from the human subject’s correlationism. This framework of thought separates the debate on post-truth from epistemological crises of truth and knowledge, a problem that extends beyond alternative facts and mass media manipulation. The newly adjusted gaze is towards the gap between knowledge and reality, its detection and elimination.

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

This chapter explores how aesthetics promises to form a “theory of everything” and how it offers universal literacy. In addition to delving into the writings of G. Harman and M. F. Gage, this chapter offers a commentary on Marcel Hénaff’s canonical work *The Price of Truth: Money, Gift, and Philosophy*. Hénaff examines how truth obtains metricity through money, granting momentary objectivity without harming the exchanged item—even to truth. The purpose of the concentration on Hénaff’s work is to provide a framework for understanding how aesthetics works in Object-Oriented Ontology.

The discussions in this chapter are followed by a more isolated examination of Object-Oriented Ontology and its translations to architecture, with the goal of outlining how OOO’s “detecting the gap between knowledge and reality.” Furthermore, the consequent discussions aim to examine OOO’s formulation of how (architectural) objects—the truth of objects—are being subjected to various forms of reductions.

## **2.1 In/direct Access to the Reality via Aesthetics**

Harman extensively problematizes and concerns the development of a theory that stands for everything, expanding through all domains of knowledge. In the context of Harman’s previously mentioned book, the philosophy of aesthetics demands the legitimacy to realize what the theories such as “Newtonian physics,” “String theory,” and all other theories intend to unveil and describe the whole domains of reality. According to Harman, a theory of everything should recognize and explain the entire range of entities covering both the physical and non-physical—from the tiniest entities to the largest, including the fictional entities.<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, such a theory expands from the domain of physics to the social sciences, even to the degree of successfully covering fictional entities, such as imaginary characters and concepts. Furthermore, the issue of what stands beyond human understanding and comprehension plays a vital

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 61.

role in the sought-after unified theory; Harman intends to exclude nothing. He takes a hostile stance against what he calls “all-or-nothing rationalism” and the “facile mysticists,” which claim direct access to reality—the former through intellectual means and the latter through the spiritual means.<sup>87</sup> The difficulty with both, according to G. Harman, is their promises of direct access. The theory he presents in the book, and in OOO in general, is fundamentally seeking to outline the means of indirect access to reality via aesthetics.

He illustrates indirect access to objects with the example of metaphors, suggesting that metaphors are one of the best ways of speaking of an object through a non-literal type of cognition.<sup>88</sup> At this point, he refers to one particular essay written by José Ortega y Gasset, “An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface,”<sup>89</sup> where the philosopher speaks of a form of interaction, access which is not necessarily claiming to be direct, with the inwardness of inaccessible things. Harman writes that the “I” in Ortega’s writing, “the true inwardness of things beyond all description,” is not emerging from a consciousness that dwells in all objects but exists “because each of us is something, and that something can never be exhausted by conscious introspection any more than by outward description.”<sup>90</sup> Even though stating that the inward “I” (the noumenal realm, the things-in-themselves) exist, Ortega asserts, there is a way that the domain of “I”s open to us—and it is through the language of art. He writes:

“Now then, imagine the importance of a language or system of expressive signs whose function was not to tell us about things but to present them to us in the act of executing themselves. Art is just such a language; this is what art does. The esthetic object is inwardness as such—it is each thing as ‘I’.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>89</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, “An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface,” in *Phenomenology and Art*, trans. P. Silver (New York, NY: Norton, 1975), 127–50.

<sup>90</sup> Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, 70.

<sup>91</sup> Gasset, “An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface,” 138-9, quoted in Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, 71.

Harman goes on to cite Ortega again:

“Notice I am not saying that a work of art reveals the secret of life and being to us; what I do say is that a work of art affords the peculiar pleasure we call esthetic by making it seem that the inwardness of things, their executant reality, is opened to us.”<sup>92</sup>

Ortega differentiates direct access to the things, an explication of the inwardness, from presenting themselves to the beholder “in the act of executing themselves.” According to him, the potential mode of engagement that comes with art fits into the latter category. To explain this claim, Ortega borrows the metaphor “the cypress is like the ghost of a dead flame” from the poet López Pico. Harman notes that in Ortega’s work, the metaphorical object is presented as an example of an aesthetic object.<sup>93</sup> The objects brought into contact to form the metaphor are not only associated due to their resemblances.

Moreover, the correlation does not work in a reversible/symmetrical and direct manner. Instead, the metaphor provides “a coincidence between two things that is more profound and decisive than any mere resemblance.”<sup>94</sup> Therefore, the metaphor’s poetic aspect is born with the disappearance of one’s responsibility to speak of an object and its qualities without indicating the in-between resemblance with a literal statement. The metaphor functions as a whole rather than through segregated parts. Consequently, as the metaphor expands beyond the literal meanings of the words and the phrases that constitute it, the likened object’s external qualities and the explicit identities dissolve—enabling the constitution of a more profound correlation between these two objects. In Pico’s metaphor, the flame and the cypress are metaphorically likened to each other. In doing so, both the “practical images” of the flame and cypress

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<sup>92</sup> Gasset, “An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface,” 139, quoted in Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, 71.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>94</sup> Gasset, “An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface,” 141, quoted in Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, 73.

are shattered down, and the objects become available to gain “new form and structure.”<sup>95</sup> In addition to constructing a new way of engaging an object with another object, the metaphor allows the beholder to “experience a new entity that somehow combines cypress and the flame.”<sup>96</sup>

Harman writes that Ortega’s work presents an alternative mode of engagement with the inaccessible domains of reality, called noumena, without being facile or negative.<sup>97</sup> This is unlike the cases of people, such as the mysticists, who wish to gain direct access to the noumenal realm. There is no claim of complete access in a metaphor for the inaccessible qualities of an object. Nevertheless, Harman notes that the metaphor can still correlate disparate items under normal circumstances and create a new entity out of the blending of the input objects. As a result, what Harman perceives is not accomplished access to the noumenal world but rather a condition of proceeding to the halfway point. He designates this situation with the term theatricality.<sup>98</sup> Harman indicates that OOO is against the claims for direct access to reality. The theatrical scene developed by the metaphor/aesthetics is an indirect mode of engagement with the real. By discussing the concept of a metaphor, Harman demonstrates how aesthetics brings the beholder/subject closer to experiencing the real than any other way.

Harman’s ambition about aesthetics as the basis of his theory of everything is based on aestheticizing all other domains. As an initial example of how art operates borderless, Harman speaks of Joseph Beuys becoming an “ingredient of an artwork” while filming himself.<sup>99</sup> Accordingly, the work of art is not only limited to the domain of acrylic pigments and other more traditional ingredients but is also capable of

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 101.

acquiring even the artist itself. Furthermore, aesthetics does not necessarily need to stand in autonomy from other aspects and contexts of the objects. He mentions the following cases: architecture is mainly differentiated from arts due to its entanglement with functions and purposes; artworks firmly merged within their socio-political contexts, such as Picasso's painting "Guernica" and Goya's series of prints, "The Disasters of War."<sup>100</sup> Within the scope of OOO, the work of art does not need to be an isolated object within the domain of aesthetics. It can be merged within various contexts and relations, yet all non-aesthetic qualities must be aestheticized. Such an act of aestheticization of everything lies in the basis of OOO, as it places aesthetics as the basis of an all-encompassing theory.

## **2.2 The Model of Money Language for a Universal Literacy through Aesthetics**

One feature of the aestheticization of the reality in OOO is that aesthetics acts as a universal language for everything to communicate with each other. Nevertheless, aesthetics is not the only medium with the potential and ambition to gain universality. Marcel Hénaff examines another medium in the book *The Price of Truth: Money, Gift, and Philosophy*.<sup>101</sup> He scrutinizes on money and the economization of everything. In the context of post-truth, money economy is notable for providing a virtual language of objective values, enabling the truth of things to be spoken of. Money provides a model for comparison. It helps grasp the working mechanism of aesthetics in OOO. For architecture, the money-economy is an alternative to aesthetics that aim to facilitate the disciplinary exchange of both tangible and intangible.

The examination of money sign serves a double function in the scope of this thesis. First, it allows us to understand how money and rhetorics operate in the contemporary

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>101</sup> Hénaff, *The Price of Truth: Gift, Money, and Philosophy*.

discipline—not solely for the purpose of deception and profit, but also for facilitating an “objective” communicability and exchangeability. Its second and the principal function is to provide a comparative model for the examination of aesthetics in OOO.

This commentary on Hénaff’s analysis looks for ways in which truth acquires metricity, allowing for some degree of objectivity. It aims to elaborate on possible methods through which truth is not sacrificed to “detect the gap between knowledge and reality.” Discourse and the calculative reason of its rhetorics, which constitute the space between knowledge and reality that OOO seeks to overcome, compromises truth that is nonhuman and non-constructed.

In the rhetorical coding, which promotes exchange and communication, there is sophistry<sup>102</sup> at work, setting a price for everything. This economization is what, in turn, gets criticized by Gage. The sophistry raises the inquiry on truth as an object of exchange and communication, where interest and monetization are at work. Truth and values are intertwined, and communication prevails through an economic system. The rhetorical operation occurs through third parties, disassociating the truth from the exchange process and imposing intermediary layers. The communicating parties are not anymore in contact with each other. The boundaries between the individuals are not overcome by themselves but through the creation of the third parties that reach beyond the disciplinary borders and the social hierarchies. Rather than the truths, the objects of the rhetorics are actively exchanged. The actual objects become encoded with the prices that constitute the basis of the sought objectivity in the process.

Accordingly, the study focuses on Marcel Hénaff’s book *The Price of Truth*, which examines a mechanism of thought that allows truth to gain metricity. The concern of the book is not the truth itself. Nonetheless, it explores how truth can be preserved as

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<sup>102</sup> Although sophistry implies deception, one of the consequences of its superficiality other than a negative mode of deceptiveness is as follows: through sophistry, speech acquires an abstract universality. As Schindler notes, sophistry becomes “a univocal method that may be used indifferently to everybody and everything.” David C. Schindler, *Plato’s Critique of Impure Reason: On Goodness and Truth in the Republic* (CUA Press, 2008), 261.

invariant while being negotiable in its discursivity. In doing so, what is at stake in his work is how truth becomes entangled with the substitute orders of money and price on the one hand, gift and sacrifice on the other. Money serves as a pivot point to which everything can be subjected. It allows truth to be kept implicit while being negotiable subjectively. It functions as a meta-sign, maintaining value and worth apart from its subjects—for better and for worse.

Hénaff seeks to deconstruct the relationship between the communication of truth and its conversion into an exchangeable good. He shows how the encryption of truth into a monetary system without altering or consuming has always been at work. It aims to call attention to the fact that this is not necessarily negative but may also be beneficial. Truth acquires a temporary metricity and quantifiability due to this continuous encoding and decoding process. The addition of intermediary layers of mediation in communication helps positions/values to co-exist. His book foregrounds an inevitable level of coding at work in representing truth.

### **2.2.1 Meta-Sign, Zero, Money**

Before looking into how Hénaff demonstrates a means to entwine truth with substitutive orders, it is fruitful to explain how money can become a meta-sign and how coding occurs in the process, or to put it another way, becomes the process itself. In the first chapter of the book *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*,<sup>103</sup> Brian Rotman asserts that the mathematical sign zero differs from the other numbers in its semiotic features. As a cardinal number, zero stands for a theoretical limit of counted objects and plurality. It becomes a sign without correspondence. On the other hand, zero as an ordinal number “represents the starting of the place where that subject begins the whole activity of traversing what will become a sequence of counted

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<sup>103</sup> Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan Press, 1993).

positions.”<sup>104</sup> It becomes an imprint of the erasing of all predecessors to the sequence, including the counting subject. Due to this two-fold nature and being a sign among other signs—as in the sequel “0,1,2,3,4...”—it also becomes a sign-about-signs: a meta-sign.<sup>105</sup>

Rotman asserts a second meta-sign which is the vanishing point. The vanishing point organizes everything around itself, allowing the view to be coded. It has the exact twofold function with zero: to be part of the picture plane as a sign, and again, a sign-about-signs, a location that cannot be occupied, a mark of the viewing subject.<sup>106</sup> Through the meta-sign, the coding action of the vision occurs. The perspective coding theoretically claims for making the subject’s view experienceable by everyone. The view is not only traced on a plane. It can only be de-traced by any experiencing subject. The perspectival coding allows to encrypt and decipher the view objectively.

Following the meta-signs of counting and viewing, Rotman presents another one regarding the issue of price. Like the others, money is again internal and external to the sign system that it belongs to; it has a twofold structure. In the first place, it is part of the monetary system since it can be exchanged and used to purchase goods. On the other hand, it exists outside the sign system for “originating the very medium of exchange which allows money to become a commodity.”<sup>107</sup> As referred to in this context, it is the imaginary money, which becomes the medium of coding the price of things and turning from a product into a commodity.

Rotman underlines that the imaginary money as a meta-sign emerges in the transition from the feudal to the capitalist economic structure.<sup>108</sup> In feudalism, it is based on its use value and the surplus associated with the process of production. The gold is

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 23.

physically valuable, and its price corresponds to its actual value. Furthermore, gold materializes society's labor surplus as an exchangeable product. It becomes detached from meaning based on its production and usefulness for society. The surplus associated with production is replaced with the capital that stands for nothing; money is altered from a product into a commodity. The resultant capital presents the acts of buying and selling of the commodity. In contrast, the previous conception was not purchased or sold but exchanged/traded on equal terms. Accordingly, Rotman suggests that the new availability of buying and selling as a commodity puts money into a relationship with itself.

When the price of gold is based on its material qualities and weight, its worth precedes the signification system; it does not come along with it. On the other hand, the price of the imaginary money has no correspondence to pre-existing materiality. This new form of dealing with price was based on a contractual relationship between the bank and the individual; it "functioned as a money sign, not through any iconic replication of value in its own vehicle, but by convention, through a mutual understanding between a bank and an individual."<sup>109</sup> Exactly as zero does to the counting and the vanishing point does to the view, it defines a new signification system ordered around itself. Thereby, it becomes entangled by the subject's involvement, the one who buys and sells. Accordingly, the imaginary money is another sign that signifies nothing.

Money becomes a meta-sign for internally and externally relating to the monetary system. It is internal in the sense that it enables the purchase of products. It is external because it becomes the foundation and the starting point for the entire medium of exchange, commodifying itself in the process. The subject, the one-who-buys-and-sells, no longer gets involved in a sign system where the sign follows the reality; in this case, the money would be expected to follow the object's value. The meta-sign

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 25.

eliminates the reality's precedence over the signs, resulting in a schema that renders possible coding relations that are normally impossible between the object and the sign.

### 2.2.2 Algebra, Zero, Money: Variables

On top of explaining how money makes the process of integrating the objects into an economy of exchange by coding and organizing them around a cypher, Rotman deconstructs the way variables emerge in the process as new categories of signs. In disturbing the reality's precedence to the signs, meta-signs present the idea of a variable that stands for nothing. Variables in mathematics are theoretically what can be substituted with anything that supplies the demands of the given algebraic expression. Algebra is the branch of mathematics that deals with the variables (meta-signs), unlike arithmetic, which deals with numbers (signs). Rotman notes: "Algebra, the art of manipulating formal mathematical expressions such as equations, formulas, inequalities, and identities, is co-extensive with the idea of a variable."<sup>110</sup> He provides the following equation as an example for the category of algebraic expressions:  $(x+y)(x-y)=x^2-y^2$ . The variables in the equation are  $x$  and  $y$ . In this instance, there is no counting in the foreground as in arithmetic. On the other hand, there is an emphasis on how things are put together into an equilibrium. These variables pre-exist their signified objects: "A variable is thus a sign whose meaning within an algebraic expression lies in certain other, necessarily absent, signs."<sup>111</sup> Accordingly, Rotman notes that the variables are meta-signs, not standing for actual things but only for the potential, possible, and the virtual.<sup>112</sup> They can be calculated like a determinate number, like a sign, even though they are indeterminates that stand for nothing.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 30.

The algebraic variable also gives rise to the algebraic subject, “a self-conscious subject of a subject, a metasubject.”<sup>113</sup> The counting subject in arithmetic, the-one-who-counts, is displaced “from an actual to a virtual presence.”<sup>114</sup> The algebraic subject does not necessarily count a definite thing but deals with the potentialities. It deals with a set of possible counting processes emerging from how things are put together. Every potential value of  $x$  that suffices the equation it belongs to is enclosed within the algebraic number  $x$ . Therefore, algebra deals with the variables which function through an act of virtual counting done by a self-conscious subject. Moreover, it is zero which organizes everything around itself as the cypher, which enables the virtually putting of things together:

“The semiotic connection between zero and the variable thus emerges as one of symbolic completion: by ranging over all number signs, that is over all possible records that can be left by the subject whose sole capacity is to repeat, the algebraic subject performs an operation of closure on the infinite proliferation of number signs that come into being with zero.”<sup>115</sup>

Since the zero lacks referentiality, it flips over the posteriority of the signs to the numbers. The outcome is neither a proof of the anteriority or posteriority of one over another but the co-existence of the things and the signs-for-things.<sup>116</sup> In the sign system where zero is set as the origin, all other signs also lose their referentiality; they become “signs produced by and within arithmetical notation.”<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, with the zero in origin, the resultant set of signs without a reference only continue to bear meaning in relation to each other.<sup>118</sup> The meta-subject is the one who “performs an operation” in the self-referential set of signs.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 29.

The reformation initiated by zero in the emergence of algebra is comparable to the revolution created by paper money. The sign which once corresponded to an anterior wealth became capable of “creating money” alone.<sup>119</sup> Although it is still standing for the real currencies such as the gold, it can deconstruct its relations which does not prove its anteriority but instead generates a co-existence.<sup>120</sup> It deconstructs and organizes the sign system it belongs to and becomes a meta-sign. Likewise, the bearer becomes the meta-subject that remains anonymous in exchanging, the temporary owner of the note that is in a “meta-lingual relation to any particular named and dated individual”—a “variable subject.”<sup>121</sup> The gold is authentic, and the bearers are definite. On the other hand, paper money is completely indistinguishable from each other and has no aspect differentiating one sign from another. They not only exist anonymously but also bring anonymity to their bearer. The bearer is a variable, “a subject in meta-lingual relation to any particular named and dated individual.”<sup>122</sup>

The paper money is not authentic; it does not stand for anything in particular, but it takes on meaning and value due to its relations with the other signs. It grants its subjects and objects anonymity by being the only exposed and directly involved element in the exchange system. As a result, like how the bearer is a variable subject, what it stands for becomes a variable object. For instance, when it signifies gold, it does not refer to a specific gold but rather any piece that suffices the relation. It guarantees the ability to be converted into any piece of gold at any time and place by anyone.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 49.

### 2.2.3 Sophistry and the Price of Truth

Marcel Hénaff's book, *The Price of Truth: Gift, Money, and Philosophy*,<sup>123</sup> looks back to Ancient Greece to demonstrate how truth becomes entwined with substitutive orders, laying out a template in which money becomes a meta-sign for making truth signifiable through the means of price. He writes:

“While the truly philosophical question (which is also the question of truth) is, ‘What is the thing itself?’ the Sophist is only concerned with setting a price to talk about it—a price for truth.”<sup>124</sup>

The Sophists alienate themselves from their product by the action of setting a price. They do not need to know what their product is because they are no longer compensated for their service's quality. The price is not anymore attached to the item. As a result, the knowledge they offer is something they know how to sell rather than something they know what it is. The compensation provided to experts such as poets, sculptors, and musicians serves a specific function: “recognition and proof of competence.”<sup>125</sup> The services provided by these individuals set prices based on their level of quality, implying a direct link between the product's value and the declared price. On the other hand, the Sophists are one profession that is exempt from such a relationship. They claim to teach what cannot be thought. As a result, Hénaff describes them as selling and speaking of nothing.<sup>126</sup>

### 2.2.4 The Figure of the Merchant

Since the figure of merchants in Hénaff's analysis are the ones who deal with nothingness, buy and sell anything regardless of their qualities—through an economy

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<sup>123</sup> Hénaff, *The Price of Truth: Gift, Money, and Philosophy*.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

based on an imaginary system of values encoded on the objects—neither the buyer nor the seller comes into contact with each other; time, place, and actors turn into variables just as the objects themselves become as such. The anonymity prevails as the only exposed values are the ones that are represented by money. The meta-sign, money, becomes the bearer of all meaning and qualities: the communicative tool; the ultimate joker, placing the merchant, the one who sells, not the author, into a crucial position concerning the object.

Since the merchants are selling nothing, the Sophists—the merchants of knowledge<sup>127</sup>—cease to be the authors or the owners of the objects of exchange. In addition to their incapability for authorship, they are experts in nothing and have no definite product to offer. Their position regarding the product is always limited to being their merchant.<sup>128</sup> As merchants rather than experts, the Sophists deal with everything and nothing in a way that resembles a wholesale of an endless variety of products with no specific order or hierarchy in between, other than their pricing. They are capable of selling what they do not know, just as merchants are capable of selling what they do not own. Their lack of understanding of the nature of the merchandised product results in their inability to distinguish products from one another according to the actual values.<sup>129</sup> As a result, merchants are confronted with certain restrictions in their relationship with their merchandised items, which they use the money to overcome. The price is through what the Sophists interact with their products, forsaking their actual qualities and encoding them with the virtual markers. In short, the price is the means for them to communicate what they do not know. Through this medium, they are able to handle products that they are not experts of.

The exchange mediated by the merchants, namely the Sophists, promises anonymity through alienation from the object. The money serves as the intermediary layer that

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 48.

diminishes the contact of every figure that takes place within the system. Hénaff uses the verbs bartering and trading to describe the dissimilar forms of exchange taking place without and with the meta-sign, respectively. According to him, the mode of exchange that the Sophists engage with is a “trade rather than barter;” more specifically, they do “wholesale trade.”<sup>130</sup>

In the case of bartering, the products are exchanged with other ones based on their inherited values. It is the most direct form of exchange, a swapping of objects that are presumably equal in terms of their values. The object does not get substituted with money and dissolves into nothingness. There is no intermediary communicative layer of exchange, which separates the buyer and the seller, concealing the objects behind the variables. Bartering presumes that the products are the value-wise equivalent to each other. The object has no externally imposed value system; instead, the price is determined by the object itself. To barter is “to exchange goods for other things rather than for money.”<sup>131</sup> Without the intervention of the meta-sign, every exchange process becomes stamped by idiosyncrasy. The exchangers come into direct contact, getting to know each other. They cannot sell at one place and time and buy at another one. The action is not divided into two unparalleled buying and selling segments, but both go on together. As a result, everything loses its anonymity and ceases to be variables, including the objects.

“Where and when does commercial money emerge? A provisional (and insufficient) answer can be provided: it emerges wherever the emergence of the figure of the merchant is observed, that is, the figure of all intermediary who buys and sells in order not to consume but to facilitate transactions over goods between third parties. For commercial money to exist, the unit of exchange must be cut off from any purely symbolic value and specified as a means of acquisition independent from the partners’ status. In short, this unit—

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>131</sup> “Definition of Barter,” in *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary* (Cambridge University Press, March 15, 2022), <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/barter>.

currency—must be nothing more than a sign of its general exchange value (even in the case of precious metal currencies).”<sup>132</sup>

According to Hénaff, the commercial money and the figure of the merchant emerge together in the disappearance of bartering. For the figure of the merchant to appear, the price should be “the signifier of its exchange value;” the object should obtain autonomy from its external relations and exist within the system only through its exchange value. The merchants/Sophists construct every parcel of the exchange ecosystem by using money, and the price is imposed on the objects as a non-symbolic value. Despite bartering, which requires access to the product and some knowledge of its nature and value, trading operates through intermediary layers, namely through the third parties.

As the Sophists do not acquire knowledge about their products and lack interest in them, the exchange becomes based on the price set on these objects, which is the virtual value, not real or symbolic. In doing so, the object becomes isolated behind the coating provided by the economic system. The Sophists, the merchants of knowledge, do not claim to barter knowledge with an equivalent in price. They are the merchants of the priceless. They sell what cannot be sold by setting virtual prices that are not emerging from the objects themselves. Much like the way zero flips the anteriority of number signs to the numbers, the merchants encode a new value to the priceless through the cyphers. The priceless is not exchanged with another product at its level of price. It is commodified and subordinated to another system of signification based on money, where it begins to be bought and sold, regardless of its true nature.

In doing so, the priceless gains temporary objectivity during its involvement in the trade. The price set on the goods is definite and the same for everyone. It does not alter due to the circumstances or the sympathy between the goods and the partners who sell or buy. No matter whoever is involved in the transaction, “a prince or a peasant” in

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<sup>132</sup> Hénaff, *The Price of Truth: Gift, Money, and Philosophy*, 306.

Hénaff's exemplification, the price is the same, and the one who pays the required amount has the right to have it.<sup>133</sup> The commercial exchange is devoid of social relationships<sup>134</sup> and excludes other values in the totalizing effect of money. The measurement of the priceless takes place without any ambition to truly measure its value, but only based on its trading value.

Hénaff reveals that the act of selling without knowing its nature is more than a lack of knowledge. It bears the potential for effectively dealing with things that are impossible to grasp in their entire nature. This way, even though the Sophists cannot fully comprehend anything, they are called "the merchants of knowledge." They are trading rather than knowing or speaking. They are mere agents of exchange between individuals. They repel the responsibilities and consequences of dealing with the priceless, mainly because they do not have any claims over it, such as knowing, defining, or owning. The truth is impossible to be bartered with something else, but the price of truth is knowable, measurable, and objective; therefore, tradable. The Sophists develop a meta-language to speak of their merchandise, which is not limited to the tangible, expanding to the domain of intangible goods. The money becomes the meta-sign that systematizes the trade and allows communication about unspeakable and indefinable things.

### **2.2.5 Intermediaries, Substitutes, and the "Proportional Equalization Between Heterogeneous Goods"**

As an agent for the substitution of goods and an intermediary in the exchange, the figure of merchant presents and co-exists with the variable objects that can be referred to as the substitutes and intermediaries. Hénaff notes that the merchants are intermediaries because of making interaction possible between individuals who do not

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 307.

meet each other. This situation brings along the possibility of (a) transcending the limits of place—buying in one place and selling in another, de-localizing the trade, (b) circulating goods between the specialized individuals/experts who only know how to deal with what they are experts of and cannot communicate with other specialized individuals, (c) transcending the limits of time—buying in one particular time and selling in another, separating the two actions in time.<sup>135</sup>

Consequently, the agency of the merchants enhances societies' communication capacities and brings along new forms of engagement. The trade occurs between an enriched and diversified spectrum of individuals who do not necessarily belong to the same civilization. Distant groups of people can interact through the mediation of the merchant. Moreover, the experts, who only knew what they specialized in, needed the merchants, who knew nothing about everything, to communicate with the other experts; the merchants were operating as translators. Hénaff further points out that the time variable symbolizes the potential of stockpiling items inside the trading economy and dispersing them when the demand arises. Accordingly, the merchants link various figures to each other, including individuals, societies, places, and periods, with a medium of exchange that does not deteriorate the products or alter their values in a transaction. Up to a certain point, merchants give means of breaking down the limitations of communication and interaction imposed by the bartering system. Once encoded within the economic system, the goods prevail as invariable until decoding/exiting. Money as the cypher makes all of this possible:

“As a consequence this circulation gave rise to a bond different in nature from the political bond; the merchant was its operator and money its language. This is what made the merchant appear to the philosopher as a rival figure and money as a language competing with the language of truth. This is, at least, what a reading of Plato brings to light. This ancient conflict traverses our entire history.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 74.

Accordingly, money is the language of the merchants that serves as the intermediary which substitutes the actual objects of exchange. Hénaff refers to it as “a substitute and guarantor meant to translate the value of goods.”<sup>137</sup> Its validity does not rely on a social contract that would involve personal relations, social hierarchies, and other factors. It is rather constructed upon an ideal of an objective contract that is economical. For the money itself, which does not stand for any definite object as a signifier but exists as a joker that can stand for an unlimited variety of objects, the meaningfulness only comes into existence from its relations within the trading economy. After all, it is a sign among the other signs and the meta-sign that organizes the sign-system; it cannot dwell outside of the sign-system it germinates from. Hénaff notes that “money can only be exchanged.”<sup>138</sup> Therefore, it can never truly replace the object that it substitutes.

As the intermediary language, money puts distinct objects into relation to each other based on their prices. It constructs a shared ground for speaking of irrelevant objects in the same sentence. The medium of judgment is thereon the values of objects attributed to them through coding. As money organizes all objects, by their prices, around the nothingness which the sign stands for, it gives rise to an algebraic equation. The variables substitute the signs-for-the-things but, in doing so, gain meaning based on the relations of the figures inside the equilibrium. It presents virtual equilibriums through which distant objects come into contact, which is the operation that Hénaff refers to as the “proportional equalization between heterogeneous goods.”<sup>139</sup> Accordingly, the algebraic relation imposed on the objects by the meta-sign via proportions. Furthermore, the proportions provide a relationship between items and serve as a benchmark by which individuals can judge them.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 89.

### 2.2.6 The Invariance of Objects Through the Meta-Sign

In constructing the benchmark for assessment and comparison—enabling the exchange of everything with everything else—money brings what Hénaff refers to as “universal confusion and transposition.”<sup>140</sup> His exploration of the negative consequences of the money economy asserts that the conversion of one object into another occurs devoid of all limits. The ontological categories of objects are dissolved in the infinite possibilities of exchange and conversion allowed by the meta-sign. He writes that the problem arises when “money appears as a power capable of abolishing differences in a game of equivalences devoid of any rules.”<sup>141</sup> The translation of objects and values lacks not only limits but also any self-regulatory system. All objects are ordained to dissolve into indifference due to the desire for the universal “transposition.”

Money claims equivalences in-between heterogeneous sets of objects in a wholesale manner. This is far from claiming that it transforms all objects into a state of sameness. While sameness would suggest a non-difference in the objects themselves, the equivalence suggests the non-difference in terms of a common measure. There is a brief list of exemplary conversions of one object into another, which Hénaff borrows from Marx. “It changes fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, stupidity into intelligence and intelligence into stupidity.”<sup>142</sup> In this set of examples, the objects always come in couples of polarized opposing figures and, even more importantly, always in both directions of the conversion, suggesting the reversibility of the process. The object does not lose its essence since it can still be converted back into its original form, such as in the example of the love into hate and hate into love back again. Given that A and

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 13.

B are two heterogeneous objects, money can convert A to be and then B back to A without having the object lose any value or quality. The two objects construct a heterogeneous set which means that they vary in their nature and qualities. The two objects are not the same, but they become comparable in terms of their price.

Hénaff refers to the notion of confusion emerging from this state of extreme flexibility in dealing with a diverse range of objects by citing Marx's early writing, where he speaks of this term as related to the objects' qualities: "the confusion and transposition of all natural and human qualities." Accordingly, the dissolution of objects into indifference occurs at the level of qualities<sup>143</sup> rather than at the level of the objects themselves. Differentiation between the members of the heterogeneous set is sacrificed for the shared motive, which is to achieve a universal language of comparison. There is no claim that the A and B are ontologically categorized as the same. The exchange promises reversibility since the objects are not altered in themselves. It is only the domain of the qualities subjected to concealment within the exchange system.

Following the discussion on the effects of confusion and transposition, Hénaff notes that money is a figure of "imposture" because its function is not only the translation of objects into each other, but it also involves concealing and deceiving in various ways. Three categories provided by him are as follows: (a) It can set prices large in number to an object that is not; (b) It can provide "respect" and "importance" to people that do not deserve it; (c) It can make the objects which take time to acquire in natural conditions, readily available.<sup>144</sup> Accordingly, money disorganizes everything, capable of overturning all relations and disturbing objects' qualities; it contains trickery.

Nevertheless, Hénaff establishes a deeper inquiry than taking a position regarding whether or not money is harmful in its nature. In the monetary system, the systematic

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 14.

creation of an “imposture” is associated with reorganizing everything around the cypher to construct a virtual means of comparability by equalization and proportioning by price. One definition of the term “imposture” provided by the Cambridge dictionary is “the act of pretending to be someone else in order to deceive others.”<sup>145</sup> The imposture is linked to creating virtual prices that are not based on the actual attributes of the goods but instead on the fashioning of them by monetary values that disguise their true nature. The exchange operates through virtual prices. Through its imposture, money can set a price for the incommensurable objects and join them into the domain of exchange. Furthermore, by its imposturous quality, the object’s true nature is not involved in the exchange and not harmed in the process—as they are hidden behind their fashioning—the reversibility is possible.

The Sophists cause a rupture between “speech, being, and truth,” which has been provoked by the involvement of the pseudos in philosophy.<sup>146</sup> Fakery disrupts the speech-being-truth interrelation, creating a rupture. The merchants were experts in nothing but selling, which made them uninterested in the nature of their products. Moreover, unlike bartering, the trading began to occur on a virtual level where the actual values of the products were discarded; money became the only relevant language that operates in the universal domain and through objective judgment. As a result, it becomes the universal language of communication that transcends all boundaries—nothing escapes. Therefore, this resultant mode of speech is uninterested in the objects in themselves and operates on the level of monetary values. The speech, as a result, gains autonomy from the being and the truth. In the conversion of the object A into B, the object’s nature is of no interest and does not get affected. The exchange objects are invariable in contrast to the money, which performs as the ultimate joker, the absolute variable. The domain of the monetary exchange is limitless, yet the

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<sup>145</sup> “Definition of Imposture,” in *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus* (Cambridge University Press, March 15, 2022), <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/imposture>.

<sup>146</sup> Hénaff, *The Price of Truth: Gift, Money, and Philosophy*, 9.

objects in themselves escape from the imposed relations. Hénaff writes about the segregation of the speech from the truth and the being of the objects as follows:

“The Sophists introduce the power of pseudos into philosophy since they use it as a means of arguing, and they invent games of logoi in which the question of truth—the being of the thing—becomes arbitrary.”<sup>147</sup>

Consequently, the Sophists become capable of subjecting truth to a system of metricity, even though it is an incommensurable object. The language of the monetary exchange sets up price, which, in representing the truth as an object, preserves the actual being as an invariable throughout the process. The heterogeneous sets of objects are subjected to money and reorganized around this cypher via their proportional equalization. The outcome is universal literacy and communicability, which does not sacrifice the objects of exchange. Truth becomes speakable while being kept implicit. All monetary relations remain external to it. Furthermore, the process always remains reversible, suggesting that the truth does not disappear or become exhausted in its exchange; it can be deciphered into its incommensurability without any loss.

### **2.3 Rethinking Post-Truth and Object-Oriented Architecture through the Figure of Merchant**

Hénaff’s work assists in understanding how truth is enveloped and disseminated through today’s mass communication platforms. Money and the coding of truth become relevant in the post-truth debate, especially regarding the post-truth’s underlying causes, which originate from tremendous advancements in mass communication. Furthermore, Hénaff’s book provides ways of understanding the correlation between truth, being, and speech, helping to understand post-truth and the conception of aesthetics in OOO and Gage’s critique over the narratives which accompany the objects.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 9.

The reading of Rotman and Hénaff's works presents how it is possible to speak of a mode of speech that is universal and objective yet not attached to truth in a submissive manner. Instead, sophistry is at work, and speech has a certain amount of autonomy. This meta-language operates not as an anterior to truth or being. It is organized around its cypher and runs on a virtual level in a self-determined domain.

Hénaff deconstructs how money became the common measure of all objects, independent of their lack of shared aspects. He examines a unique language that enables the speaking of all objects through a shared value. Given the extreme diversity of information circulating in communication channels without governing figure in the post-truth era, the promise of a common measure that can organize a heterogeneous set with an unlimited and indeterminate number of members/objects becomes more than relevant.

Furthermore, the post-truth concept assumes that the consequences of social media, knowledge manipulation and provocation of subjective knowledge, personal opinions, and ideas have created chaos in which assessing and sifting through the entire information flow has become nearly impossible. The forms of exchange are deeply intertwined with these criticized consequences. As communication systems become more complicated, more third parties are involved; sources of information and recipients rarely come into direct contact. The ever-increasing volume of transactions adds on top of the mentioned developments. The consequence is the creation of a wholesale-like environment.

In such a wholesale environment, OOO is a figure that seeks to develop a universal theory that can totalize the assessment tools. It strives to create a unifying theory of everything, making aesthetics an all-encompassing medium and the most accurate and objective method of engagement with all objects. In this respect, the motive underlying the adoption of aesthetics in OOO has a strong affinity with money. Therefore, the economization of everything—the encoding of objects—is a potential guide to thinking about aesthetics as a universal language.

In part of coding all kinds of objects, aesthetics attains a correlation between objects in categorical distinctions. Ortega's notes illustrate this through metaphors, which Harman discusses in-depth: cypress and flame are tuned in to each other by poetic language. Accordingly, in OOO, there is a kind of sophistry at work that subjects everything to its language and forces its mediums of comparison and measure. It might be asked how does the aestheticization of an object, much like the economization, occur; how does the coding take place? In various ways, the object-money (code) relation is at work in aesthetics.

## CHAPTER 3

### ARCHITECTURE EMERGING FROM NOTHING

The previous chapter examined the aestheticization of all kinds of objects in G. Harman concerning the creation of a universal language. OOO aspires to develop more than just a language; it aspires to be “a new theory of everything,” involving aesthetics in accessing truth as well as exchanging it.<sup>148</sup> The sophistry in OOO subjects everything to its rhetorics and forces its mediums of comparison and measure—which is aesthetics—on everything. All the while, it accepts the impossibility of revealing the truth. Aesthetics seeks to become the language while also allowing the objects to be known as accurately as possible indirectly. Consequently, it can also be argued that aesthetics differs from money language. It

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<sup>148</sup> In his interview with the *Wired* magazine, Harman speaks of how he perceives “rhetorics” as a necessary element in dealing with “truth.” For the complete manuscript of the interview, please see Graham Harman, “More Speculative Realism,” interview by Bruce Sterling. *Wired*, June 17, 2011. <https://www.wired.com/2011/06/more-speculative-realism/>.

“I’ve always agreed with Nietzsche’s claim that the only way to improve your style is to improve your thoughts, but also believe that the best way to improve your thoughts is to improve your style. There is a tendency to think that philosophy is about explicit propositional content, and that style is merely pretentious ornament plastered on top of explicit propositions. Yet this assumes that correct representational statements about the world are possible, which is precisely what I deny. As I see it, truth is a matter of allusion, not of representational picture-drawing. To improve as a writer means primarily to improve one’s allusive and suggestive power.

We should not say ‘there is no truth’, since this vapid relativism is irresponsibly empty. But we should also not demand a frictionless contact with the real, as many scientific and absolutist philosophers do. Instead, approaching the truth requires something like insinuation or innuendo. That’s precisely what style is: saying something without explicitly saying it. A style is the tacit background condition in which all explicit utterances are made. Philosophical breakthroughs are always rhetorical breakthroughs. And as Aristotle already knew, rhetoric does not mean ‘devious non-rational persuasion’, but ‘establishing the tacit background conditions for later explicit statement’.”

still exhibits a great deal of interest in the truth of the objects, attempting to engage with it indirectly, in contradiction with the merchants’/sophists’ general disinterest.

M. F. Gage’s criticism of the narratives is one of the ways that discourse on the access to and exchange of objects in OOO translates into architecture. He argues that there is an unpairing of the real qualities and narratives in architecture, resulting in a rhetorical language. This alternative form of communication in architecture is coating objects with narratives detached from the truth. Nonetheless, Gage addresses the term rhetoric in his works differently from Harman. In one of his interviews, Harman asserts that he perceives rhetorics as an allusive and speculative form of speech that positively contributes to knowledge production.<sup>149</sup> The rhetoric in architecture, which Gage stresses, is more of a marketing issue adversely affecting architecture in multiple ways. He illustrates the affinity of the problematic reductionism in architecture to advertisements with the following examples:

“As with meaningless advertising slogans such as ‘Coke is It!’ or even deep in the history of literature through, for instance, Jane Austen’s Mrs. Bennet merchandising her daughters through fiction, architects increasingly have become promoters of infantilizing wares, continually selling the simplistic, or fun, at the expense of the deeper intellectual and social engagement so desperately needed in the spaces of the world.”<sup>150</sup>

Gage further notes the correlation between the truth of the problems and the narratives in architecture:

“As in advertising, products propose to solve individual problems, perhaps problems users weren’t even aware of having, until they were told they did. So too is architecture today expected to solve specific and easily understandable problems, rather than considering how it might produce equitable and just spaces of our future co-existence in broader social registers.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Graham Harman, “More Speculative Realism,” interview by Bruce Sterling. *Wired*, June 17, 2011.

<sup>150</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*, 29.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

Gage’s examination implies rhetorics’ incapacitation of more profound architectural discourses, including social equality. The way architects access, share and solve the truth of the problems becomes dominated by narratives and advertisements. As a result, accuracy and justification become emulated by narratives and advertising. The architects/experts and the uninitiated/clients/users become capable of understanding each other by transforming architecture into “consumable, simple narratives.” Consequently, the narratives grant architecture universal legibility at the expense of a lessening of the discipline.

This chapter focuses on how aesthetics creates a theatrical stage via which indirect access to truth might be gained. The debates also look at how OOO assesses the unbreachable gap between knowledge and reality. It provides an overview of the ways in which the descriptive poetics and list-making in OOO provide indirect access to truth and a mode of universal communication.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, the section concentrates on how OOO argues about multiple forms of object degeneration at work in the processes of access to and exchange of objects. The discussion is followed by the translation of these debates to architecture by Gage, as well as his problematization of the diminishing of architecture via “narratives.”

The following chapter adds to these discussions by concentrating on an architectural project by M. F. Gage Architects and how the kitbashing technique is utilized in the project. Gage’s design incorporates kitbashing as an architectural adaptation of the OOO’s listing technique, as well as a means of enabling indirect access to objects and ensuring exchange and communication via aesthetics where architecture is exposed to various forms of reductions.

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<sup>152</sup> Hélène Frichot criticizes these approaches—list-making and descriptive poetics—in Frichot, *Creative Ecologies: Theorizing the Practice of Architecture*, 109.

“Descriptive poetics and list-making frenzies replace more complex accounts of the truly messy relational matrix that entangles things and their transformations. To this I want to cry out in response, OOOh! No!”

### 3.1 “Detecting the Gap Between Knowledge and Reality”

The OOO posits an unbridgeable divide between knowledge and reality, as demonstrated by the theatrical model and the quadruple object. Reality, as well as real objects, are inaccessible in any sense. According to Harman’s approach, knowledge and reality never overlap accurately due to the gap. Nevertheless, he does not reject the importance of knowledge concerning the advancement and organizing of society and the shaping of everyday life. Through the theatrical model, he illustrates how the gap exists and how it should be dealt with. Accordingly, although the relation between knowledge and reality is like an unbridgeable gap (he even suggests that one can never know anything truly), he does not disregard the importance of the (imperfect) knowledge:

“Where knowledge is lacking, the people perish; without the promise of an increase in knowledge, our hopes for the future darken. For this reason, even if OOO’s argument that knowledge is always an imperfect translation of its object, whether through under- or overmining, were accepted, surely there is still a difference between having a better or worse handle on that object?”<sup>153</sup>

Harman continues to assert that the discourse on the (in)accessibility of truth and reality does not disprove that the GPS systems are more accurate than early maps, or a cancer patient would seek the hospital with the top-ranked oncology department.<sup>154</sup>

Harman inquires how better or worse treatment of objects constitutes the differences in the setting where the level of expertise on a subject concerns people to a large extent. In this respect, he writes:

“And since knowledge cannot be ‘truth’, which would imply an impossible direct revelation of the world, it needs to have some sort of contact with reality, though not contact of a direct sort, which we have seen to be impossible.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Harman, *Object Oriented Ontology*, 168.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

The aesthetic beholder was constructing the theatrical scene by replacing the real object by creating a virtual version of it—referred to as the sensual object—structured around the absence of the real object. Yet, according to Harman, knowledge has to be literal and direct due to its nature. Aesthetics cannot provide the necessary background for the production of knowledge since it contrasts with literalism in aiming to achieve indirect access to the real object. What he calls an “OOO model of knowledge” deals with the sensual objects to reach the real qualities rather than the real objects.<sup>156</sup>

Furthermore, he notes that knowledge differs from the aesthetic approach. In the case of metaphor, the aesthetic beholder was experiencing the sensual qualities (SQ), which would lead to an indirect relation with the real object (RO). In contrast, knowledge looks for inquiring into the object’s real qualities (RQ) by engaging the subject with the sensual object (SO). Knowledge seeks more profound qualities than the sensuous ones, which are recognized as false. Nevertheless, because the real objects are always withheld, knowledge must cope with the sensual ones.

Harman uses the term “paradigm” to explain “in what sense does the beholder supply real qualities for a sensual object.”<sup>157</sup> He borrows the concept of paradigm from Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996), who wrote on the philosophy of science. Harman calls the paradigms “justified untrue beliefs”: (1) they are not true because they do not provide an accurate picture of the reality which is withdrawn from them; (2) they are not real but are dealing with the sensuous objects; (3) they are constituting of “justified beliefs” up until they are disputed by the not yet discovered domains of the reality, the surplus of the object from the scientific knowing; (4) “it is literally built

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 189.

of real qualities: the vague, initially unstated background assumptions on which the paradigm is based.”<sup>158</sup>

Therefore, they function as models of the reality constructed upon the real qualities—not the real objects. They are neither perfect nor possible to be perfected; they are progressed or overthrown by other models. The gap between knowledge and reality always exists as an axiom for the OOO. Nevertheless, the difference between the models is determined according to, for example, their greater or lesser accuracy and comprehensiveness. The issue is not whether truth exists or not even though Harman explicitly argues that “there is no truth” according to the OOO perspective.<sup>159</sup> It is that knowledge and reality always maintain an unbridgeable gap. All scientific models are unsuccessful in thoroughly explaining the reality.

In doing so, Harman outlines the difference between the aesthetic and scientific approaches and how they function concerning the schema of the quadruple object. Aesthetics is based on experience—more particularly, the experiencing of the real object indirectly—whereas knowledge aims to, as Harman puts it, “attain some sort of partial grasp of the features of a sensual object that is already in our midst.”<sup>160</sup> Accordingly, one aspect of the separation lies in the types of actions: experiencing/grasping; another lies in the points of concern: real objects/real qualities. Aesthetics constructs the theatrical scene where the real object can be experienced indirectly. To do so, the sensual object is created from scratch in the process. On the other hand, knowledge intends to delve deeper into a sensual object to attain real qualities that can be grasped through intellect but not through sensuous experience. There are also paradigms/models in science, much like the theatrical model of aesthetics; nonetheless, scientific models never invent their objects: “art is

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

not the production of knowledge about things, but that it creates new things-in-themselves.”<sup>161</sup>

### 3.2 Metaphors and The Process of Encoding in the Quadruple Object

In detecting the gap between knowledge and reality, G. Harman speaks of a fourfold structure that separates the real from the sensual and the qualities from the objects. There are four categories, all of which exist independently but are correlated to each other in specific ways: (a) Real Objects (RO); (b) Real Qualities (RQ); (c) Sensual Objects (SO); (d) Sensual Qualities (SQ). Harman presents his interpretation of the quadruple structure, borrowed from Heidegger, in the book titled *Art and Objects*<sup>162</sup> and his earlier book *The Quadruple Object*,<sup>163</sup> in addition to the *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*.<sup>164</sup> The basis of the structure contains a rupture between real objects and their qualities. By their nature, real objects are always withdrawn from everything else, including the aesthetic beholder. Their presence does not rely on or emerge from external relations; they possess absolute autonomy. The qualities of the real object, on the other hand, are distinct from the object itself, and they are not by definition incomprehensible-unlike the real object. Consequently, the divergence between the object and its qualities results in a twofold structure, but the fourfold convolution occurs only through the presence of what Harman calls the theatrical model. He explains the theatrical model as follows:

“[...] the aesthetic beholder was required to step in to replace the missing real object, giving rise to a theatrical model of aesthetics: the reader of Homer’s metaphor ‘wine-dark sea ’behaves in the manner of a method actor who

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>162</sup> Graham Harman, *Art and Objects* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).

<sup>163</sup> Graham Harman, *Quadruple Objects* (Winchester, U.K.; Washington, D.C.: Zero Books, 2011).

<sup>164</sup> Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*.

replaces the withdrawn sea in its absence and takes on all its various purported wine-dark qualities.”<sup>165</sup>

Although the real object, namely the sea in the example, is withdrawn from the direct experience of the aesthetic beholder, the metaphor provides the subject with a theatrical scene that allows the wine-dark qualities to be experienced. These are not the real qualities (RQ) but those offered by the theatrical model. The metaphorical model sets out the correlation between the sensual qualities (SQ) and the real object (RO).<sup>166</sup> As the example of Homer’s wine-dark sea shows, this is an experience that is only made possible by aesthetics. Harman asserts that even when the real object pulls itself from the subject, the aesthetic beholder does not experience a void. This is due to the surface qualities of the object left behind, which produce the aesthetic experience in the subject’s consciousness.<sup>167</sup> Hence, the absence (of the real object) is replaced by creating a (theatrical) model derived from that antecedent void.

Harman notes that the RO cannot be tied to the SQs that arise from the theatrical model because the RO always withdraws from the subject and the SQs of the object are consequently “floating in space, attached to nothing.”<sup>168</sup> In the model described by Harman, the aesthetic beholder responds to the absence of the sea (RO) by creating the theatrical scene that constructs the sensual object (SO) based on the SQs. Accordingly, the void is managed by introducing a new object created by the subject. This process does not allow the subject to get closer to the real object but leads to creating an alternative object that is comprehensible to the viewer; this is an object that does not retrieve from human experience.

In Homer’s metaphor, SO is what replaces RO – the sea. Moreover, the metaphor works mainly because of how all the elements are put together. The metaphor brings

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 181.

two objects with no comparable aspects in the literal sense—the sea and the wine—together. Moreover, they are ordered in this particular way that the sea becomes SO, and the wine qualities become SQ.<sup>169</sup> The SQ is only to be understood aesthetically, not literally. Otherwise, Homer’s assertion would be a straightforward definition of the sea, and he would be dealing with the RO. The correlation is achieved by non-literal means, suggesting that the quality of being wine-dark cannot be attributed to the sea as an object.

Furthermore, Harman states that the observer can perceive the same object (e.g., the White House) in more than one way and that the qualities experienced can differ every time.<sup>170</sup> The White House is more than a “bundle of qualities;” there is a White House as an object. Nevertheless, he writes that the building, which “endures” throughout all the fluctuations and transformations in the perception, is not the actual object.<sup>171</sup> The beholder observes an object that endures in all alternative modes of perception as the same, but the enduring one, the real object/White House, never participates in the process; it is still incomprehensible. Using the White House as an example, Harman illustrates the autonomy of the sensual object from the sensual qualities: The attributes are associated but not directly tied to the object in a rigid way. Even though the “sensual objects exist only as the correlate of our acts of consciousness,”<sup>172</sup> the theatrical model preserves the sensual object as stable and isolated from the momentary consequences of how the subject experiences it.

Harman’s fourfold structure proposes the existence of real qualities (RQ) as a category separate from the sensual ones. While both sensual objects and qualities are brought into being by the theatrical model, real qualities exist without the presence of an observer of the object. On the other hand, the divergence between the objects

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 155.

and their qualities externalizes the qualities to the objects themselves. To define such a category that completes the fourfold structure, Harman returns to the example of the White House as an object of aesthetic experience.<sup>173</sup> While the sensual qualities of the building are in constant flux-like the white color whose hue changes depending on the angle, distance, surrounding atmosphere, and the totality of all other variations in the experience of the object-there are certain qualities that make the object the White House. Harman inquires about how far one can go in removing the sensuous aspects one by one until the object experienced is no longer the White House. This includes looking at the building from different angles and sides, having a partial view, and even reconstructing the whole building. He writes, “Through mental exercises of this sort, we approach the real qualities that the phenomenon needs in order to be itself.”<sup>174</sup> Accordingly, the category of real qualities brought in by Harman’s fourfold structure is the quintessence of the qualities necessary for the object to be itself - those that cannot be subtracted. Moreover, just like RO, these RQ are inaccessible and withdrawn from human cognition, not only regarding sensuous but also intellectual intuition.<sup>175</sup>

Accordingly, Harman’s quadruple object, which he also sets as the basis of the OOO, explains how a real object gets aestheticized—not by manipulating the real object itself, by creating a new object (the sensual object) through aesthetic coding. The whole structure is constructed upon the presence of the void (cypher), created by the withdrawal of the real object from the experience of a subject. A theatrical model of the real then replaces the absence. The objects are never explicit in aesthetic perception, and there are no restrictions on what may be considered an aesthetic object. Aesthetics establishes relationships between items that are not comparable in natural ways, such as the wine-dark sea metaphor. The wine and sea have no standard

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 157.

measure but become involved in an algebraic equation through the metaphor. There is an aestheticization/monetization at work to produce a unified, all-encompassing aesthetic language, operating on a theatrical paradigm based on the void.

### 3.3 The Problem of Narratives in Architecture

M. F. Gage, one of the architects involved in OOO discourse, observes that architecture is abandoning more profound subsurface layers of the disciplinary concerns in favor of the easily tangible ones.<sup>176</sup> He argues, in his book *Designing Social Equality: Architecture, Aesthetics, and the Perception of Democracy*, that the current discipline further distances itself from real architectural qualities and embraces narratives. He draws attention to how the seeking of justification transforms into an issue of advertisement. Furthermore, his works explain how these narratives operate and why the real architectural qualities are at stake—while also arguing what aesthetics has to offer.

He accentuates rice products on the market—the ones with the title “gluten-free” on the package—to comment on the problematized state of the architectural discipline and highlight their comparable motives. In this analogy, the objects bear two layers of qualities: the former is the real qualities, and the latter is the narratives that are only secondary and external to the real object. He makes the point that today’s architecture is devoid of “actual architectural qualities, or even actual sustainable properties”<sup>177</sup> while being justified by LEED certification and other authoritative credentials of, but not limited to, sustainability. The narratives accompanying architectural practice are disconnected from the actual; they proceed unparalleled: “In advertising, words and graphics have ceased to function as descriptors of

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<sup>176</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

products and operate nearly independently in the service of unrelated, but consumable, simple narratives.”<sup>178</sup>

The narratives are forming a communication system on the object’s features. On the other hand, while promoting communication in various ways, they put real qualities at risk by potentially operating unparallel to the actual. Gage mentions that there are two simultaneous phases of narration in the process of labeling the product as “gluten-free”: (a) the ending of the titles to “function as descriptors;” (b) the beginning of the titles to “operate nearly independently” from their objects’ real qualities.<sup>179</sup> The movement away from the real object towards the rhetoric stems from the fact that the newly associated label gluten-free does not originate from the real qualities. It functions disjointly, on a level that serves a communicative purpose. This transformation stands for the disintegration of the titles from the objects and the functioning of the rhetorical coding as an external force.

The disassociation of the narratives from their objects is the process Gage observes in contemporary architecture as a discipline he claims to have ceased to stand upon “actual architectural qualities.”<sup>180</sup> In this situation, the values are not emerging from the objects themselves but are encoded upon them through rhetorics. LEED certificates are an example of a conflict between object appropriation and justification systems on the one hand and their actual qualities on the other. Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) is a system developed by the US Green Building Council (USGBC) for measuring and certifying sustainability as a variable in architectural design. It provides a globally recognizable and trustworthy certification system that subjects sustainability to its measures.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

The description provided by USGBC on their official website about the certification system states as follows: “We stand for accountability, and we translate that accountability through the LEED third-party certification process.”<sup>181</sup> USGBC definition emphasizes accountability for why systems such as LEED are sought after by many people and companies. By providing the certificates, USGBC bears the responsibility regarding the trueness of the statements. They act as a third-party institution that becomes a translator—a communicator between the primary parties in an architectural exchange.

Gage wrote about the relation between LEED and “actual” qualities: “A building is claimed to be architecturally successful or significant by virtue of its LEED certification rather than its actual architectural qualities, or even actual sustainable properties.”<sup>182</sup> The success or significance is not genuine anymore by nature but is constantly subjected to approval through third-party authorities. The discipline does not directly deal with the actual values but rather with these approved rhetorics. Institutions such as LEED provide certificates to provide a relatively more objective and calculable way of assigning values to objects. They function to trigger the communication objectively.

Nevertheless, the result is an economy of values where the architectural qualities, including the sustainable qualities, become involved indirectly, through which they are actively exchanged. The qualities of objects are externally attributed and in dynamic transformation; no value is permanent. The question is if these narratives necessarily sacrifice the real qualities, signify them in a depleting manner where the truths of the problems are lost in the creation of narrations, or are there ways through

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<sup>181</sup>“ Why LEED,” Why LEED certification | U.S. Green Building Council, accessed April 28, 2022, <https://www.usgbc.org/leed/why-leed>.

<sup>182</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*, 125.

which the truth is retrievable through deciphering in any moment, regardless of the circumstances.

The communication made possible by these narrations is not only between the disciplined individuals, such as exchanging information from one architect to another. The issue of the privileged individual and its relation to the unprivileged is a topic of concern in Gage's work. He asserts that, if not the whole, one of the underlying motives in creating the narratives is to communicate with the undisciplined individuals about the disciplinary knowledge. For him, such narratives are based on the logic of "privileged insight into the problems of society," and they are the consequences of "the unproductive critical strategies of producing 'awareness' to reveal these insights to the uninitiated, and simplified narratives to convey both."<sup>183</sup> The project behind the narratives is to create awareness.

Therefore, the rhetoric is enmeshed within the existing status quo; it is a mediator over the boundaries set by the social hierarchy. The coatings of the objects are part of the discipline's functioning "through the packaging and sale of an approved body of knowledge, guarded by institutions vested in the status quo."<sup>184</sup> Gage notes that the privileged insights are not stemming from the "actual architectural qualities" but rather from the narratives which subject the architectural discipline to certain power relations and hierarchies reinforced in the process.<sup>185</sup> Even the quality of sustainability itself becomes extracted from the objects; it operates independently from the objects and the discipline by engaging with the third parties, to the degree that a building certificated as sustainable might not even be as such. In many cases, the narratives quickly fail to provide the truth, illustrated by the example Gage provides: A house that is LEED certificated because of having solar panels, but is

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid..

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 125.

far from being sustainable because of the two SUVs in its garage, which is not taken into account by the LEED certification system.<sup>186</sup>

The concept of the degradation of a profound discourse in Gage's criticism (the subordination of the more profound layers to the surface layers) is not about the emphasizing of any sort of concern over the others (in a fashion of truths against truths) but rather a concern over how accurately the truth of the problems can be exchanged. At stake is the truth of the issues which are indirectly referred to and communicated about in the case of the rhetorical coding and sought to be more effectively sealed with, which is the basis of OOO's embodiment of aesthetics.

In light of the discipline's current ineffectiveness, as asserted by him, an aesthetic turn in architecture is necessary to prevent the discipline's dependence on and claim to directly access to singular truths and reality, as well as the acquisition of absolute knowledge; to "allow into the profession the possibility of addressing not only that which is known or claimed to be, but also that which is speculative, the not yet known or unknowable."<sup>187</sup> He inquires about a way of being able to refer to the not yet known or even the unknowable while bringing another question, how to emancipate from the relations of power that reinforces the existing hierarchies—to which his response is again through an approach based on aesthetics.

### **3.4 Building as an Object in Architecture**

In the article titled "Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture" (2015), Gage discusses the reciprocal translation of the OOO and the architectural discipline. The following is a remarkable statement by Gage which refers to what lies in the foundation of his work: "For architecture, one basic but fruitful translation

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 115.

of OOO is the unbearably literal equation of object with building.”<sup>188</sup> The basic assumption of considering buildings as objects in the sense of OOO philosophy glances at the incomprehensible and unexperienceable nature of the real objects, suggesting that buildings are a kind of object which always remains withdrawn from everything else, including the human subject. He asserts that the buildings as objects “means that its reality cannot be understood through its external relations - including its relation to context.”<sup>189</sup>

In this work, Gage borrows the “undermining” and “overmining” concepts from Harman and examines their applications to buildings as objects. Harman frequently mentions these ideas because they lead to erroneous interpretations of objects. Both undermining and overmining are irreconcilable with the OOO’s intention to place the objects as the fundamental constitutive units of reality. Gage notes that the buildings exist regardless of any gaze that presumes a unity of component entities or bundles of qualities when designating the buildings as objects. Likewise, buildings are not just their outward interactions, but they exist independently. As a result, the objects are neither underminable nor overminable because they are not the sum of their constituents nor their external relations.

Harman describes undermining as a strategy for identifying underlying constitutive parts that, when combined, form a larger object than themselves in his book *The Quadruple Object*.<sup>190</sup> In explaining its principles, he makes the following remark on the undermining techniques: “what seems at first like an autonomous object is really just a motley aggregate built of smaller pieces. Only what is basic can be real.”<sup>191</sup> Undermining an object implies that it is a “derivative product” emerging from the “permutations” of those elements as long as an object is still divisible into some other

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<sup>188</sup> Gage, “Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture,” 98.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>190</sup> Graham Harman, *Quadruple Objects*.

<sup>191</sup> Harman, “Undermining,” in *The Quadruple Object*, 15.

smaller parts. Such an approach suggests that objects “gain their reality from elsewhere;” they are “too shallow to be the fundamental reality in the universe.”<sup>192</sup>

Similarly, to undermining, Harman explains the overmining as a reduction of the objects in an upward direction, where “objects are important only insofar as they are manifested to the mind, or are part of some concrete event that affects other objects as well.”<sup>193</sup> As a result, the existence of the objects is inseparable from their external relations. While it is a form of undermining to claim that the objects are sums of their effects on others, saying that the objects are the overall effect they create in observer’s minds is another way of overmining. Both claim that the objects do not exist autonomously as the independent elements of reality. An underlying correlationism indicates that the objects exist only in correlation to others.

Gage demonstrates undermining and overmining as follows by using the examples from Harman’s works:

“An example of undermining the reality of an object would be to believe, as Leucippus did in the fifth century BCE, that objects are merely collections of atoms, which are what constitute the true reality of the universe and therefore any object in question. An example of overmining might be to say that an object only becomes real when it is perceived by an observer (idealism), or that it is only a small part of a larger network of forces in which it is enmeshed - as one might say a leaf is really only a part of a tree, or a tree merely part of a forest, or a forest merely part of an ecosystem.”<sup>194</sup>

By incorporating both overmining, undermining, and duomining into architectural discourse, Gage seeks to raise awareness on these method’s harmful consequences and their frequency of use—as well as to look for potential ways of dealing with architectural objects solely for the sake of what they are in an autonomous state of being. Undermining is often practiced in approaching buildings with smaller

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>193</sup> Harman, “Overmining,” in *The Quadruple Object*, 19.

<sup>194</sup> Gage, “Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture,” 98.

constitutive elements that are real and assembled into an edifice that does not exist independently of these elements. This is similar to the situation of Leucippus, who places atoms in the foreground in quest of the primary constituents of all objects; yet, in contemporary discourse, atoms are also undermined and replaced in search of other infinitely small particles. The buildings, in this sense, are objects that are self-reliant and self-explanatory; neither the atoms, quarks, nor infinitesimal strings that are part of its physical structure are more real than the building itself. Likewise, in the case of overmining, buildings do not only exist only because others perceive them.

Another example is looking at the buildings as parts of the bigger wholes or networks, such as the cities and building clusters. An object-oriented approach suggests that a building is not actual only because it is part of a city, a district, or a building among other buildings—as in the tree-forest relation mentioned by Gage. That is to say, the presence of the buildings is not granted from its correlation to elsewhere.

Considering the translation of Harman's concepts into the architecture, Gage asserts that the buildings are, like any other object, can be spoken of as being undermined or overmined in many instances and various ways.<sup>195</sup> Nonetheless, Harman's method permits one to regard buildings as real as any other object—as another fundamental reality component. The types of mining are harmful exercises that lead to the neglect of buildings as individual entities. They have an infinite number of potential ramifications that affect buildings as physical beings and the functioning mechanisms of architecture at large.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 99.

### 3.4.1 Cases of Undermining the Architectural Objects

In the article “Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture,” Gage stresses a particular instance of undermining an architectural object. He informs the reader about the presence of an architectural project at its initial stages and notes that the building is labeled as “LEED Platinum-certified affordable housing.”<sup>196</sup> The point he aims to draw attention to is that the project was not yet built when he was writing the article, but it was already claiming to be LEED certified. Being sustainable is a quality of the architectural product, not an object itself. Similarly, sustainable components cannot replace the entirety of a building but instead can be sub-elements of it. Nevertheless, the object’s qualities are presented to the audience even before the building is present and treated as if there is no difference between these qualities (sustainability) and the object (the building). The object is undermined for the sake of a particular portion of its constitutive parts, which provide the sustainable qualities to the object and are necessary to obtain a LEED certification—but also constitutes neither the whole domain of architectural qualities nor the building itself. Moreover, the LEED certification is functioning as a form of justification of the entire design, not just the part of concerns about being sustainable. Gage notes:

“A building with a LEED gold certification is seen as a great piece of architecture, even though this does not consider any architectural aspects of a building other than its energy use and its relationship with the environment.”<sup>197</sup>

Even though LEED certification and sustainable design are more recent forms of undermining, Gage says that most architectural movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were involved in various forms of undermining. The architect Patrik Schumacher’s Parametricism is another example he mentions. Schumacher’s

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 99.

approach to architecture is described as “interconnected sets of information and differentiated components.”<sup>198</sup> In this instance, the architectural object is “based on a grammar of components that respond to inputs and impact the whole.”<sup>199</sup> As a result, the pieces are prioritized over the whole, as if the building is nothing more than a collection of its parts rather than a separate entity to be considered independently.

It is crucial to point out that the stance against undermining is different from neglecting the importance of the parts. It is the other way around: OOO is against sacrificing the whole object for the sake of its parts, especially in an eclectic gesture. Gage’s work is far from suggesting the dismissal of the sustainable aspects of a building and intends to prove the LEED certification as useless. His writing raises consciousness over how the parts and qualities of an object began to overshadow the rest of the object, becoming the foundations of totalitarian judgments and justification-seeking approaches.

### **3.4.2 Cases of Over- and Duoming the Architectural Objects**

While confirming that the architectural elements are undeniably members of broader networks, Gage is cynical about the ways of justification of a design via these networks. He addresses two types of overmining: (a) diagrammatic simplifications, in which the architectural object is reduced to graphics, and (b) metaphorical reductions, in which the architectural object is reduced to words.

The diagrams are based on ideas, are easily understandable, and do not need literacy or foreknowledge. Accordingly, ideas are produced, presented, exchanged, and communicated highly efficiently without confronting complexity or necessitating expertise. Gage refers to the arrows that take up a substantial portion of the diagrams

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 99.

when converting concepts about the relationships between objects into a sketch.<sup>200</sup> The arrows sometimes show the deformations and manipulations of the form of the building in correlation to the ideas that are operating behind it. These ideas are limitless, including an intention to receive more sun or provide an entrance to enhance accessibility. For instance, Gage refers to a diagram showing a corner of a building pushed towards the east to fit the local zoning envelope.<sup>201</sup> These diagrams ease the communication, especially with the non-experts; they are consumable:

“Arrow diagrams have immediately consumable benefits, which is why this strategy currently thrives. Architects need not manage any form of complexity, but only develop a cursory, diagrammable idea that can be easily transformed into a building. If the idea is obviously legible in the final building (which usually looks like the diagram), the public or client is likely to “get it,” and the building is legitimized through its direct reference to the big idea; the diagram is a relational conduit.”<sup>202</sup>

As a result of sacrificing all other aspects of the design and focusing extensively on the diagrammable idea, buildings become diagram-like; the ideas are even visible in the final form of the building in many cases. Big ideas are catchy figures that can be more easily advertised and exchanged. Therefore, the overmining of an architectural object to one of its qualities, outcomes, or consequences arising from its external relationships in a particular network—meanwhile neglecting the complexity of the object itself—is a reduction that transforms the real depth of the object into a shallow one.

Similar to how the diagrams reduce architecture into “caricatures,” metaphors conduct the same process using words rather than graphics.<sup>203</sup> The Denver Art Museum by Daniel Libeskind and the World Trade Center Transportation Hub are two cases that Gage refers to in examining the overmining through metaphors.

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 101.

Libeskind points out the mountains in close distance to the building as a reference for legitimizing the design of the building's form. Likewise, Calatrava associates the shape of his design with a "flying bird." He justifies the form as reflecting "the theme of transportation."<sup>204</sup>

On many occasions of undermining and overmining, both methods take place simultaneously, which Harman refers to as duominig. For instance, Gage notes that the reductionism of the buildings through diagrams inherits not only an overmining by "its participation in a singular big idea" more extensive than and external to the object itself but also an undermining in the way that the "big idea only refers to only one aspect of the building."<sup>205</sup>

### **3.5 Architecture Emerging from Nothing**

An architecture emerging from elsewhere, both in search of legitimation and causation, undertakes reductions in countless ways. Over-, under- and duominig provide the potential to justify the presence of the architectural objects by seeking their reality elsewhere. Within this context, Gage asserts that architecture does not have to be "a connector of things" or "the result of analysis." He speaks about the possibility of architecture as "a liberated player." The rules of the game/sport emerge from "the productive tensions between deeply complex realities and their sensorial perception."<sup>206</sup> The gap between reality and the limit of sensual experience becomes the fertile ground for new approaches to and for architecture. Going beyond the sphere of the already perceived, computed, and known reasons and putting an end to limiting architecture for specific preconceived goals opens the possibility of addressing more profound aspects of objects and reality that are being disregarded.

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 104.

When architecture does not ground itself on other things, it becomes devoid of any foundation in an absolute sense. Through such a reconsideration, architecture becomes an object in the sense that OOO provokes. It becomes autonomous and discrete. An object cannot exist in correlation to others but only does by itself, which is the case Gage puts by the following words:

“Under the banner of OOO, architecture has the responsibility to emerge from the careful study of - absolutely nothing. Architecture can be justified only by its existence and not by reductively isolated key relationships.”<sup>207</sup>

An architecture based on nothing does not lose contact with the issues of everyday life. It does not give up on being socially conscious, political, or sustainable. He notes that this is far from nihilism and an “anti-intellectual position.”<sup>208</sup> Replacing the foundations that architecture based on external relations with nothingness allows the profession to become political, social, and even sustainable in more speculative ways without confusing these qualities with the object itself.

### **3.6 Remarks on an Architecture Emerging from Nothing**

Gage’s critique of architectural reductionism is increasingly critical in light of the current state of the architectural discipline with regard to the post-truth debates. The split between truth and narratives, as observed by Gage, is the reason behind its relevance. He speaks of a rhetorics taking place in architecture, through the uncoupling of the real qualities of objects and narratives. The information accompanying the architectural objects cease to function as descriptors and begin to operate independently. This form of rhetorical coding enables the communication in architecture in an efficient manner, despite the obscurity and intangibility of most domains of architecture.

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 104.

The extra layer of coating on the objects, which are the narratives, makes them referable, judgeable, and observable. On the other hand, Gage shows that there is also a lessening of the architecture into mere narratives. Therefore, the rhetorical coding in the case of the observance of Gage does not operate in a sustainable manner, where the truth of the objects is not sacrificed. Rather, the narratives can be commented to be exhausting the truth, reducing the object to its coating—as demonstrated in the way the narratives tend to replace the real qualities of the objects.

Gage's counter suggesting is the development of an architecture emerging from nothing. Such an architecture would not seek justification or causation from various narratives imposed on itself externally. Rather than operating through such rhetorics, aesthetics offers architecture increased autonomy, greater accuracy, and liberation from the constraints of the narratives. As a result of this transformation, the discipline can be able to address more profound issues more openly and accurately.

Harman's theatrical stage shows how this aesthetics functioning from the scope of OOO. It highlights the gap between knowledge and truth and illustrates what is referred to by aesthetics as a means of gaining access to objects. In the theatrical stage, objects are aestheticized to have more accurate—and indirect—access to the truth. In doing so, the aestheticization creates its own objects separate from the real objects, constructing a kind of a theatrical stage of the reality. This virtual stage allows the real objects (which are withdrawn from everything else) to be addressable, accessible, and experienceable. Aestheticization builds a universal aesthetic language based on the theatrical model.

In short, the review of Gage's problematization of narratives and embracement of aesthetics demonstrates a way of dealing with reductionism. His arguments provide an alternative way of dealing with architecture's communication and exchange crises in the post-truth era through aesthetics. The following chapter focuses on a significant architectural project by Gage, which stands for an architecture emerging from nothing.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CASE OF THE TOWER ON WEST 57TH STREET, NYC

#### 4.1 Introduction

The tower on West 57th Street in New York City<sup>209</sup> shows one possible way in which the architectural discipline and works can resist being subjected to narratives. The project seeks to engage with reality's full potential rather than limiting itself to narratives. It refrains from being rhetorically coded and embraces aesthetics as its principal communication and exchange medium. Furthermore, through an aesthetic turn, the tower is not dissected into its bits and pieces of narratives for being more easily understandable, communicable, or marketable. It preserves both depth and complexity as a real object. Aesthetic engagement remains the means through which the access to the object offers the way that this richness of the building is not lost.

More particularly, the kitbashing technique becomes the means of stripping off the building from any symbolic or representative value and equipping it solely with formal values. The questions of function are shown to be intertwined with narratives and power relations, making the form the means of achieving to sustain a more equal politics. Kitbashing technique brings numerous objects together in the form of lists, a non-hierarchical, object-oriented way of ordering and clustering objects. The lists allow objects to preserve their being as a concealed reality while interacting with the

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<sup>209</sup> The tower on West 57th Street in New York City is an architectural project by Mark Foster Gage Architects which is designed for a client in 2015. It is not a physically constructed project, but rather exists as a paper architecture. It is designed to be located in Manhattan, NY as a residential skyscraper.

The Project does not have a special name and referred in the company website and the principal architect M. F. Gage's works with a descriptive name as the residential tower on West 57th Street in New York. "Khaleesi Tower" is its nickname.

other objects and creating a network. The numerous amounts of gargoyles and other sculptural elements on the tower interact with each other by kitbashing. As a result, they lose their symbolic representative values but preserve their formality and individuality.

The building is designed by M. F. Gage Architects. The head of the company is M. F. Gage who addresses the gap towards reality from a perspective that incorporates specific OOO approaches. He is a prominent figure in contemporary architectural debates related to OOO and aesthetics philosophy in general. The architect's joint involvement in both academia and practice is a distinctive feature of him, which allows him to examine a translation of OOO in the architectural practice effectively even though none of his works are realized. He is among other figures who embrace or associate themselves in various ways with the OOO and G. Harman's works. One significant aspect of Gage's works is that they do not reduce architecture into representing an external (philosophical, in this case) discourse. His writings, teaching, and designs work consistently, in close contact with each other, examining ways of doing architecture in continuous exchange with OOO. Consequently, architecture becomes more than a mere representation of other discourses but gains autonomy while remaining in close contact with the external discourses; it gains a porous skin that allows reciprocal communication.

Gage's books and essays approach toward an object-oriented architecture extends beyond what is pioneered by Harman and refers extensively to aesthetic philosophy in general. His works express his concerns and thoughts on issues in society, the world, everyday life, and architecture through his works. In addition to *Designing Social Equality: Architecture, Aesthetics, and the Perception of Democracy*,<sup>210</sup> two other books that are worth mentioning are *Aesthetics Equals Politics: New*

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<sup>210</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*.

*Discourses Across Art, Architecture, and Philosophy*<sup>211</sup> and *Aesthetic Theory: Essential Texts for Architecture and Design*.<sup>212</sup>

The tower on West 57th street is one of many buildings by Mark Foster Gage Architects' architectural design company that embraces the debates provocatively sparked by his scholarly works. If not characterized as the OOO discourse given shape as an architectural product, it is a fruitful outcome of Gage's collaborative engagement in both philosophical debates and practice and his ongoing teaching involvement. Therefore, a parallel reading of the building and Gage's writings allows one to delve deeper into an object-oriented design and an architecture that takes on a critical position regarding the gap between knowledge and reality.

This chapter intends to direct attention to the design technique called kitbashing used in the tower and expand upon this object-oriented technique's potential for presenting an alternative mode of (aesthetic) engagement with reality. Gage's effort of developing the concept of kitbashing and exploring its potential in the meantime through various mediums and projects, including not only office projects but also a topic integrated into his university teaching, could be considered as a search for an architecture that he refers as emerging from nothing.

Concerning the theatrical stage model of Harman, Gage's kitbashing claims for more accurate access to the objects—including buildings as objects—and places aesthetics in its basis. It aims to emancipate the architectural discipline from the limiting forces of contemporary disciplinary rhetorics and economics. The architecture itself is being sacrificed and being constantly under- and overmined into other things, such as in the cases referred to by Gage where architectural objects that are already sustainable by themselves are undermined into LEED-certificated objects because of

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<sup>211</sup> Mark Foster Gage, ed., *Aesthetics Equals Politics: New Discourses across Art, Architecture, and Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019).

<sup>212</sup> Mark Foster Gage, *Aesthetic Theory: Essential Texts for Architecture and Design* (New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 2011).

the rhetorics of sustainable design achieved by the institutions like the US Green Building Council (USGBC). The rhetorics displaces the real architectural qualities from the domain of communication and presents the LEED certification as the object of communication, which overlooks the architectural object in total.

Kitbashing incorporates objects into architecture as the preeminent constituents of architecture, while seeking to emancipate the architectural object from the modes of coding other than aesthetics. In doing so, kitbashing involves an absolute embodiment of aesthetics as its medium. In this chapter, to expand upon what object means within the scope of the architectural discipline in the works of Gage, what are architectural objects, and lastly, how do buildings relate to objects, his article “Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture”<sup>213</sup> is visited extensively. Moreover, particularly for the clarification of the concepts of undermining and overmining in this kitbashing discourse, which is led by the OOO philosophy, this chapter refers to the explanations of these two concepts in the G. Harman’s book *The Quadruple Object*<sup>214</sup> as complementary sources to Gage’s writings.

On top of that, this chapter scrutinizes lists and litanies as two essential notions that help to understand the use of the kitbashing by Gage in various mediums. The technique of listing is frequently used in the works of people involved in the discourse of OOO. It is primarily embraced by Graham Harman, who openly shares the reason behind his use of lists in an interview titled “More Speculative Realism”<sup>215</sup> and in various posts on his website.<sup>216</sup> However, the discourse on lists in OOO is not limited to the works of Harman and Gage; it is, indeed, well-discussed by others,

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<sup>213</sup> Gage, “Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture,” 104.

<sup>214</sup> Harman, *The Quadruple Object*.

<sup>215</sup> Graham Harman, More Speculative Realism, interview by Bruce Sterling, June 17, 2011, WIRED.

<sup>216</sup> These posts can be access from Harman’s personal blog: Graham Harman, “Object-Oriented Philosophy,” n.d., <https://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com>.

including the principal figure Ian Bogost (1976–), an award-winning game designer, author, and academic involved with OOO and other relevant discourses.

In his prominent book, *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It's Like to Be a Thing*,<sup>217</sup> Bogost seeks to examine a speculative realist approach to objects in a non-anthropocentric, non-correlationist manner. A significant idea that “alien phenomenology” underlies is that all objects exist autonomously and in complete isolation from each other—not only from human access but from the access of all objects that constitute reality. Thus, like Harman and Gage, it embraces a flat ontology where humans are only objects among other objects, but nothing other. This book shows how listing can be regarded as an invaluable technique in engaging with reality and its objects. This act of listing is not only a matter of categorization, classification, or an ordering of things—all of which have strong ties with power relations that are embedded in the process. Instead, Bogost presents listing as an ideally non-hierarchical process emancipated from power and other similar motives, which otherwise take away the autonomy of the so-called withdrawn objects. Accordingly, Bogost’s elaboration of lists widens out the overall discussion and helps understand the underlying systematics of the kitbashing technique of Gage.

Overall, the chapter undertakes an examination of the tower on West 57th street, particularly about the concept of kitbashing, which is a matter of dealing and ordering objects and is emerging from the listing technique, providing a form of translation of it to architectural design. It is a unique approach to dealing with architectural objects that has the potential to redirect the discipline away from anthropocentrism and correlationism while also standing for the autonomy of architectural discipline and architectural knowledge, both of which are under degeneration due to overmining and undermining operations at work.

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<sup>217</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It's Like to Be a Thing*.

## 4.2 Kitbashing, Lists, and Litanies

The review of the notion of lists in OOO is relevant for understanding ways of dealing with objects while being involved in nothing except the objects themselves. Such conceptualized forms of listings suggest the absence of higher causes and motivations and smaller constitutive units from where the presence of the lists is reasoned out. As considered in OOO, lists are emerging from nothing but a “void.”

Harman shows that the lists are not solely determined as an act of bringing things together. In this act of gathering, a separation, or to say, distinguishing of things from each other, is present. The lists become a way of speaking of very distinct figures that are not in contact; it sets them adjacent to each other and gives rise to a rich network of relations. In the meantime, it never sacrifices the individuality of its elements. The members of the lists are never placed tangentially or coincidingly. There is the space that surrounds these objects and the “commas” that interlink these members to each other. For example, given that “A,” “B,” and “C” constitute the list “A, B, C,” none of the members of the list are in touch with each other directly. Still, at the same time, through the means of the listing, there is a coming together, which gives rise to potentially infinite numbers of relations between these objects.

Furthermore, Harman’s works illustrate how these lists penetrate through the boundaries that come with categorizing the objects. He shows that the lists are capable of containing discrete objects, even though they might belong to different categories of beings, such as imaginary countries, historical figures, scientific objects, mathematical symbols, limbs of animals—all of which do not have any aspect in common unless there is a cypher that organizes these around itself. Such an algebraic equation always deals with meaning, though Harman’s use of listing claims to be devoid of such syntaxes. Accordingly, the argumentation behind the use of lists in OOO differs from the organization of objects around the void through a cypher and syntax. The meaning of the list does not arise from the internal organization of the objects, nor from the focal point, their order, and their ways of joining each other.

This chapter focuses on developing a commentary on the concept of lists as an established technical term onto which various philosophies and concerns are projected. Furthermore, it focuses on the concepts of litanies as it appears in the works of Ian Bogost as an object-oriented form of listing.

#### 4.2.1 Listing of Objects and the Kitbashing Technique

The tower on West 57th street is the title of a skyscraper project designed in 2015 by the architectural firm owned by Gage. The project is in Manhattan, New York City, in the neighborhood of many other skyscrapers surrounding the proposed building. The tower is not constructed physically, meaning that it is a paper architecture and imaginary object. It is a 102-story residential skyscraper that fits well with the neighborhood's exceptionally high skyline—except for its extraordinary design. A brief explanation of the creation of the tower provided on the official webpage of the MFG Architects firm is as follows:

“[...] The project continued the line of ‘kitbashing’ research projects in the office and sought to use recycled digital objects that had been heavily modified so that their original form was unrecognizable. Each residential unit accordingly receives own unique figural cast-stone façade that frames views from the interior of particular features of the surrounding urban and natural landscapes. The building is draped in a façade of limestone-tinted cast stone panels with hydro formed bronze alloy details and brass-tinted alloy structural extrusion enclosures. The 64th floor features a sky-lobby which houses exclusive retail stores, a double-height high ballroom for events, and an adjacent restaurant space; all of which have access to four massive cantilevered balconies that offer awe-inspiring views of the surrounding urban fabric.”<sup>218</sup>

The initial term that appears in this project brief is kitbashing, a design technique that appears in various works and projects of Gage, including the title of the course he gave in the Spring semester of 2017 in the School of Architecture at Yale

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<sup>218</sup>“ W 57th Street Residential Tower,” MFGA, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.mfga.com/khaleesi>.

University, titled “Disheveled Geometries: Kitbashing Modernist Icons.”<sup>219</sup> The term he uses within the architectural design is borrowed from model-making hobby and refers to “the activity or process of creating a unique model, figure, etc., by adapting or customizing a commercially produced kit or kits.”<sup>220</sup> Gage mentions in the article “Speculation vs. Indifference”<sup>221</sup> that his office’s usage of this terminology is connected to the desire to translate the frequent use of lists in OOO. To further explain the sense that the notion of list is relevant to kitbashing, he refers to the interview of Harman for the *Wired* magazine where the philosopher describes the function of the list.<sup>222</sup> In the interview Harman notes that the lists draw attention to the “particularity of individual things.”<sup>223</sup> Accordingly, the listing of objects is more about disjoining them from one another than bringing them together. Lists are an alternative way of emphasizing objects’ singularity and individuality.

In the interview addressed by Gage, Harman shares examples of the lists that he frequently uses in his writings and the rationale he employs in creating such lists. An exemplary list begins with “neutrons” followed by “rabbits, radar dishes, the Jesuit Order, the Free City of Bremen, and Superman.”<sup>224</sup> The list consists of six objects, and all these members of the list are remarkably different from each other. The significant disparity between the objects stresses each object’s uniqueness and autonomy. Besides that, the list arranges these various objects in a non-hierarchical manner, implying a flat ontology.

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<sup>219</sup> For more information, please see “Disheveled Geometries: Kitbashing Modernist Icons,” accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.architecture.yale.edu/courses/23843-disheveled-geometries-kitbashing-modernist-icons>.

<sup>220</sup> “Kitbashing,” in *Lexico, UK Dictionary* (Oxford, n.d.), <https://www.lexico.com/definition/kitbashing>.

<sup>221</sup> Mark Foster Gage, “Speculation vs. Indifference,” *Log*, no. 40 (2017): 121–35.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>223</sup> Graham Harman, *More Speculative Realism*, interview by Bruce Sterling, June 17, 2011, *WIRED*.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

Harman notes that in such lists, he gives importance to giving place to at least one object from the following categories: sciences, living creatures; machines; compound entities; human political units; fictional entities.<sup>225</sup> Through the given example of a list, Harman contends that neutrons, as a scientific object, are no less or more of an object than rabbits—even though material objects are frequently undermined as a result of the accumulation of their smaller constitutive elements rather than being considered to be an object on their own. Moreover, his list expands beyond the material and physical objects; it includes, for example, Superman. In this case, the object is not even under stress concerning the act of undermining down to neurons and other smaller elements because it lacks material in an absolute manner. Accordingly, about the lists, he says in the interview:

“They remain useful as a way of encouraging the idea that all objects must be granted the dignity of objects, without immediately reducing 500 kinds of objects to two privileged kinds such as quarks and electrons.”<sup>226</sup>

The lists allow one to put various distinct objects together and have them resist the undermining and overmining forces in defense of their autonomy as irreducible entities, namely, objects.

#### **4.2.2 Invoking the Guggenheim Museum Proposal in Helsinki**

Gage expresses that his office’s use of the technique called kitbashing is emerging from the search for finding a way to integrate lists—and listing as a strategy—into “nonsyntactical architectural structures.”<sup>227</sup> Various MFG Architects projects contain numerous objects that exist individually through the listing. These objects contribute as integral parts of the whole without undermining the unity and autonomy of the building. A particular case where this technique is used extensively by the

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Gage, “Speculation vs. Indifference,” 130.

company is the proposal for the Guggenheim Museum in Helsinki, which was submitted in 2014. The project was never completed, nor did it receive an award; in fact, not even the competition's winning proposal was ever built. The official project description shared by the M. F. Gage Architects' website points out the importance given to the technique of kitbashing in the overall design of the building:

“The new 129,000 sq. ft. museum, sited on the urban waterfront in Helsinki, Finland, was designed to be exclusively constructed from 'recycled digital materials,'- objects that were randomly downloaded from various online sources but have no intentional existing relationships with one another or larger symbolic agenda. Through the high-resolution recombining, or, 'kitbashing' of components, the individual figures were intended to lose any associations of symbolic content in favor of the emergence of a new and highly complex form of architectural aesthetic that mysteriously hints at, but in no way reveals, the curious and varied importance of the artistic contents within.”<sup>228</sup>

According to the brief, the variety of objects excessively used on the building's facade is 3-D models retrieved from online sources. Moreover, the company's narrative evaluates the usage of these retrieved sources as a form of recycling since the objects are taken from elsewhere and introduced into a new context within the domain of the architectural design. It is further stated that these recycled digital materials are individual entities brought together not because of their inter-relationships nor symbolic values. The objects are referred to as individual figures and integrated into the design for their being as autonomous objects and the potential that arises from that, rather than their external relationships. Accordingly, the bringing of these objects together is a form of purification and cleansing of the objects from the external values that are attached to them—to which the brief refers as getting rid of “any associations of symbolic content,” and this action is worked out to allow a particular aesthetics to take place.

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<sup>228</sup>“ Helsinki Guggenheim Museum ,” MFGA, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.mfga.com/helsinki-guggenheim>.

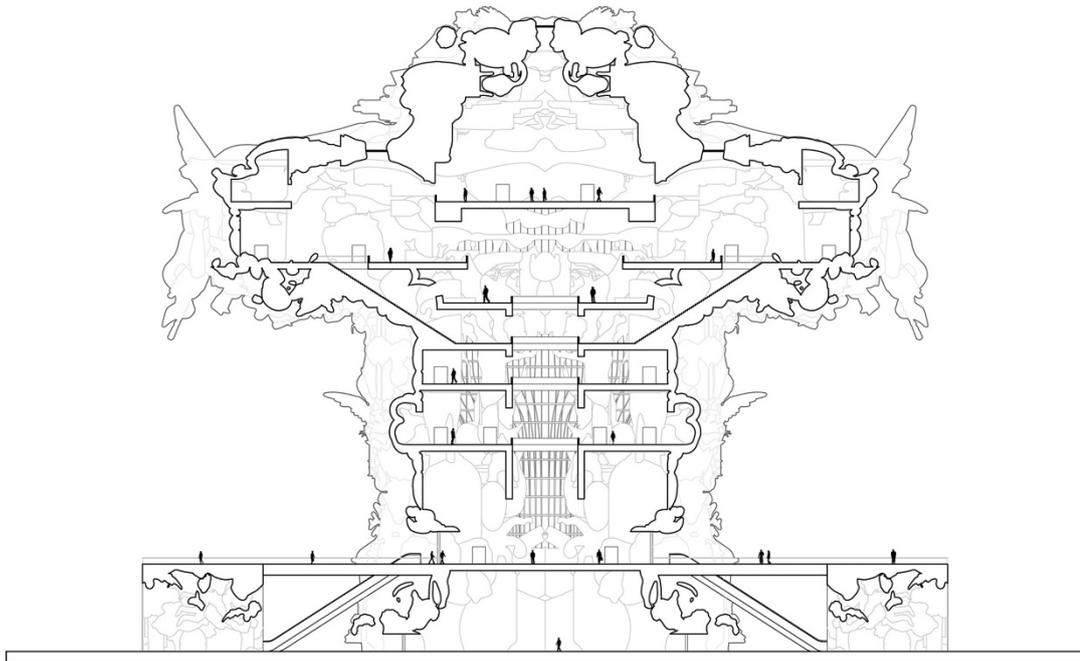


Figure 4.1. Section Drawing of the Guggenheim Helsinki Museum by Mark Foster Gage Architects (2014). MFGA, *Helsinki Guggenheim Museum*, accessed March 17, 2022. <https://www.mfga.com/helsinki-guggenheim>.

In the renderings of the Guggenheim Museum proposal, the act of kitbashing is seen not just as a dispersion of objects on the surfaces of a building as if they are additions to the whole.<sup>229</sup> The objects are engaged with the mass and the form of the building as constitutive elements. The recycled objects do not attach to the building object or become mere constitutive elements of the whole. The kitbashing gathers various objects that lead to the revealing of a new object—the building object—as the end product of the process. By the OOO definition, this resultant building is autonomous from its parts and cannot be reduced into these objects. Likewise, the kitbashing is not ruled by a specific motivation; the objects are not gathered because of their existing or potential associations. The kitbashing technique aims to reinforce the

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<sup>229</sup> An exemplary rendering of the project is the section drawing shown in the Figure 4.1. For more renderings and drawings, please see the official webpage of the project: “Helsinki Guggenheim Museum,” MFGA, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.mfga.com/helsinki-guggenheim>.

individuality of objects. In doing so, it highlights the interwoven state of being of all objects that vary in scale but not in hierarchical order.

### 4.2.3 Latour Litany

M. F. Gage also refers to the Guggenheim Museum proposal in his article called “A Hospice for Parametricism”<sup>230</sup> in a very concise manner—in the form of a side note. The noteworthy aspect of this article is that, in this source, Gage uses the term litanies—which expands upon the discourse of kitbashing fruitfully—which is not present in his project description on the company website nor in most other sources. In the article, Gage writes that the language of kitbashing of the Guggenheim Museum proposal can be considered as “a manifestation of Bruno Latour’s ‘litanies’.”<sup>231</sup> This subchapter intends to re-approach to kitbashing through Bruno Latour’s concept of litanies and Ian Bogost’s Latour Litany, as well as how Graham Harman’s comments on Latour Litany. Bogost borrows the idea from Latour concerning the concept of listing objects that are commonly used in both Bruno Latour’s works and the works of OOO-related figures. The prominent book by Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It’s Like to Be a Thing*,<sup>232</sup> presents the notion of litany in the chapter on “ontography” and in close association with the concepts of lists and sets.

In the above-mentioned chapter, Bogost proposes to embrace “ontography” as a notion standing for “a general inscriptive strategy, one that uncovers the repleteness of units and their interobjectivity.”<sup>233</sup> On top of that, he notes:

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<sup>230</sup> Mark Foster Gage, “A Hospice for Parametricism,” *Architectural Design* 86, no. 2 (2016): 128–33.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>232</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It’s Like to Be a Thing*.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

“From the perspective of metaphysics, ontography involves the revelation of object relationships without necessarily offering clarification or description of any kind. Like a medieval bestiary, ontography can take the form of a compendium, a record of things juxtaposed to demonstrate their overlap and imply interaction through collocation. The simplest approach to such recording is the *list*, a group of items loosely joined not by logic or power or use but by the gentle knot of the comma. Ontography is an aesthetic set theory, in which a particular configuration is celebrated merely on the basis of its existence.”<sup>234</sup>

Accordingly, ontography—and lists as a form of ontography—function as sets that compile various objects with a relaxed gesture rather than a forced and rigid alternative. The definition provided by Bogost differentiates these lists from the power-driven methods of categorization of things. It is nothing but the comma which assembles the list out of discrete objects. Moreover, as the lists ideally remain free of the mechanisms of logic and power, the list’s existence becomes the only reason and motivation for its presence. At this point, the list’s existence with a particular combination and the objects within the list are differentiated with clarity.

Furthermore, ontography reveals relationships without any need for clarification or description. Examples such as the lists are as much about the interrelationships of their set members as they are about the compiled objects. In defining the concept of ontography, Bogost uses the word “compendium,” a form of collection—“a short but complete account of a particular subject, especially in the form of a book” according to the dictionary definition.<sup>235</sup> The ontography is not descriptive but demonstrative in that it organizes the objects in specific combinations in terms of their order, location, and numerous other configuration figures. It is the demonstration that gives birth to the acts of revealing without describing.

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>235</sup> “Compendium,” in *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/compendium>.

Bogost shares an example of lists of objects taken from Bruno Latour, the person from whom Bogost borrows the concept of litany. The portion from Latour's litanies includes the following objects: "Elections, mass demonstrations, books, miracles, viscera laid open on the altar, viscera laid out on the operating table, figures, diagrams and plans, cries, monsters, exhibitions at the pillory."<sup>236</sup> Within this widely diverse list of things, there are no hierarchies within the internal organization. Likewise, there are no necessary ambitions to assemble the objects for a greater cause. Therefore, the lists place all objects into an equal stage in two ways: (a) there are no hierarchies in the being of the objects; (b) there are no hierarchies in between the relations of the objects, such as the fact that the relation the object A has to the object B is neither superior nor inferior to the relation of object C to the object B.

Bogost adds, "Lists remind us that no matter how fluidly a system may operate, its members nevertheless remain utterly isolated, mutual aliens."<sup>237</sup> The objects within the list never diffuse into each other but remain self-standing. The lists organize objects and create configurations; nevertheless, they lack a syntax that gives a stable meaning to the final order of the things. Bogost refers to the use of signs in the language where the syntax is what separates a sentence from being a mere list of objects. One of the given examples is "I want to be loved by you"<sup>238</sup> Without a syntax, the sentence would be: "I, you, by, loved, want, to, be." Language and lists have the act of compiling the objects as a common feature. On the other hand, in Bogost's examples, lists do not order the objects around a cypher, and therefore lack fixity. They are devoid of a narrative. Although no fixed meanings are emerging from the syntax, the accumulation of the objects makes the relationships between the

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<sup>236</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It's Like to Be a Thing*, 38.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

set members possible. The relationships between the objects are not pre-established but remain as potentials.

As much as the syntax-based language gives meaning to the whole, constructs narratives, and connects everything with solid and determinate ties, the lists alienate one from another, defamiliarize the objects to the other objects and the reader. It functions as a source of obscurity and emancipation. Nonetheless, both the syntax-based language and lists aim to be constructive. Thus, the vagueness and constructiveness are interwoven features of the lists. Bogost introduces a new list in his work to discuss the distinct constructive aspects of the lists. He borrows the example from Roland Barthes' autobiography, where Barthes simply gives a list of things which likes or dislikes.<sup>239</sup>

In these two paragraphs of the autobiographical work, Barthes uses a form of listing to speak of himself instead of literary prose. There is no sequentiality of the objects in the list and no overarching system of organization in the lists. The lists are made of a broad spectrum of beings, which include—but are not limited to: physical

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<sup>239</sup> Ian Bogost borrows the list from Roland Barthes' autobiographical book *Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley; Los Angeles, CA: Uni. of California Press, 1994), 116-17.

“J'aime, je n'aime pas ~ I like, I don't like”

“*I like*: salad, cinnamon, cheese, pimento, marzipan, the smell of new-cut hay (why doesn't someone with a “nose” make such a perfume), roses, peonies, lavender, champagne, loosely held political convictions, Glenn Gould, too-cold beer, flat pillows, toast, Havana cigars, Handel, slow walks, pears, white peaches, cherries, colors, watches, all kinds of writing pens, desserts, unrefined salt, realistic novels, the piano, coffee, Pollock, Twombly, all romantic music, Sartre, Brecht, Verne, Fourier, Eisenstein, trains, Médoc wine, having change, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, walking in sandals on the lanes of southwest France, the bend of the Adour seen from Doctor L.'s house, the Marx Brothers, the mountains at seven in the morning leaving Salamanca, etc.”

“*I don't like*: white Pomeranians, women in slacks, geraniums, strawberries, the harpsichord, Miró, tautologies, animated cartoons, Arthur Rubinstein, villas, the afternoon, Satie, Bartók, Vivaldi, telephoning, children's choruses, Chopin's concertos, Burgundian branles and Renaissance dances, the organ, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, his trumpets and kettle- drums, the politico-sexual, scenes, initiatives, fidelity, spontaneity, evenings with people I don't know, etc.”

objects, such as “too-cold beer” or “flat pillows;” immaterial things, such as “all romantic music;” abstract notions, such as “spontaneity;” and complex conditions such as “evenings with people I don’t know.”<sup>240</sup> Although all of these different objects join each other via the “comma,” they do not lose their individuality and autonomy concerning the other figures in any circumstance that results from this act of listing. Therefore, this distinctive form of the gathering of objects is what Bogost calls “mutual aliens,” which remain in isolation in individual terms but also achieve to function appropriately and fluidly as a whole—even capable of being able to constitute an autobiography of someone and give information through its non-narrative language.

Bogost speaks of “the abandonment of anthropocentric narrative coherence in favor of worldly detail” in the case of Barthes’ lists of likes and dislikes.<sup>241</sup> There are no narratives in these lists; there are nothing but objects that come together. These objects do not serve only to point out certain aspects of Barthes, the central figure. The reader is not solely concerned with knowing the personality of Barthes, but also enthralled with the whole set of objects brought into the reader’s view, “the curious world outside his person.”<sup>242</sup> Accordingly, Bogost shows that even when speaking of Barthes, who has to remain central to the ongoing communication to have the work still be counted as an autobiography, the list allows the text to become non-anthropocentric. Furthermore, by means of the cataloging in the lists, “a tiny part of the expanding universe is revealed.”<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 116-117.

<sup>241</sup> Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It’s Like to Be a Thing*, 41-42.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

#### 4.2.4 Texts That Are Not Descriptive and Narrative

Graham Harman has a brief post on the Latour litanies on his website,<sup>244</sup> which refers to the difference between listing objects in a descriptive and informative way, and in a non-descriptive way. In this post, he discusses upon Latour Litanies through one of his examples followed by a list from Richard Rhodes on all objects that are demolished as a result of the annihilation of the atom bomb in Hiroshima and the critical example of the litanies that Harman examines is a sample text taken from Gibbon: "...the valour of the inhabitants resisted above five months the archers, the elephants, and the military engines of the Great King."<sup>245</sup> This quotation from Gibbon refers to a siege, and the only information provided about the siege is the duration (5 months) and some particular objects from the army that is surrounding the inhabitants. The army is not referred to as an army but provided in the form of a discrete set of objects—archers, elephants, military engines of the Great King. Nonetheless, Harman notes that the gesture of Gibbon's text is very different from Harman's version which intends to describe the army of the Great King. The description is far from being descriptive in literal means; as Harman puts it, this list is "a picturesque hint of the nature of the siege."<sup>246</sup>

Gibbon's list is more than a literal collection of objects. The Great King's army is not being referred to as a body that contains these objects—archers and the others—within itself but only suggested in non-literal means. Therefore, this form of writing is different from ordering all objects that constitute the army one after another. Harman reconfigures the quotation descriptively to point out its difference from Gibbon's non-descriptive list. The exemplary reconfiguration of Harman is as follows: "the valour of the inhabitants resisted above five months the army of the

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<sup>244</sup> Graham Harman, "Latour Litanies and Gibbon," *Object-Oriented Philosophy* (blog), December 15, 2009, <https://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2009/12/15/latour-litanies-and-gibbon/>.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

Great King, which included archers, elephants, and military engines.”<sup>247</sup> In this case, the objects are no longer as discrete from each other as in the previous example; they are no longer individual “actors.” The army is openly mentioned, and it becomes the principal actor to which all other objects become associated.

Harman notes about the situation of the archers and the other objects in the second case with the following words: “They are not depicted in the very act of being themselves, which is one possible account (and not such a bad one) of what metaphor does.”<sup>248</sup> Accordingly, the archers and the other objects are not mentioned on account of themselves. They are given space within the sentence solely to provide further information about the army’s contents. Harman calls Gibbon’s example “an implacable assemblage,” while archers, elephants, and military engines are referred to as “autonomous components” with powers that belong to themselves on an individual basis.<sup>249</sup>

In short, Harman demonstrates two different fashions of listing objects: one that is descriptive and the one that is not. He borrows the writing about a besieged city and its resistance to contrast a list about an army that consists of objects and a self-sufficient listing of objects themselves without the presence of a more prominent “actor”— like the army in the given case. Although the descriptive style of listing can provide accurate information, the domain of knowledge that it can offer is bound to the limits of literal speech. Independent of the statement in the sentence, a descriptive listing falls short to break out from the borders of a cliché and become as dramatic as in the case of Gibbon’s words. The reason why litanies like Gibbon’s are valuable is best expressed in Harman’s parting comments:

“The point is that our capacity for accuracy is limited by the nature of things, and that an oblique approach to describing the valor of the citizens of Dara is

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

the only way to make that valor visible. ‘They valiantly resisted the army for five months’ is accurate, but leaves little trace in the memory.”<sup>250</sup>

### 4.3 The Tower on West 57th Street

This subchapter elaborates on M. F. Gage Architects’ project “The tower on west 57th street,” in conjunction with the previous commentaries and discussions on the notions of intermediaries and object coding, speculative approaches to reality, and, most particularly, the discourse centered on the concept of lists. In this architectural project, the technique of listing the objects is present in the form of kitbashing. Kitbashing is the central figure for it results in an object-oriented design based on aesthetics as its principal language for both communication and exchange with its exterior/other objects. For this purpose, this chapter focuses on the article “Aesthetics as Politics: The Khaleesi Tower on West 57th Street, NYC,”<sup>251</sup> where the project is presented in a rhetorical gesture using texts and a rich set of images, demonstrating how this building achieves to be an opening rather than a closure for its environment.

There is a significant amount of attention received by this project alone in the media, which is easily relatable to the fact that it is proposed for a very public and central location—close to the Central Park in New York City—and is standing out of its context in an assertive and self-confident gesture. Furthermore, the fact that it takes its name “The Khaleesi Tower” from the famous TV series Game of Thrones—a code name given by the employees in the company<sup>252</sup>—lays the ground for further

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Mark Foster Gage, “Aesthetics as Politics: The Khaleesi Tower on West 57th Street, NYC,” *Architectural Design* 86, no. 6 (2016): 26–33.

<sup>252</sup> The project is not officially titled as Khaleesi Tower and it does not inherit any reference or symbolism related to Game of Thrones. It is referred as the Tower on West 57th Street in the company website. In one of his interviews, Gage explains that the name “Khaleesi” was coined by the employees in the form of a “nickname.” For the interview, please see: Mark Foster Gage, *Architect Designs NYC Skyscraper Fit for a Khaleesi*, interview by The Creators Project, December

speculations, public debates, and interest in this unordinary project. Online posts about this project are abundant in (non-architectural) magazines and newspapers, including the well-known news website Business Insider<sup>253</sup> and Vice magazine.<sup>254</sup> Among these sources, one of essential source is the official company website of M. F. Gage Architects.<sup>255</sup> Although this page provides only one brief paragraph as written material, it contains a considerable number of high-quality renderings of the building ranging from partial elevations to perspectival views to and from the building. Among these, the company presents an elevation rendering of the building in video format, capturing an approximately 12-story-high portion of the whole against an abstract white background, which adds up to all other materials, capturing the essence of the building indirectly and tacitly.

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16, 2015, VICE, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/nz4kvz/mark-foster-gage-khaleesi-skyscraper-interview>.

<sup>253</sup> Chris Weller, "This Ornate Concept Skyscraper Was Inspired by 'Game of Thrones,'" *Business Insider*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-khaleesi-skyscraper-plan-in-nyc-2015-12>.

<sup>254</sup> Gage, Architect Designs NYC Skyscraper Fit for a Khaleesi.

<sup>255</sup> "W 57th Street Residential Tower," MFGA, accessed March 17, 2022.



Figure 4.2. Digital rendering of the project. MFGA, Tower on West 57th Street (“The Khaleesi”), New York City, 2015, accessed on March 17, 2022. <https://www.mfga.com/khaleesi>.

“Aesthetics as Politics: The Khaleesi Tower on West 57th Street, NYC”<sup>256</sup> is an article solely focused on this scandalous building. It introduces a problematization of architecture’s capacity to cause change due to the prevailing mindset with the following words:

“While forgotten by many, architecture is, in fact, a creative act. And yet the power of architecture and its imagery to prompt change exists only as architectural myth and ancient lore – a power associated only with the Miesian gods of yesteryear, a magic no longer known or practised. Instead, architects today focus on simpler problems, more local problems, problems of context (it looks like the mountains in the distance), of programme (put a Starbucks in the bathroom), of marketing-friendly animal metaphors (it’s a bird), or how to consume a bit less energy (mom look – LEED copper). Like

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<sup>256</sup> Gage, “Aesthetics as Politics: The Khaleesi Tower on West 57th Street, NYC.”

a decrepit sorceress robbed of her powers, architecture sits mute in a world of technologically enabled explosive possibilities, vaguely remembering having had, in the past, perhaps more respect, more prestige and certainly a lot more power.”<sup>257</sup>

According to the article, the tower is unlike the criticized form of architectural works; it is not motivated by a desire to provide solutions to singular problems. The building does not take the problems of context, sustainability, and other pertinent issues, yet it is not lost in the singularity of these concerns and cannot be lessened to its response to them. Architecture remains a “creative act” without being reduced to its bits and pieces. Gage writes: “Any attempt to distill architecture into a smaller, bite-sized anything denies the reality of its reach, complexity and potential depth and vastness.”<sup>258</sup> The tower refuses to be subjected to this act of lessening to gain access to reality with its complexity and immenseness.

The attempt of the building to direct itself toward more comprehensive access to the reality rather than focusing on bits and pieces of problems does not lead to an indifference to the needs of its surrounding. This issue operates both on the level of the building itself and its engagement with the context. The tower on west 57th street, for example, is a sustainable structure.<sup>259</sup> Nevertheless, it opposes being rhetorically coded as a sustainable building and having its real architectural qualities to be lessened due to this labeling. The rhetorical coding incorporates the building into a communication system by tagging it in specific ways, as demonstrated by Gage’s note: “mom look-LEED copper.”<sup>260</sup> On top of that, the building’s engagement with its context is lessened in many cases, as exemplified by Gage’s notes: “it looks like the mountains in the distance”; “put a Starbucks in the bathroom”; “it’s a bird”; and

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 30.

“mom look-LEED copper.”<sup>261</sup> The rhetorical coding of the environment comes into play when the surrounding reality itself becomes lessened to singular problems or qualities it possesses, which obstructs the access to the true depth of the reality. Narratives overshadow the real qualities.

In the interview for the Vice magazine, Gage points out the “2 World Trade Center” project by Bjarke Ingels architects, an unrealized project from 2015, as a case where narratives lead the architecture. This project is also located in Manhattan, New York City, near the 1 World Trade Center. The building faces a low-rise neighborhood on one side and high-rises on the other. The proposed project’s narrative is to gradually rise from one side to the other to match its height to its surroundings and fit into its context, making a smooth transition. This project is led by a narrative that even precedes the building itself, becoming the central point shading the real qualities of the building and the skyscraper’s actual potential.

The tower on west 57th street, without compromising on programme, sustainability, and other individual aspects and concerns, intends to overcome the dominance of the narratives and the lessening of the real qualities at work in the contemporary architecture:

“[...] Instead of becoming smaller, easier or infantilisingly ‘funner’, architecture is poised to re-enter culture with a technologically enabled ferocity not seen since the Renaissance. Our office may not be the cause, or even a player, but we will have a voice – one that is louder than diagrams, more confrontational than birds, more inspiring than LEED copper and, above all, serious about the emerging potentials of architecture to once again inspire shifts along the fundamental fault lines of culture.”<sup>262</sup>

Gage continues by concluding on the project as follows:

“In this spirit we invite you to view these images of our Tower on West 57th Street project. You may not understand it or what we are trying to do, for it

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<sup>261</sup> Mark Foster Gage, Architect Designs NYC Skyscraper Fit for a Khaleesi.

<sup>262</sup> Gage, “Aesthetics as Politics: The Khaleesi Tower on West 57th Street, NYC,” 33.

does not aim to solve any clever problems of context, offers no exhibitionist intertwinings of programme, has no cute animalistic metaphors, and is of course LEED Titanium, but not about being LEED Titanium. We anticipate that if successful, you will either love or hate these images with a vehemence usually reserved for politics or conversations about abortion. We welcome your love or hatred, and suspect that if you have gotten this far, we have already won, as we have not been ignored.”<sup>263</sup>

The article illustrates how the architectural discipline is losing its comprehensive access to reality by becoming caught up in the singularity of the problems as well as why this tower is a crucial voice. The building intends not to be caught up in narratives and not to be subjected to any symbolic values.

Its vastness depth and complexity are not concealed by the labeling which integrate the building into a communication system interested in economics. It is not “LEED” or “bird-like.” None of the figures on the building are symbolic or represent anything.<sup>264</sup> It is not justified by its smaller compounds, larger contextual relationships, and things other than itself. It does not intend to make the architecture more communicable by degrading the whole.

#### **4.3.1 Kitbashing Technique in the Tower**

In an interview about the tower on West 57th street with The Creators Project, Vice magazine, Gage speaks of two buildings led by narratives and contrast with the aim of the tower in New York. He begins by recounting a personal experience in front of the One World Trade Center (1WTC) in New York City, which officially opened in 2014.<sup>265</sup> His father asks him if this is the “1776” tower. This tower was built in conscious reference to the twin tower buildings of the World Trade Center, which were diminished on September 11, 2011. The underlying narrative is that the new

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Mark Foster Gage, Architect Designs NYC Skyscraper Fit for a Khaleesi.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

tower's height is the numerical equivalent of the year the United States of America was founded. Thus, the building is coded with a pre-written narrative, and the perception of it by the people has dominated this narrative.

Gage says that he would favor the building to have sparked curiosity and interest in the topic of concern rather than providing immediate answers, even before anyone asks a question.<sup>266</sup> He talks about the creation of curiosity as an alternative to pre-conceived narratives. The tower owns no answers, and all kinds of questions are yet to be asked since the building intends to provoke curiosity.

The extensive detailing of the tower, namely the kitbashing of objects, serves this purpose: the provocation of curiosity. The building contains numerous amounts of detailed sculptures—gargoyles and other sculptural elements—which are 3D models retrieved from various online sources.<sup>267</sup> Although these are all recognizable elements when observed individually and might include the models of very well-known figures, they are not selected for their meanings or references. The motivation for gathering the models is to create a batch of models with the highest level of detail. He defines this as a new method of thinking about complex architectural forms that are solely concerned with their formal aspects rather than their symbolic values.<sup>268</sup> This way, the building bears no preconceived narratives, while the people are also becomes enabled to project their narratives on the building and become more curious and questioning. Unlike the 1WTC,<sup>269</sup> when the visitors look at the skyscraper, the design does not tell them what they are “supposed” to think. Therefore, the kitbashing technique helps liberate the building's full potential from the constraints of forced narratives.

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

#### **4.4 Concluding Remarks on The Tower on West 57th Street**

The tower on west 57th street demonstrates how the listing of objects implements aesthetics as the principal medium of exchange and communication. The resulting aesthetic language concerns the formal values of the objects, which are non-anthropocentric, and do not operate through the narratives. One of the principal techniques used in the project's design, which works through the aesthetic language, is kitbashing. Gage introduces this technique by referencing "listing" and "Latour Litanies" as conceptualized within the OOO discourse, particularly by Graham Harman and Ian Bogost.

Furthermore, the tower building exemplifies how architectural works exist as autonomous objects as parts of reality. The project indicates that the building's individuality cannot be reduced to smaller constitutive units, such as its sustainable or program-based qualities or an overall metaphor, programme, or narrative. Gage criticized this action of lessening in depth in his works by borrowing the notions of undermining, overmining, and duomining from Harman. The tower accomplishes an architecture that does not reason out its existence by referring to elsewhere, such as environmental or economic concerns. Gage argues that the tower achieves to be sustainable while resisting being lessened to an environmentally friendly building; likewise, it achieves to suffice its programme while not being reduced to a pre-written narrative that overrides its reality and the potentially infinite richness which comes with it. In short, the tower aspires to be an autonomous object—or to say, an architectural object—that emerges from nothing and, by doing so, to fully engage with reality.

Gage's use of kitbashing alters from a literal assemblage, seeking a form-based aesthetic experience of objects. This kitbashing is an adaptation of the litanies to architecture. The tower becomes a non-narrational architecture through the kitbashed 3-D models retrieved from the internet and gathered as part of the building. These objects are not individual components of the building adding up to each other in the literal sense to create the tower. The correlation in-between the building and these

objects is indirect. In his analysis of the Latour Litanies, Harman describes the functioning of this indirect link between the whole and units by referring to metaphors. While in an informative list, the objects are autonomous components, when the metaphor is formed, their individuality ceases to involve in the list on account of themselves. Therefore, the retrieved 3-D models' assemblage does not give information about these objects on an individual basis. The overall meaning transcends their individuality. The building becomes the principal actor rather than its sub elements. The nonliteral assemblage of these objects claims to provide more precise access to the reality of the object/building, going beyond the limited potential of literality.

In kitbashing, an overall syntax is absent. According to Ian Bogost's description, in the case of litanies, the objects are joined together by a single element, a comma. This brings fluidity and flatness to the list, eliminating the cypher as the principal actor and determinant for joining the elements together. In search of an object-oriented language, the kitbashed objects also abandon a vanishing point to abandon the anthropocentric narratives.

Moreover, while the real qualities of the objects are not rhetorically coded in the form of narratives, aesthetic coding is present. Object-oriented non-narrational architecture is achieved using aesthetic experience, which comes with an indirect experience of objects. It offers more precise access to reality than other forms of engagements. It allows all kinds of objects to be in communication with each other. The tower is absent of rhetorical coding, while aesthetics promotes the means of communication—giving potentially more precise access to what the building is than the literal approaches.

The aesthetic coding bases itself on the formal organization and qualities of objects. Despite dismissing all narratives and other alternative cyphers, the form-based aesthetics is welcomed, providing the building with a particular grammar. The aim of the kitbashing technique included bringing things together without a pre-written narrative and, with that, the prevention of fixing the relationships of the items. Their

connections in the building would remain open to what is not yet figured out, not yet known, and even unknowable. On the other hand, the formal distribution and organization of the kitbashed objects consist of a series of symmetrical harmonious elements arranged around a vertical axis. An authoritative and unitarian formal grammar is present in the tower, creating stress regarding the overall non-syntactical design of the building.

Lastly, kitbashing technique's embodiment of form-based aesthetics and the exact formal organization of the tower on the 57th street are independent since the formal organization of the tower has further motives.<sup>270</sup> The tower is founded upon the discourses Gage addresses in his works (Harman's fourfold structure, Latour Litanies, and his criticisms of narratives, to name a few). However, these intellectual discourses and kitbashing need not always lead to the tower's totalistic and centralized formal gesture. The intended form-based aesthetics may be supplied through different architectural forms. The objects can be liberated from being bound by such rigid formal grammar. Other ways of applying his ideas to an architectural design process are possible.

In conclusion, the tower on the west 57th street, New York, shows a possible way of achieving a non-narrational object-oriented architecture. The project embodies aesthetics and form as its principal mediums of exchange and communication. By incorporating the kitbashing technique, it resists the lessening of itself to its qualities, programme, contextual relations, overarching metaphors, and narratives. It becomes an architectural work that emerges from nothing—justified solely by its existence.

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<sup>270</sup> While the kitbashing prioritizes form-based aesthetics over other mediums of exchange, the particular unitarian formal organization of the tower project has a further motive; the tower seeks to address architecture as a creative discipline, which can even trigger and fuel social change. The principles of kitbashing—avoidance of rigidly prescribed relationships and grammar—are abandoned for achieving, or contributing to, social equality. The building is set in comparison to the creative acts; for instance, “an image could galvanize an anti-Vietnam war movement in the US, or illustrate to the citizens of China that another form of life was possible – one of peaceful resistance.” Gage, *Aesthetics as Politics: The Khaleesi Tower on West 57th Street, NYC*,” 28.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This thesis examined in which ways architecture is discussed in OOO to be subjected to reductions and how aesthetics in OOO claims to provide an alternative mode of access and exchange of truth. It focused on the state of the architectural discipline in the post-truth era, in which the problem of communication and exchange exacerbates architecture's difficulty in communication due to the discipline's lack of commensurability and tangibility. The works of G. Harman and M. F. Gage are reviewed to understand how aesthetics offers universal communicability. The thesis explored M. F. Gage's problematization of narratives and the tower project on West 57th Street in NYC—concentrating on the kitbashing technique—to assess how it presents an architecture based on aesthetics and resistant to all forms of reductions. The case study demonstrates an architecture equipped by an aesthetic form of exchange and (indirect) access to truth, allowing for universal communication and literacy.

One notable way of problematizing architecture's condition in the post-truth era is being attentive on the gap between knowledge and reality, and how it is dealt with in its access and exchange. The referred discourse on the gap is concerned with limits, not a break between knowledge and truth, associated with the alteration or manipulation of facts. The post-truth condition is associated with the massive increase in the communication technologies; consequently, it brings about the creation of a wholesale environment for the exchange of information. The aesthetics in OOO aims to be one alternative way of dealing with the limits without sacrificing the truth in the wholesale-like exchange environment.

OOO employs aesthetics as its primary mode of engagement with real objects—and truth—to achieve universal communicability between all types of objects that make

up reality's profound and infinite domain, including both material and immaterial objects, as well as imaginary objects. Furthermore, it does not only provide a way of exchanging the truth, but also seeks an (indirect) access to it. Through the theatrical stage, Harman demonstrates how aesthetics provides a way of indirectly engaging with the real objects via the creation of a virtual object from nothing—aesthetic object. He shows how this virtual stage of aesthetics allows interaction with the truth without passing through the gap, the limits of human access. Moreover, he contrasts this aesthetic approach with the forms that seek literal/direct access to truth passing over the gap. Concisely, OOO demonstrates how aesthetics can aestheticize anything by providing a universal language, which also serve as the foundation for OOO, a theory of everything.

Hénaff's analysis of the link between money and truth in Ancient Greece's Sophists' show an alternative way of dealing with truth. He deconstructs a method of coding the truth that integrates it into an exchange system. The economization is both an alternative to the aestheticization, and a model to better understand how the aestheticization operates in OOO. Nevertheless, the economization is significantly different from the aestheticization act since it is only interested in the act of exchange, but not in the access of truth. In coding with a price, the Sophists achieve to keep the truth concealed and isolated. This ability to reference objects without the need of revealing their nature lies in the basis of the success of the economization.

In a similar fashion, Harman speaks of aestheticizing object in an indirect fashion. He presents the concept of a theatrical stage where a virtual aesthetic object replaces the withdrawn real object. This aesthetic object is directly accessible by humans; it is a substitute for the real and inaccessible. Nevertheless, he presents the aesthetic object not for the sole purpose of replacing the withdrawn real object, making it indirectly integrable into the human domain. The aesthetic object is utilized not only as a substitution but also a tool for accessing the truth indirectly. In short, while money serves as an intermediary for the exchange of truth, aesthetics seeks to reveal the truth—even if only indirectly.

The commentary on Hénaff is valuable for examining the state of architecture in the post-truth era because Hénaff deconstructs how objects, including intangible and immeasurable ones, gain a momentary measurability by being economized by a price. Architectural objects are also part of such an economization offers architecture a form of objectivity. The price becomes a commensuring criterion for heterogeneous objects, including the architectural qualities that lack objective assessment tools. Most importantly, architectural qualities are not exposed and translated into tangible forms, but instead gain objectivity while remaining unaffected by the act of money coding.

A noteworthy appraisal on the reduction of architecture regarding the process of exchange and communication is M. F. Gage's criticism of narratives. He demonstrates how a split between truth, speech, and being takes place in architecture. He points out that the descriptors that accompany objects begin to operate independent from the truth, transforming into mere narratives. He analyzes a form of rhetorics that provides communicability to architecture by subjecting it to various narratives. The act of rhetorical coding involves a depreciation of architectural truths, which is one of its flaws. The profound discourses are transformed into "a series of consumable sound bites" for the sake of communicability.

Furthermore, unlike the pure objectivity granted by the money economy, the rhetorics, as observed by Gage, subjects' architecture to power relations. One aspect of the rhetorics in architecture is to provide the discipline with communicability between the initiated and uninitiated figures, such as the experts/architects, users, employers, and investors. Consequently, the exchange system becomes entangled in the existing hierarchical system, subjecting architecture to it as a result. The hardship of enabling communication between heterogeneous groups of people involves the difficulty of translation. In the book *Designing Social Equality*, Gage argues that the

usage of narratives to answer this issue involves various forms of reductions.<sup>271</sup> Architecture becomes more comprehensible, marketable, and explicit. Furthermore, through the use of narratives, architectural objects become more easily justifiable.

Gage mentions some exemplary forms of justification resulting in the reduction of architectural design to easily understandable diagrams: Calatrava's World Trade Center Transportation Hub shaped like a "flying bird" to reflect "the theme of transportation;"<sup>272</sup> Daniel Libeskind's Denver Art Museum mimicking the neighboring mountains' outline;<sup>273</sup> the One World Trade Center (1WTC) reaching 1776 meter high to reference the year United States of America was founded.<sup>274</sup> On top of such examples, Gage particularly concerns the use of singular architectural concerns, such as sustainability or contextual relationships, as an overall form of validation of design decisions and the success of architectural projects.

He asserts that aesthetics can serve as the foundation for a non-narrative approach in which architectural objects do not seek out the corporation of narrational rhetorics. Such an architecture does not emerge from individual and overarching problems, ideas, relationships, or any other singularities. He claims that architecture should not be a byproduct of other variables. To put it simply, it should emerge from nothing. This would not be a dismissal of important architectural concerns, but rather a stance against the devaluation of all architectural concerns in favor of a few select ones—to the reduction of architecture to more marketable, consumable bits and pieces.

When noting "Architecture can be justified only by its existence and not by reductively isolated key relationships," Gage notes that this statement does not lead to nihilism or an anti-intellectual position.<sup>275</sup> It enhances the productivity of the

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<sup>271</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*.

<sup>272</sup> Gage, "Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture," 101.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> Mark Foster Gage, Architect Designs NYC Skyscraper Fit for a Khaleesi.

<sup>275</sup> Gage, *Designing Social Equality*, 104.

discipline by turning it from a mere consequence to an active figure. Furthermore, the gap between knowledge and reality does not become an obstacle in disciplinary progressivism. Instead, the limits of access to truth—which are illustrated in the real objects in Harman’s theatrical stage—become the “rules” of a sport where architecture is a “liberated player.”<sup>276</sup> Instead of being a hindrance, the gap becomes a constructive medium for disciplinary development.

One way of overcoming the reductionism illustrated by Gage is the use of kitbashing. This technique removes any symbolic or representative values from architectural objects. It creates a non-narrational architecture that facilitates exchange and communication through aesthetics. Gage notes that his adoption of kitbashing is an attempt of translating OOO’s listing technique into “nonsyntactical architectural structures.” Furthermore, rather than networking objects, the lists and kitbashing both strive to disjoin them into individual presence. They combine heterogenous objects together, provoking interaction between them without jeopardizing their autonomy. In short, kitbashing allows architectural objects to be brought together in a nonsyntactical fashion—the syntax serving as an underlying reason in the specific selection and method of bringing things together. It avoids the involvement of narratives as overarching figures over the architectural objects.

The usage of kitbashing in architecture is demonstrated by Mark Foster Gage Architects’ tower project on the West 57th street in NYC—“The Khaleesi Tower” by nickname. The kitbashing method incorporates a large number of 3D objects downloaded from the internet into the structure. The items were chosen based on nothing other than their pure formal quality, which is their level of detail. As a result, the objects have no symbolic or representational significance. They form a unified body that has no overarching narrative about how the objects are brought into relationship with one another. Furthermore, the structure as a self-contained entity

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

cannot be reduced to a byproduct of the simple collecting of myriad items, nor to its relationships, components, or narratives.

Kitbashing uses aesthetics to enable indirect access to the actual features of architectural objects rather than narratives by detaching them from their symbolic, representational values, and any external references. There are no pre-established relationships between the objects, only possibilities. In comparison to the confines of a pre-determined relation, the indeterminacy allows for more profound, fruitful, and diversified encounters in the gap. Kitbashing respects the limits and uses them to preserve the distinctiveness of objects while also allowing a thriving indirect contact between the objects via aesthetics.

While the kitbashing aims to establish this non-presence of syntax, the form-related qualities are excluded in applying this technique in the tower on the 57th Street. The formal organization of the tower presents a totalitarian formal grammar in the arrangement of the kitbashed objects in the building scale. This exception is related to the overall design aims of Gage: the setting up of form-based aesthetic relations between objects and society. Through this form-based aesthetics, he seeks to reformulate architecture as a creative discipline that can fuel social change. To some extent, the tower project purposely omits the kitbashing technique's destructive tendency, which is opposed to its unitarian organization and cyphers. The case study exemplifies the application of an object-oriented and non-syntactical architecture, aiming to become a stepping stone for the future multiplicities of developments. Nevertheless, the kitbashing may operate against the formal cyphers of the tower and result in the development of entirely different architectural forms.

In conclusion, this thesis examined the embodiment of aesthetics in OOO to understand how aesthetics is demonstrated to be providing universal literacy for the architectural discipline in the post-truth era. It focused on ways of exchanging truth, concerning the wholesale-like communication in the post-truth era which puts truth at stake. The gap between truth and knowledge, and the question of limits to the access to the real qualities of objects lies as a prominent issue in Harman's reference

to post-truth and in OOO's employment of aesthetics to provide an indirect access to truth. Furthermore, through Gage's analyses, the thesis examined how narrational rhetorics is providing communicability in architecture. His criticism showed the split between truth, speech, and being. Moreover, his implementation of the kitbashing technique into architecture demonstrated an aesthetics-based alternative form of access and exchange for the discipline. By problematizing the exchange of truth and reviewing the utilization of aesthetics in OOO, this thesis examined the possibility of an aesthetic turn in architecture that does not sacrifice the truth or lose the complexity and profoundness of architecture in the process.



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