

Keywords: mathematics, politics,
radical passivity, ideality,
narratology, experientiality,
seriality, meaning-structure,
phenomenology, hermeneutics,
language, mimesis,
phenomenological opening,
exactness, inexactness,
methodological artefact, design
process, Walter Benjamin,
Edmund Husserl, Jacques
Derrida, Paul Ricoeur

Encountering the Geometry and Rhetoric of Lamb's House, Leith, Edinburgh, Scotland

Abstract. This paper considers geometry and rhetoric through an examination of the empirical and the narratological, comparing the architectural experience of dimensionality (geometry, scale, proportion, material, weight and measure) and the order of telling tales. Of interest here is the experience of stories through material constructions, and there are two aspects to such architectural narratological experience that concern the designer. First, the experience of geometry and narrative in the built artefact; second, the experience of geometry and narrative in the course of the design process, as narrative becomes construction, architecture and building. The second part of the paper discusses an architectural project for a restructuring of Lamb's House in Leith, Edinburgh. The discussion and project draw associations and sparks the communicative potential between the lines of construction, which are by nature geometric, and the lines of narrative, which conventionally are textual but in architecture are represented through its construction.

Introduction

There are inestimable number and type of relations to be formed through architecture. Perhaps due to the legacies of Pythagorean and Cartesian philosophical mathematics and post-Hegelian politics, many pairings are reductively dialectical, casting differences as dissociative and oppositional rather than as associative and communicative. The pairing of geometry and rhetoric presupposes a relation between the mathematical and the political. However, rather than being constrained by specific geometric paradigms and ideals that foreclose the rhetorical and political dimension, this paper and the project it illustrates record an interest in both a fluid sense of geometry – what might be called geometric ideality – and, consequently, a more open rhetoric that promotes the communicative rather than the persuasive.

This paper considers geometry and rhetoric through an examination of the empirical and the narratological, comparing the architectural experience of dimensionality (geometry, scale, proportion, material, weight and measure) and the order of telling tales. Of interest here is the experience of stories through material constructions. There are two aspects to such architectural narratological experience that concern the designer. First, the experience of geometry and narrative in the built artefact; second, the experience of geometry and narrative in the course of the design process, as narrative becomes construction, architecture and building. This paper (and the project it adumbrates) draws associations and sparks the communicative potential between the lines of construction, which are by nature geometric, and the lines of narrative, which are conventionally textual but in architecture are represented through its construction.

Considering first the experience of buildings

Walter Benjamin claims that architecture – and he is talking of buildings – is experienced “in a state of distraction” by an “absent minded examiner” [Benjamin 1992: 232]. He has in mind the general everyday experience of architecture, suggesting that under passive, everyday encounter any canonical status of architecture recedes, including utility, symbolic function and persuasive force. Whether architecture today retains its canonical status from Benjamin’s day is not so much the point, although it is worth mentioning that if architecture has lost its canonical status, then the already fragmentary nature of architecture’s mode of appropriation (we only ever engage with a building a bit at a time and over time) necessitates other reasoning to establish relations. In other words, without canonical assurance, architecture’s everyday users rely more than ever on the cumulative process of optical, conceptual and tactile appropriation. Furthermore, without recourse to canons, we also have to make up our own minds about what it all means. For this very reason, as Benjamin notes, the absent-minded passive encounter with architecture gives it a radical aspect, casting what Benjamin terms “cult value” [Benjamin 1992: 233] – which today might also stand for any “enigmatic signifier” of populist iconic value¹ – into the background. Passivity undermines any rhetoric of persuasion.

Benjamin’s view on the radically passive mode of appropriating buildings resonates with Husserl’s notion of passivity in the appropriation of geometry and with Paul Ricoeur’s appropriation of narrative. In *The Origin of Geometry* Husserl states, “Passivity in general is the realm of things that are bound together and melt into one another associatively, where all meaning that arises is put together passively” [1978: 165]. Husserl theorises a passive experience of geometry; Ricoeur does the same for narrative, and Benjamin allows us an insight into how it operates in architecture. Benjamin’s theorisation of the radically passive everyday encounter with architecture is premised on the absence of *a priori* understanding of the relation between parts and whole. In everyday encounters with the built environment, users presume that relations exist and instinctively embark on a not entirely conscious quest to establish relations,² an eidetic aggregation of parts that takes time. Whether consensus among the multiple users and their varied experiences of a given building can be formed is doubtful; even if it were, this would require even more time and involve the prior release of the views as a form of discourse.

In such a difficult terrain of meaning it is easy to see why the apparatuses of culture and government find it easier to maintain absolute values and universal codes. But what can be said for architecture can also be said for geometry and narrative. In other words, the distracted encounter with architecture, geometry and narrative all describe a passive quest for meaning but with radicalising potential for free, rather than prescriptive, association. The fact that architecture embeds geometry and narrative within its own representational practices points to the possibility of drawing upon the compound effect of the three strands of architectural, geometric and narrative radical passivity to facilitate and encourage the open reading of architecture rather than simply promoting architecture as another instrument in the rhetoric of persuasion. It is this play, between the empirical understanding of geometry and narrative in the “world of things” [Derrida 1978: 122] that any building can hold, for anyone at anytime, that this paper and the project that it describes center upon.

An interest in the radical condition of passivity arises through a phenomenological turn.³ In simple terms, this equates to a move from the scientific to the more artful. If the scientific journey can be caricatured by the avoidance of falsehoods and the attempt to put a halt to the free play of associations [Derrida 1978: 165], clearly a very desirable modality if one is trying to solve problems, the (Husserlian) phenomenological turn liberates the play of associations, bringing them to rest only temporarily, but recurrently. The phenomenological turn has a very heavy commitment to serial encounters with things and thoughts, but wishes to promote further encounter with the same things over and over again whilst sparking different thoughts and actions. So, whether or not we are informed, by canon or otherwise, (Husserl's and Ricoeur's) phenomenology recognises that for the person who engages with things such as buildings, there is an intellectual contrariness that can be characterised as a play between the scientific and artful mindsets. This is not to say that human beings are naturally cast as somewhere between scientists and artists; these terms are merely theoretically useful to describe different modes of thinking that we are all capable of but which, under phenomenological tolerance, are permitted, in fact encouraged, to contaminate and activate one another.

In his analysis of Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*, Derrida invokes Ricoeur's analysis of Husserl to note that the root of this contrariness lies in the distinction, and clear but tense relationship, between intention and intuition [Derrida 1978: 140, n. 167]. Intuition operates without intention. However, its own grasping ghosts the very same serial mode of encounter and relaying of significance that is hoped for by the methods of fulfilling intention.⁴ That is to say, the instrumentality of intention more often than not requires a series of moves to convey such intent; this is akin to intuition in that it too operates by grasping things in series. Thus the structures of intuition and intention are similarly serial in manner. Although given to us by Husserl within a theory of appropriation of geometry, what we can say also about the absent-minded passive progression through a building is that it involves a process of appropriating meaning through a series of intuitive grasps, a series of experiences that seem to add up to something consequential.

Thus, when a building is organised in accordance with geometric principles, these organising principles may take on the status of canons and offer a further structure for a progressive and perhaps intuitive appreciation of its meaning. However, two aspects of the radically passive condition [of absent-mindedness or distractedness] may still come into effect in the experience of such principles. Following Benjamin's analysis, the geometric canons may recede into the background as any other canon, but also, following Husserl's analysis, geometric principles, even under scrutiny, always abstract reality to an ideal condition; such distractions, as Husserl states, "is especially true of sciences which, like geometry, have their thematic sphere in ideal products, in idealities from which more and more idealities at higher levels are produced" [Derrida 1978: 166]. Therefore, rather than providing explicitness to a construction, a geometric principle may further enhance the shift from sense-intuition and the self-evident to the tacit and abstractly representational dimension.

Without delving into specific geometric principles, it can be understood that geometry in architecture can be employed to either override or co-opt its fragmented and serial mode of appropriation. As the history of architecture shows, the ideal dimension of geometry can be used to overcome the fragmentary, providing canonical guidelines. However, equally evident in the history of architecture is the (radical) potential for geometry in architecture to carry participants beyond the experience of an immediately

sensible and straightforwardly useful thing. The potential in the ideality of geometric principles may be coupled with the disjunction and pause of serial experience to cultivate ways for coming to terms with the phenomenology of the thing.

We never experience architecture as a whole; we experience it a bit at a time. This serial experience can be very distracting, since we fluctuate between using the building for its utilitarian purpose and engaging the building as a historical/cultural artefact. Between the seriality of building experience and the seriality of our distracted experience (and the branching of each into the geometric and narratological), we make patterns of successive intersection and diversification. Optimistically, and from a standpoint interested in creativity, neither aspect of the coming together and moving apart need be seen pejoratively. Such a succession, such interwoven seriality, may be seen as the necessary progression of creativity. However, all that is being outlined here is a move from the anticipation of truth concepts, and therefore specific expectations, to what Derrida calls a “*lived anticipation* as a radical responsibility.” Such “lived anticipation” is the necessary mindset for opening [Husserl’s] phenomenological enquiry, which has no expectation other than to move beyond a current horizon [Derrida 1978: 141]. To reiterate, the scientific and artistic categories inadequately explain a phenomenological movement and opening. There is something else that drives all thinking, a disquietude in all thought, which, depending on the attitude of the designer, can either be denied or accepted, silenced or amplified, muted or recorded. To accept, amplify and record such disquietude is the premise of phenomenological enquiry.

Before discussing the impact of the serial experience of architecture on a specific recording of what may be called points of consensus and their requisite disquietudes (contrariness) through architecture’s design processes, I will deliberate on this other dimension, this other reasoning, that Husserl brings to thinking on geometry and, in fact, any ordering system. He states, “Geometry and the sciences most closely related to it have to do with space-time and the shapes, figures, also shapes of motion, alterations of deformation, etc., that are possible within space-time, particularly as measurable magnitudes” [Husserl 1978: 177]. Here Husserl aptly defines architecture’s complicity with geometry, and highlights three things: first, geometry carries a principle of mathematical truths: second, geometry also allows for those things that are not geometrically pure, which, are nonetheless geometric and allow variations and differences to be understood as such; third and foremost, the principle of mathematical truths has validity for all people through all time, “and not merely for all historically factual ones but for all conceivable ones” [Husserl 1978: 179] (for example, the right angle may invoke a history from Thales to Le Corbusier).⁵ Therefore, in summary, Husserl’s analysis highlights that the principle of truth coincides with that of difference (or non-truth) in perpetuity.

Geometry and its perception in representation therefore has an ideality that is more encompassing than any Ideal. Geometric ideality involves ideal objects, right angles and any apparently aberrant acute or obtuse angle commonly used in architecture as a rectifying in-situ cut-to-fit. What geometry holds within its system is an expansive dialectical tension, for example, between truth and uncertainty, regularity and irregularity, exactness and inexactness, sameness and difference. Husserl suggests that only by recurrently engaging with this tension can the principles of geometry be properly understood. It might be said that “seriality” describes the dynamic of geometry. As Bertrand Russell observes, “Projective Geometry [has] shown how to give points, lines and planes an order independent of metrical considerations and of quantity; while

descriptive Geometry proves that a very large part of Geometry demands only the possibility of serial arrangement” [Russell 1903: 199, quoted in DeLanda 2004: 370]. Architecture is intrinsic to both the projective and descriptive branches of geometry. Architecture and geometry have powers of both ordering and serialising because they are pre-supposed to have an originating intention that presumes any part, even inexact parts, to be a sub-condition of the whole.

Some even argue that inexact geometries are “*morphogenetically* prior to exact ones” [DeLanda 2004: 371]. That is, the irregular stuff that sits between the more regular stuff has genealogical precedence. Husserl doesn’t make this claim, but he does suggest there is an important relation of differences between the spatio-temporal world and the ideal of geometry that all geometrical constructs retain. It is less that the irregular finally becomes interwoven into the regular, and more that geometry has a logical priority over that which as yet does not reveal its order. Geometry is a means for making sense of the world. Its invention/discovery comes subsequent to language; geometry is a fine-tuning of language and behaves as a specific language with its own logicity. The logic of geometry represents the very logic of order, even the very order that language employs to make sense and come to terms with anything. Any utterance, then, textual or geometric, is capable of being presumed part of a greater system.

In summary, any geometrical expression holds within it a reference, not just to the spatio-temporal originating moment of the invention/discovery of geometry, but also to the very Ideal of the origin of geometry. This is a metaphysics that resonates with all other metaphysical notions. By focussing on the question of the origin of geometry, Husserl theorises a communicative principle that lies within all human production, and suggests that the experience of geometry, which clearly has a very special resonance when experienced within architecture, gathers its power of meaning from a triple compound resonance: between the existential circumstances of the immediate experience; the absent ideal of a geometric origin; and its echo in the spiritual/intellectual dimension of the question of human and world origin. He does this not to romanticise the spiritual dimension of origin, which might foreclose our production in the world as mere representations of an ideal, but to open a fuller magnitude of the meaning-structure of geometry, which according to a (Husserlian) phenomenological consciousness has its “own proper dehiscence” [Derrida 1978: 153] – burst openness. Husserl’s point, underscored by Derrida’s analysis, is to illustrate that everyday questions of our existence can be tied to fundamental existential questions through any mediation (meaning-structure) of our language: via architecture, geometry or narrative. The suggestion is that we should not only enjoy gathering together all the fruits of such questioning, but that we are ethically *compelled* to grow and gather such things. Furthermore, we should assemble them by whatever series makes good sense for the spatio-temporal conditions of today, whilst recognising that such relations are always ripe and ready to burst open again for future reconfiguration and transfiguration.

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Husserl thinks geometry as language. Its ordering principles are as those of language. This is not to say that geometry emulates word language, but that it has rhetorical dimensions: both language and geometry structures rely on gradually coming to terms with the relations between their ideal whole and multiple serial conditions of their parts. Husserl alerts us to an alignment between the hermeneutics of geometry and the hermeneutics of language. He draws our attention to the point that when the serial experience of architectural language and geometric arrangements flow together the

rhetorical condition of each is opened to the other. To interweave the lines of geometry as lines of narrative is simultaneously a coincidence and dehiscence and makes a phenomenological opening. Such an opening provides invitation to read and take a view, rather than ideological foreclosure of a particular view represented persuasively by architecture.

For an understanding of rhetoric and narrative we can turn to Paul Ricoeur. According to Fredric Jameson, Ricoeur is one of the few professional philosophers through which “narrative is affirmed, not merely as a significant field of research, but well beyond that as a central instance of the human mind and a mode of thinking fully as legitimate as that of abstract logic” [Lyotard 1986: xi]. What gives narrative its philosophical weight is the “pre-narrative quality of experience” [Ricoeur 1991: 142]. Of specific philosophical importance is that experience has a narrative structure and that narrative follows and represents the very structure of experience through its own experiential system.⁶

Ricoeur plays with Aristotle’s view of the relationship between the terms *poesis*, *mythos* and *mimesis* as they were historically applied to the specific arts of Greek epic, tragedy and comedy. For Aristotle’s praxis there is a moral obligation for the arts to promote the ideology of Greek politics, offering a didactic role for representation (*mimesis*), and operating in the same linear trajectory as the emplotment (*mythos*) and the productive activity that arranges the emplotment meaningfully (*poesis*).⁷ In simple terms, we are talking here of recorded actions (representation, *mimesis*); the sequence in which the actions have been enacted (emplotment, *mythos*); and the morality of narrative and message to be promoted by the choice of characters and events enacted (virtue, *poesis*). Obviously, the characters (who they are and what they represent), what they do (the sequence of actions) and the sequence in which they do them (what the actions represent as part of a moral tale) constitute the recognizable pattern of Greek mythology. Such a clear linearity lends itself very well to instruction. The place and role of heroes and villains is organised by a clear schema, but, more importantly, what this facilitates is the place of virtue. The myth narrative, according to Aristotelian *poesis*, plays out the contest between frailty and virtue. The main aspect of heroism is to overcome human frailties. Therefore, for Aristotle, praxis secures a predetermined moral code through the lofty pursuits of virtuosos, requiring actions of heroic stature, be they feats of physical strength or ingenuity and cunning.

For Ricoeur, on the other hand, praxis is less lofty; it is gritty, as involved with the vicissitudes of everyday life as the promise of an imagined ideal. Thus, it is necessarily more complex, but flexible. Ricoeur brings Husserl’s notion of the phenomenological opening into his operations for praxis. Therefore, Ricoeur’s praxis charts the effects as *poesis*, *mythos* and *mimesis* become playfully, but seriously, transfigured and interlinked. In this sense, Ricoeur’s praxis, although stemming from hermeneutics, is not entirely hermeneutical, but is political and attempts a form of creative practicality in light of the everyday, in contrast with one steeped in a stable, unchanging vision of virtue. What constitutes virtue is by nature dynamic, and must be considered with respect to actual, rather than pretend or even bona fide political practices. Virtue must be an authorial task if creative production wishes to be politically active.

Ricoeur’s praxis acknowledges that not all politics can be or need be engaged as complex hermeneutics, but rather than reducing philosophy to political inactivity or theories of the mind, Ricoeur’s praxis proposes how production-as-hermeneutics

contributes to political engagement, particularly as creative production.⁸ For Ricoeur, it is necessary to have flexibility in the bonds between *poesis*, *mythos* and *mimesis* to counter the possibility (or tendency) for any modality, any knowledge system, geometric, literary, philosophical, political or academically architectural, to merely represent itself. Thus Ricoeur promotes flexibility in the very workings of representation, though not to promote or deny ideological or existential validity. Ricoeur wishes to eradicate neither the didactics of any representational dimension nor the sensuousness of material encounter. Ricoeur, like Husserl before him, wishes only to breach any impasse between idealism and materialism. As he describes it, the political task of hermeneutics is “to reconstruct the set of operations by means of which a work arises from the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their own actions” [Ricoeur 1991: 139-140]. Ricoeur echoes Husserl’s hope for such methods to contribute positively and practically to the world. Ricoeur rebukes the interiority of certain theories, including even those of language games, which, either by non-committal politics or doctrinal authoritarianism, foreclose and limit didactic possibilities and totally prescribe the nature and purpose of experience.

Ricoeur strikes an optimistic chord for architecture. Bringing play into the representation is not simply for fun, it is serious indeed. Elasticity in the geometric, poetic, narrative and representational processes allow for the possibility of a specifically structured, yet open, ethical dimension to any project. What Ricoeur says for hermeneutics can be said for the architectural project: “to reconstruct the whole arc of operations by which practical experience is turned into works, authors, and readers, there is neither an inside nor an outside to the work – the distinction of inside and outside being a methodological artefact” [Ricoeur 1991: 139-140]. A work here is described as a “methodological artefact.” This very interesting phrase again points towards the seriality of encounter and logic that Husserl uncovers in his analysis of geometry. The inclusive or exclusive tendencies of the methodology – architectural, geometric or narratological – will be embedded in the artefact; and it is better, then, for these expressions to permit the variant and different as well as the ideologically consistent.

An architectural drawing, model, building or text operates as a “methodological artefact.” The history of architecture is a history of methodological artefacts, but also a history of literal reconfigurations and transfigurations of such artefacts. Buildings undergo unceasing revision across time, encountering uses unimagined at the outset. Perhaps, then, it is not such a radical claim that the experience of an architectural project is like performing a hermeneutics of narrative, and vice versa. The passivity of experience in architecture is akin to the passive role of the reader of narrative: the user is a reader influenced by the concrete circumstances of the encounter, but is also privileged as an author who makes-sense-of, generating new associations and narratives. The user/reader participates in “a concrete process in which the textual [architectural] configuration conjoins the practical prefiguration and the practical transfiguration” [Ricoeur 1991: 140] of the work. To reiterate, virtue has to be constituted as an authorial task if creative production wishes to be politically active and meaningful.

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Again, we never experience architecture as a whole; we experience it a bit at a time, and the same can be said of geometry and narrative. In this sense the experience of architecture, geometry and narrative share fragmented but serial modes of appropriation. Looking to the passivity of everyday experience of each permits us to understand the radical potential of each. In coming to terms with the parts of experience, gathering and

reassembling them, we cannot help but presume there is some absent but common origin. Even if not immediately appreciable, the commonality of origin is intelligible as a product of human, hence communicative, action. However, communication can be nurtured only by maintaining variation and difference within ideological consistency. Architecture can very readily communicate this. The absent origin of an architectural project echoes the absent origin of geometry and narrative; all echo the absent origin of human and world. It is no wonder that the passive experience of architecture is very distracting: between the series of building experiences and the serial experience of our distractions, we make patterns of potential significance in successive intersections and diversification. Such succession, such interwoven seriality, may be seen as the central agency of creativity.

Geometry and narrative in the design process of Lamb's House

We now consider the experience of geometry and narrative in the course of the design process, as narrative becomes construction, architecture and building. What follows is a series of “methodological artefacts” that illustrate aspects of the design process of a specific architectural project. These “artefacts” illustrate play in the confluence of specific architectural contexts, architectural geometric principles and architectural and historical narratives. Views of history are gathered and recorded, acting in series to record either points of consensus or the requisite disquietudes (contrariness) upon opening the project to a phenomenological enquiry. At no point during the design process was there an intention for the project to preclude enquiry; rather, the methodology attempts to record as much as is possible within the practical constraints of a project with real historical, economic and political tensions, and to record them in a manner that encourages deeper reading of the artefacts produced. It is hoped that rather than transcribing the histories and events word-to-word, the artefacts open a curiosity for reading more of the architectural and historical narratives embedded in or responsible for the project.

The project was commissioned after a successful competition submission in January 2007. Due to economic pressures on its portfolio, the National Trust for Scotland was looking to safeguard the future existence of Lamb's House by setting up a combined design proposal and purchase bid competition. There was no pre-requisite programme. The building was most recently used as office space, but due to maintenance obligations the economics of this had become untenable. We won the design competition and worked with the commercial arm of the City of Edinburgh council property and development section to prepare an economically viable purchase bid. Our design and purchase bid suggested its domestic use could be re-instated and the building safeguarded through maintenance covenants with the new owners, whilst increasing the public amenity by opening “Mary's Garden” to the public and re-instating the medieval public thoroughway of Water's Close to Leith Shore. The project provides 6 domestic apartments in the existing building and 3 domestic apartments and an office in the new building. Our project received Planning consent with Historic Scotland approval in July 2008. Building construction and tender documentation is being prepared at the time of writing this paper.



Fig. 1. Contemporary Ordnance Survey Map of Leith



Fig. 2. The 1851 Johnstone Map of Leith with the citadel walls of 1560 superimposed

The maps shown in figs. 1-3 record two significant time frames. The times around 1560 were turbulent in Scottish History.⁹ The Scottish Reformation was in full gear, with much bloody fall-out. John Knox was preaching Calvinist doctrine from the pulpits of St. Giles, just across the High Street from the palace of Catholic Mary of Guise,

daughter to one of the most powerful family alliances in France – the Guise and Bourbon. Mary of Guise was mother to Mary Queen of Scots (1542-1587) by James V (who died only six days after the birth of his heir), and remained guardian and queen regent of Scotland until her daughter was old enough to formally assume the throne on which she was crowned Queen, in 1543, at the age of nine months.¹⁰ Mary of Guise also had a palace in Leith, which was a separate city to Edinburgh but operated as its port and main connection between Scotland and continental Europe, especially since the 1305 sacking and appropriation of Berwick by Edward I of England.

The 1851 Johnstone Map of Leith (fig. 2) still shows the medieval street patterns, many of which were widened or removed to make sanitary and rational urban blocks subsequent to Edinburgh's City Improvement Act of 1867. It also shows that the citadel walls had more or less been removed, the docks had undergone expansion, but the town had not been so significantly expanded as Edinburgh. The 1744 Kirkwood map shows that the citadel walls had already been removed or reduced to mounds (see fig. 3).



Fig. 3. 1744 Kirkwood Map of Leith



Fig. 4. Lamb's House as it currently stands

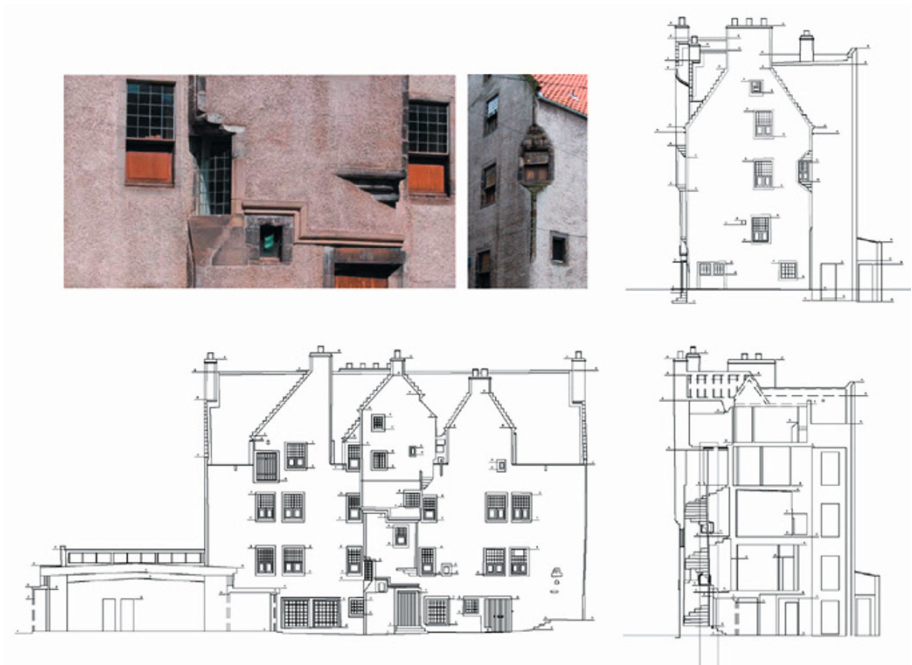


Fig. 5. General Survey of Lamb's House as it currently stands

Domesticity is the character written throughout the body, skin and detail of Lamb's House (figs. 4-5). Even on first encounter, domesticity and domestic comfort is clearly conveyed by the human scale of the seeming ad-hoc arrangement or "wilful anarchy"

[Wright 2000: 16] of its parts, and the generous quantity, size and disposition of windows, fireplaces and flues. The gables are termed ‘crow-stepped’, but, like all the architectural details of Lamb’s House, these too are intrinsically anthropometric. The aggregation of these parts produces a building that is at once homely and grand, the house of a Scottish merchant.

Lamb’s House is not a classically formal design, either in domestic arrangement or urban planning. As Andrew Wright in the National Trust’s Conservation Plan hints [Wright 2000: 15]), the Scottish inclination reversed practices in contemporary Italy, France and England, where farms or country seats were re-invented as rural palazzi, bringing urbanity to the countryside. In Scotland, the Tower House – less a palazzo and more simply a tall house in the open countryside – offered a rural model transposed to urbanity. Like a tower house, Lamb’s House accommodates all the gesturing twists and turns of its occupants that would provide protection yet take advantage of the best views and prospects; however, in the urban context such prospects look into gardens, yards, down closes, along streets and across skylines and, whilst within the walls of a more secure citadel, can take the opportunity to express such experiential privileges and comforts as external architectural features. It is the coupling of urban and domestic scales that is so intriguing about this building, and this juxtaposition of civic decorum with the human-scale rituals of living that guides the architectural proposal depicted in the subsequent figures.

Untypical of roofs in historic Scotland, which were mainly slate, stone or lead, the pan-tile roof of Lamb’s House can be seen in many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century buildings in the port towns on the River Forth on the East coast of Scotland. Pan-tiles were used as ballast on trade journeys back from Holland and continental Europe. The Petworth Map of the Siege of Leith (fig. 6) illustrates “roofs are red, blue or brown according to whether the material is tile, lead or slate, or thatch” [Steer 1961-62: 280].



Fig. 6. The Petworth Map of the Siege of Leith (Edinburgh and Leith)

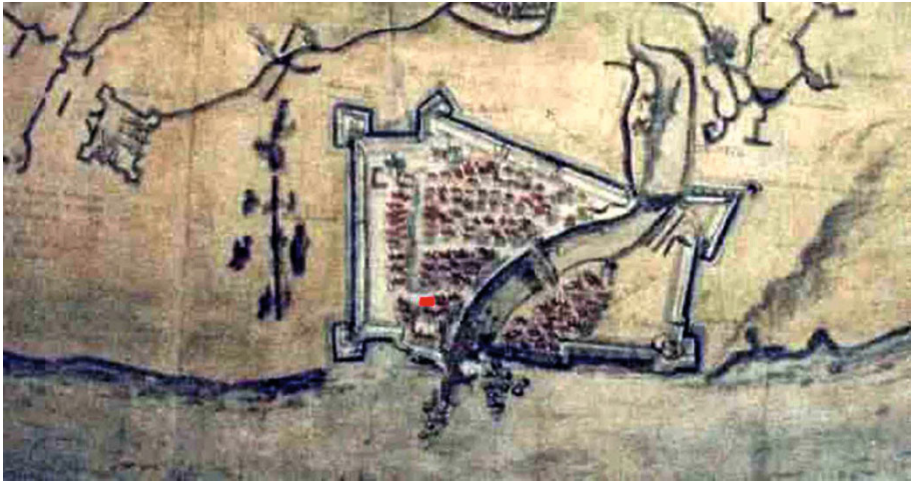


Fig. 7. The Petworth Map of the Siege of Leith (Leith)

In March 1560 an army of English and Scots laid siege to Leith.¹¹ The French and Scots loyal to Mary of Guise and Mary Queen of Scots defended Leith, and there were heavy casualties on both sides. This map records a pivotal moment in Scottish history, when Mary of Guise, ill since November 1559, died on June 11. John Knox rejoiced. The Treaty of Edinburgh was signed on 6 July 1560, and the Map was prepared a day later [Steer 1961-62: 280]. Part of the agreement was that Mary Queen of Scots and her husband Francis, King of France, should no longer bear the English coat of arms, in recognition of Elizabeth as Queen of England. The English and French armies agreed to leave Scotland forthwith and adopted a policy of non-interference with Scottish politics. The Treaty needed ratification from Francis and Mary, but this never happened.¹²

However, the political constitution of Scotland took a significant turn on 11 August, 1560, when the Scottish Parliament voted to promulgate the Protestant faith, and five days later abolished the Pope's jurisdiction and prohibited the celebration of the Catholic Mass. The Protestant Lords had secured significant power in the Scottish administration.

In December 1560, King Francis of France died. King Charles IX took up the throne of France under the regency of Catherine de Medici, his and Francis's mother, until of appropriate age to rule by himself. Rather than take up the marriage suit of Don Carlos of Spain, or any other offers of suitors from powerful continental European nations or retire to her French country estates as duchess of Touraine, Mary decided to return to Scotland and do her duty as Queen of Scots. On Tuesday 19 August 1561, aged only nineteen, Mary

once more set foot on her native soil at the port of Leith ... Her arrival was unexpectedly early – at about nine o'clock in the morning – as favourable winds had carried the royal party from France more swiftly than had been anticipated. Nevertheless, by all accounts, her reception was enthusiastic and joyful ... Since Holyrood Palace was not yet made ready for her arrival, the queen was taken first of all to the house of one Andrew Lamb at Leith; here she had a short rest and took to her midday dinner, before being conveyed from Leith to Holyrood [Frasier 1971: 171].

This project proposes that Mary's homecoming should be recorded through the new architecture of Lamb's House. It does this in two ways: figuratively and directly by commissioning a new statue of Mary on a plinth in the garden (see Fig.13); and abstractly and indirectly by developing a series of interpretive architectonic procedures that draw together the gestural geometry of the existing building and a materiality of this specific historical narrative (see figs 8-14).

Much of the architecture of Lamb's House is not as it was when Mary Queen of Scots paid her visit. However, the sense of human scale remains. The geometry is asymmetrical, more like the body posed mid-gesture than the body standing to attention. As well as a conventional survey of the whole layout of the existing building (see fig. 5), we asked the client to commission us to survey specific details of the building. It was important to record the specific nuances of the details that worked together with the volumetric and spatial disposition to give the building its human scale and lived-in quality. A measured survey of building gestures was undertaken.

Even though it was August when Mary arrived, there was a "harr", a thick fog of the type peculiar to the microclimate of the East coast of Scotland usually on what would otherwise be a warm and sunny day, and so the fires were probably lit.¹³ Lamb's House, although splendid and clearly qualitative, was more modest than the grandeur of Linthligow Palace, where Mary was born and spent her first years in Scotland, the French court she had just left, or of Holyrood Palace where she would soon reside. However, it is has many Scottish qualities: it is certainly stylish yet very homely. There is no doubt that Mary ate cake in the snugness and comfort of a beautiful oak lined room.

To memorialise Mary's homecoming may open her particular narrative and the unresolved political problems of Scottish History to a new wave of blind prejudice. However, perhaps it is in the celebration of such an everyday event of having dinner (or walking in the garden) that one can properly memorialise Mary's homecoming without it opening the old and, for some, still painful wounds of religious bigotry and scurrilous political intrigue. But how should such a fine, intimate but significant and everyday moment be recorded and made manifest? To provide dinner for a guest is to be a fine host. Perhaps recording the cutting of cake is to index the traces of such hospitality. Perhaps such traces and indexing might stimulate other lines of communication.

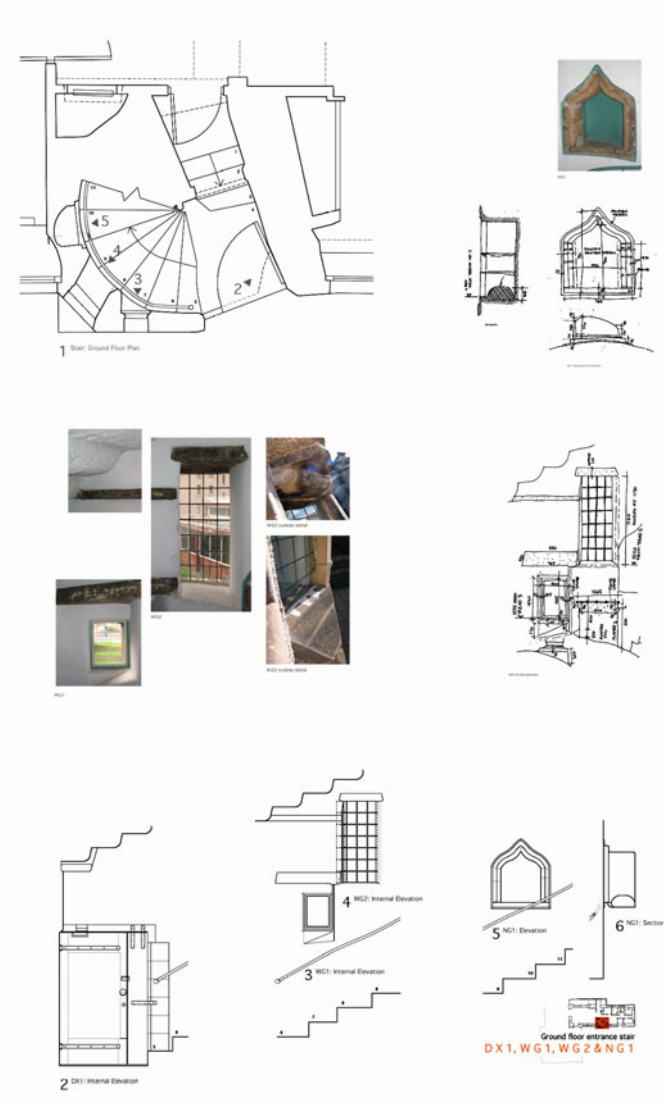


Fig. 8. Details and Gesture Survey

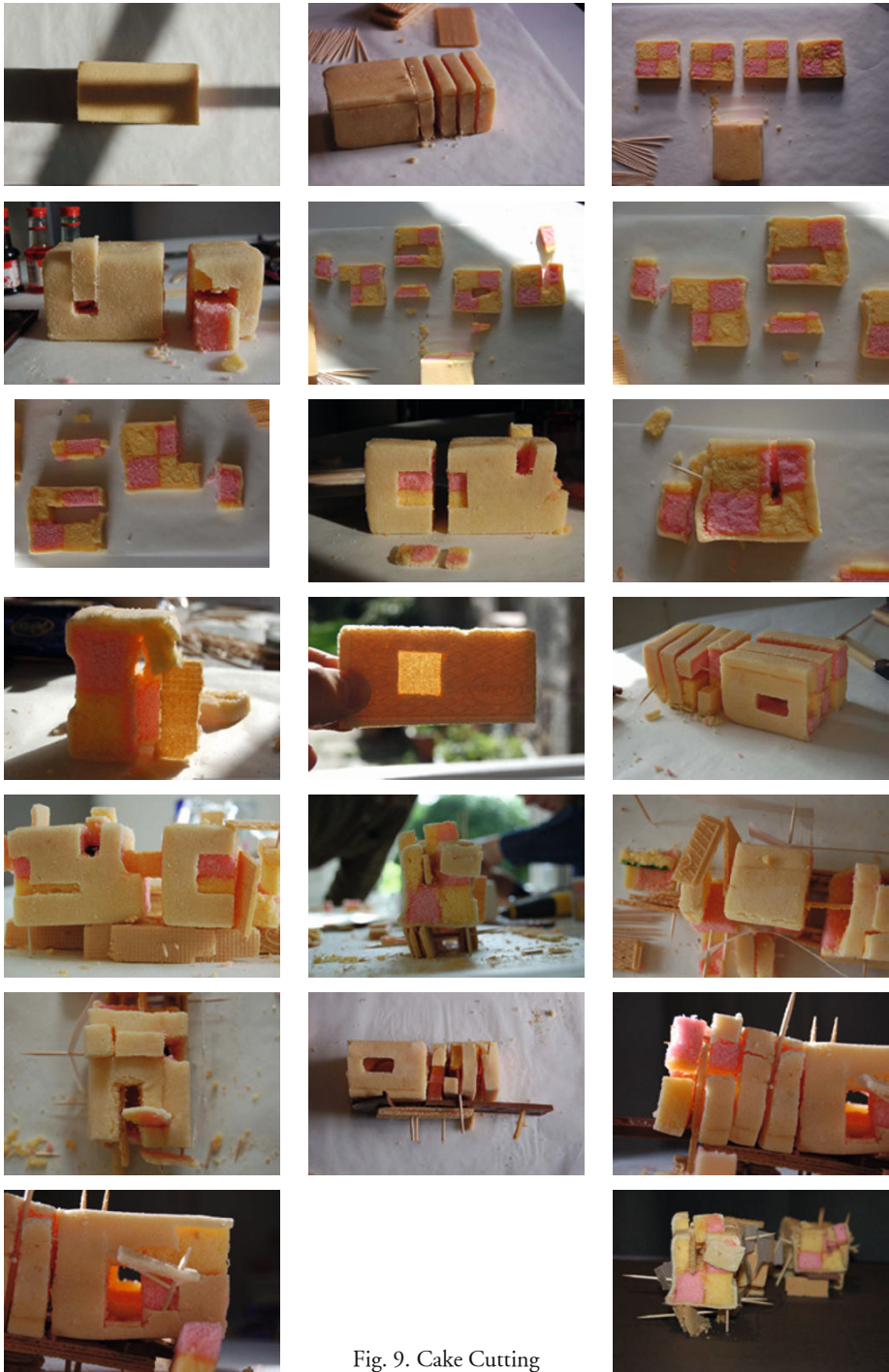


Fig. 9. Cake Cutting

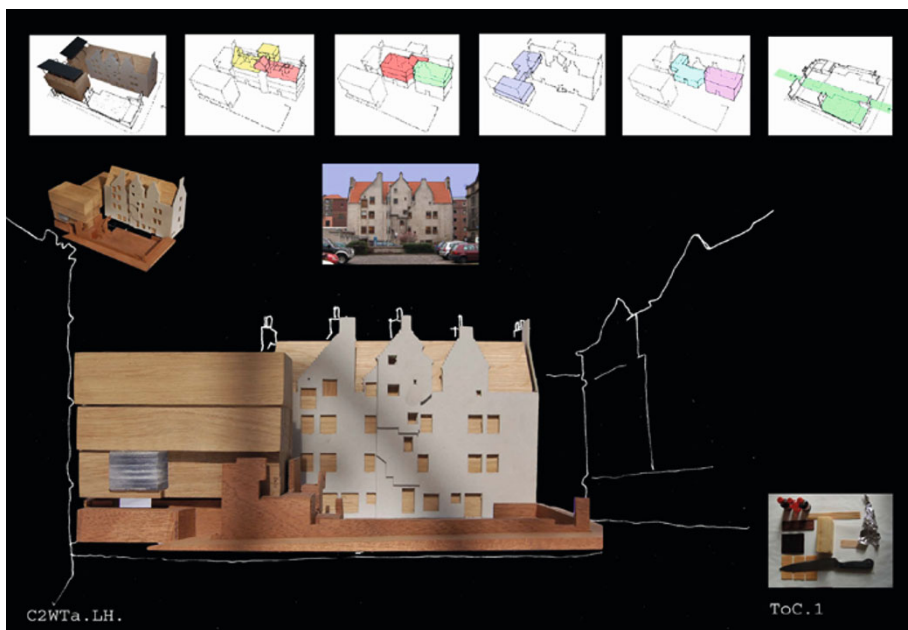


Fig. 10. Tectonics of Homecoming, Gesture, Cake-Cutting and Hospitality

The oak shutters of the existing windows remind us that once they would have been contiguous with wainscoting and other wall paneling. Such cabinetwork not only provides real warmth but is also sign of comfort. What a fine thing for homeliness. Figs. 9 and 10 illustrate processes and drawings that forge relationships between the geometries of cutting cake, architectural drawing, architectural models and cabinetwork. The suggestion is that the new architecture might find an appropriate language at such confluences. Figs. 11 and 12 illustrate drawings and models that promote further alliances between cake cutting, architectural drawing, cabinetwork and the geometry of gesture between the new and the existing buildings.

In the bottom right hand corner of the survey details (some of which are illustrated here in fig. 8), details that hold the geometry of the human scale as it meets the geometry of urban context are indexed to their locations in the existing building floor by floor. The drawings shown in fig. 11 have taken the index code of such details and relocated them with the promise that such gestures can be transfigured in the appropriate places of the new building according to their new programmatic and urban relations.

Specific gestures are deemed appropriate for specific locations; some lines of construction and geometric relationship are transfigured in scale whilst retaining material quality; some retain direct references to their source gesture; others act to reinforce the community of domestic spaces between the old and new buildings, for example the main stair of the new building that positions itself opposite and adjacent to the main stair of the existing building whilst wandering back on itself to overlook the common garden and close.¹⁴

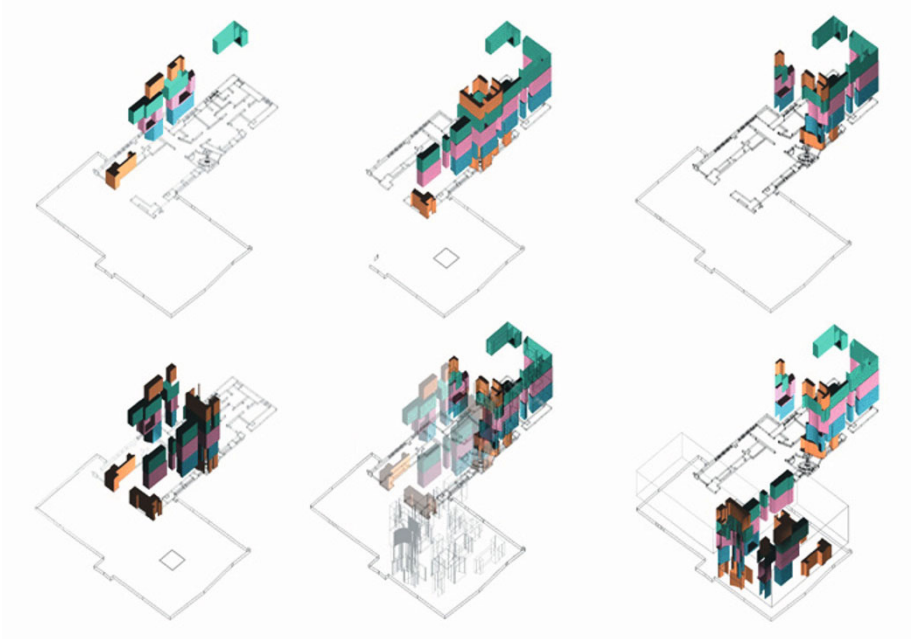


Fig. 11. Details and Gestures transfigured and transposed to new building

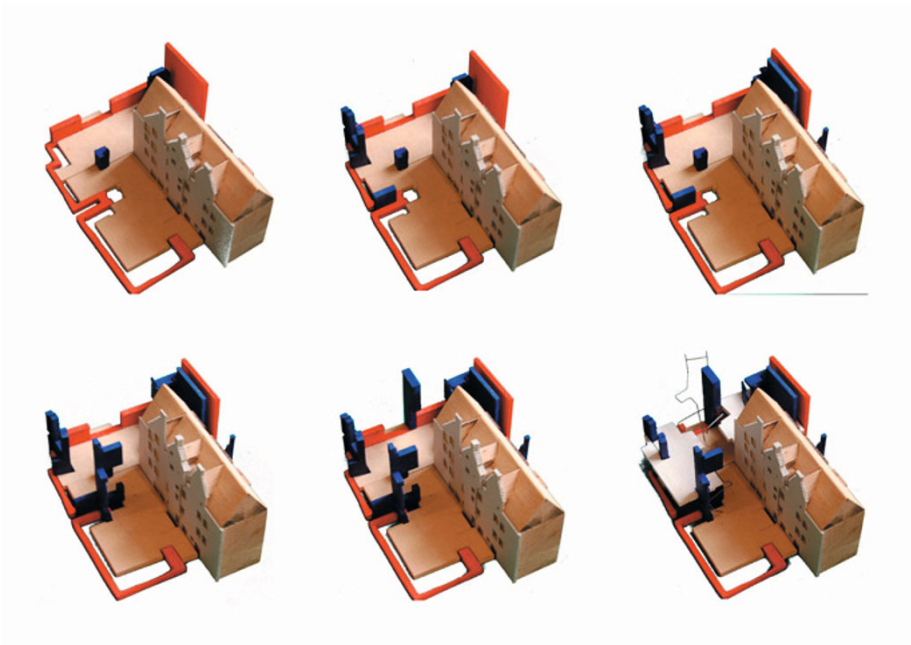


Fig. 12. Anchoring Details and Gestures to specific locations



Fig. 13. The Project – Boxes and Gesture

Two timber-frame boxes housing the new apartments of Lamb's House are set on top of masonry structures on either side of the re-opened Waters Close that runs immediately in front of Lamb's House, as a residue of the medieval urban grain of Leith, and which had been blocked by buildings of the 1960s. Finished Scottish oak will be used to frame specific openings and tectonic gestures that mediate the geometry of domestic space with the immediate urban context. The boxes step out at each floor level following a traditional construction form of the sixteenth century. The entrance steps to the new apartments will be constructed in masonry from ground to first floor and will echo the crow steps of the gables and scale of the turnpike stair in Lamb's House.

It is not clear whether Mary walked in the garden of Lamb's House, but if she did it was sure to have been of the size of either a small physic or knot garden. The new garden will be of this character and, although an amenity for the residents of Lamb's House, will be open to the public off the re-opened Waters Close. It is proposed that a setting for a newly commissioned statue of Mary be created in the garden. This would be the first statue ever to have been made of Mary Queen of Scots.



Fig. 14. The Project – South and East Elevations

Notes

1. In mind here is the tendency, promoted by politicians, commercial clients, architects and cultural commentators, to valorise certain overt expression as iconic, therefore, as enigmatic and substantial. See, for example, [Jencks 2005].
2. In his introduction to Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*, Derrida's summary of Husserl's theorisation of the relation between a geometrical and pre-geometrical world echoes this formulation of Benjamin's premise of an architectural and pre-architectural world. "However profound our ignorance concerning historical facts, we know with an immediate and apodictic knowledge ... [a] pregeometrical world as a world of *things* disposed of according to an anexact space and time ... [and] that material qualities (colour, weight, hardness, and so forth) must necessarily be 'related' to these pregeometrical, spatiotemporal shapes by a supplementary eidetic determination" [Derrida 1978: 122].
3. Thomas Carl Wall [1999] proposes the phrase "radical passivity" to describe a shared "preoccupation" between Levinas, Blanchot and Agamben. Wall's text and the sources it cites offer an important background understanding to the particular phenomenological turn this paper promotes. Such "radical passivity" focuses on the philosophy of politics and the search for an appropriate political attitude that first operates through a positive concern for co-existence; Levinas's *autrui* is the common agency for such concern. The phrase "radical passivity", however, seems oxymoronic. It seems to suggest the simultaneous promotion of actively reformist politics through being emphatically unreactive. How can this be so? The explanation is as follows. On one hand, passivity speaks of the transitive condition of existence, of being-in-relation, of passing time, of passing through time, allowing time for the other side of the relationship and the other in the relationship to flourish. The notion of passivity, then, although speaking of a lack of reaction and opposition also speaks of what is not being opposed, and that is the actions of others. It can be said that passivity invokes the very action of opening a way for being in relation to others. On the other hand, as well as holding the dynamic of agitation, radical politics also speaks of a liberalist concern for establishing political relations from fundamental principles (for example, a radical liberalism fuelled aspects of the American Civil War; in this sense, then, radical pertains both to what is fundamental, equal rights for all people, and the action of agitation to reform political systems that pervert the principles of fundamental human relations). The radical relation, then, is theorised by Wall as the essential relation that we are all bound to by being in the world with others. Therefore, not only does radical passivity suggest an essential relation between one and other and an essential responsibility to wait upon, listen to and come to terms with the action of one party by the other, to radicalise passivity is both to understand the action of being in relationship as a fundamental condition to being in the world whilst pursuing such a relationship through political action. Wall's formulation operates transcendental metaphysical dynamics. He states, "passivity in the radical sense, before it is simply opposed to activity, is passive with regard to *itself*; and thus it submits to itself as though it were an exterior power. Hence, radical passivity conceals, or harbors in itself, or communicates with, a *potentia*; it is always outside itself and its own other. Passive with regard to itself, the essential passivity of the subject must undergo itself, suffer itself, feel itself *as other*. In this sense, passivity is purely passionate" [Wall 1999: 1].
4. Husserl refers to this tendency as "horizon-certainty". He asserts that we always know that we are in a world of endless unknowns but which are as real as any of the realities we know. In other words, we have our own limits (horizons) of understanding, but we also know that there is yet more to know beyond these horizons. Husserl asserts that the "horizon-certainty" principle is "presupposed" by the human condition "in order that we can seek to know what we do not know"; see [Husserl 1978: 176].
5. According to Diogenes Laertius, "Thales was the first to inscribe a right-angled triangle, whereupon he sacrificed an ox" [*Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, quoted in Nancy 2003: 51]. This may also explain Le Corbusier's inclusion of an ox in his *Poème de l'Angle Droit*. The ox and right angle are both symbols of metaphysical significance. Thales makes a gift to the gods who provided him with the revelatory truth of a geometric principle;

- Le Corbusier makes a gift of his belief in the truth of a right angle (and primordial significance of an ox to both mortals and gods) to the muse of poetry. See [Curtis 1986: 166, 167] and [Benton 1987: 242, 243].
6. Alistair McIntyre extrapolates from this basis to suggest that our social structures operate to this same sense of narratology, even considering social structures themselves as enacted epics; see [McIntyre 1994: 128-129].
 7. Aristotle claims that Poetry bifurcated in accordance with the corresponding kinds of character. He obviously sides with the “serious-minded” people who imitated “fine-actions” rather than the more trivial people who imitated more trivial actions [Aristotle 1996: 7].
 8. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics operates from a political conscience and tries to address criticisms of post-modern language practitioners. For example, Manfredo Tafuri, as critical theorist of a historical materialist persuasion, suggests that some architectural intertextualists act as mere “manipulators of the imaginary” who cannot avoid the temptations for “pirouetting on only one foot,” and who turn political practice into “tightrope walking,” playing games “with a history whose meaning and limits they skillfully keep hidden from themselves”, promoting the “multiplication of winks and high signs” to finally make only “text of impotence.” These are damning criticisms, to be kept in mind whether it is the architectural project or any other creative production. See [Tafuri 1987: 301].
 9. The political turbulence between England and France had a major part to play in the politics of Scotland at this time.
 10. In 1558, on the suggestion and under protection of King Henry II of France, Mary Queen of Scots was taken to France and married to the Dauphin Francis to become Dauphiness of France.
 11. This was known in England as the “War of the Insignia”. The battle arose over the over the presence of French Troops in Scotland that kept the power of the Protestant Lords under control. The protestant Lords made an agreement with the English, the Treaty of Berwick, in February 1560. The English promised to support the Scottish Protestant Lords in their claims on the premise of religious freedoms. However, the English were more concerned by the threat Mary Queen of Scots posed to the English Crown through the claim made by her French father-in-law Henry II of France on the death of Mary Tudor, daughter of Henry VIII of England, in November 1558. Mary, who at this time was Queen of France after the death of King Henry II on 10 July 1559, had not rescinded this claim; see [Fraser 1971: 129].
 12. Mary’s claim to the English throne is pivotal to her imprisonment and eventual execution; see [Fraser 1971: 115].
 13. “On the day the galleys were due to land at Leith, thick fog descended. A thick fog on the coast of Scotland was not an unexpected hazard, even in the middle of August” [Fraser 1971: 171].
 14. “Close” is an old Scots word used in the East coast of Scotland for a lane or narrow street between buildings designed principally for pedestrian use, and literally describes the closeness of one building to another. Closes are a major feature of Edinburgh’s and what is left of Leith’s medieval urban infrastructure. On the West coast of Scotland, a close refers to the stairwell of tenement buildings, referring in this instance to the closeness of neighbours off a common stair.

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About the author

A registered architect in the UK since 1986, Wiszniewski took up an academic post with The University of Edinburgh in 1995 and co-founded the partnership Wiszniewski Thomson Architects in 1996. In 2006 Wiszniewski Thomson Architects won the Royal Scottish Academy Gold Medal for Architecture for the Water House, Crieff. Upon winning a design competition for the extension and renovation of Lamb's House, a sixteenth-century merchant's house, Leith, Edinburgh, Wiszniewski Thomson Architects formed a partnership with Cadell² in 2005. In 2009 Wiszniewski completed a doctorate thesis entitled "Architecture and Unavowable Community: Architecture and Community as Affirmation of Insufficiency and Incompleteness." Academic papers have been published in China, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Spain, Turkey, UK, and USA; core interests are the architectural-political-philosophical overlap on issues of representation and production.