

Call for Submissions:

“Phenomenology against Architectural Phenomenology”

Log 42, edited by Bryan E. Norwood

Deadline: Monday, October 2, 2017

We begin with a proposition: the dominant take on phenomenology in architectural theory has been as an approach that grounds architecture in a unified conception of human subjectivity. The lifeblood of *architectural* phenomenology (and we mean this as distinct from the philosophical program of phenomenology) has not been a consistent methodology but rather an ethical project that aims – in the name of recovering something lost, reunifying something fragmented, or attending to something missed – to stabilize and even sanctify particular forms of subjectivity. That is, architectural phenomenology has been a project of saying what humans should strive to be.

The language of architectural phenomenology that developed in the second half of the 20th century is by now familiar: the critique of the inhumanity of modern technology, the need to attend to authentic “primary experiences” of embodiment and the “magic of the real,” and the crucial task of “wresting place from space.” In an introduction to Steven Holl’s *Intertwinings* (1996), Alberto Pérez-Gómez lays bare the essentializing ethic behind this project, suggesting that a phenomenological approach can produce architecture that “allow[s] the inhabitant to recognize a potential wholeness through experience.” Dwelling functions as a normative description of the fundamental poetics of being human, and the ideal architect is positioned as an artist-philosopher making place for the explicit experience of this mode of existence. Whether one ultimately classifies architectural phenomenology as a school, an ethic, or simply an attitude, there has been little slowdown in the amount of writing in this vein.

But equally familiar today is the language of the critique and dismissal of architectural phenomenology: that it is grounded in a nostalgia for a mythical premodern condition, its interpretations of technology are clichéd, and ultimately it is a return to absolutes in the guise of the individualized language of place and personal experience. These critiques initially emerged from an all-too-simple binary in architectural discourse between phenomenology and structuralism, between foundationalism and the thought of difference. Recently, they have been

developed in the more sophisticated forms of critical historiography – perhaps most notably by Jorge Otero-Pailos in his *Architecture's Historical Turn* (2010) – that bring out the peculiarly furtive universalizing desires of architectural phenomenology and its partial and piecemeal relationship to the philosophical project of the same name.

It is the dialectic of the acceptance and rejection of phenomenology that this issue of *Log* aims to thwart. By critiquing not phenomenology but rather the assumed ethical project at the heart of its architectural appropriations, the aim is to think phenomenologically against architectural phenomenology. One recent way of turning against the stabilizing humanism deeply inscribed in architectural discourse has been to graft in actor-network and object-oriented theories that give agency to the nonhuman. While acknowledging the possibilities afforded by these approaches, here we intend to rethink the conception of the human itself. Rather than proliferate phenomenological accounts to the nonhuman, we aim to do phenomenology that avoids treating the human as a *single* fixed subjectivity. That is, if one of the main tasks of phenomenology is to destroy clichés, why not start with the one that assumes the character of the experiencing subject? This, of course, is not a new idea. Let us give three recent, guiding examples:

(1) Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) challenges phenomenology's approach to the normativity of *orientation*, in its spatial and sexual dimensions, but also through the issue of "the orient" itself. Developing a tradition of phenomenology through Iris Marion Young, Judith Butler, and Frantz Fanon, among others, Ahmed confronts the tendency of phenomenology to universalize the way in which subjects orient. Perhaps through similar considerations of phenomenological difference, architectural discourse can develop more expansive accounts of the bodies to which architecture affords position and possibilities.

(2) "Between my sensation and myself, there is always the thickness of an *originary acquisition* that prevents my experience from being clear for itself," Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). Recent work on moods like anxiety and horror, such as Dylan Trigg's *The Thing* (2014), draws on this thickness of human constitution. While phenomenologists have long addressed moods that contrast with homeliness, the grand narrative of architectural phenomenologists, which privileges dwelling, often prevents the delamination of an account of experience from moralizing about what moods are proper.

Through phenomenological practices that consider conditions of displacement to be as fundamental as dwelling, perhaps alternate accounts of the ethical function of architecture can be generated.

(3) In *Habeas Viscus* (2014), Alexander Weheliye, propelled by black studies in particular, pushes against the assumption of the *man* who experiences. Drawing on the writings of Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, and Hortense Spillers, Weheliye favors an account of the human condition in terms of *the flesh* rather than that of the liberal, humanist, individualized man. Bringing into relief the assumed "man-ness" in architectural phenomenology, we may be able to reconsider the contingency of historical narratives and normative visions in relationship to dwelling and place.

Log 42 calls for writing that considers the way in which architecture produces and is produced by humanness, for phenomenologies that consider the varieties and differences of human embodiment rather than allowing the terrain to be prepared in advance. Reconsiderations of the possibilities of architectural phenomenology through the work of thinkers underutilized in architecture, such as Fanon, Butler, Young, and Édouard Glissant, or through creative readings of established figures such as Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl are particularly welcome, as is work related to the spatial turn in the humanities and to fields such as disability studies and gender studies that provides alternate routes into phenomenological considerations of bodies in built space.

Submission Guidelines

Text

Text should be submitted as an editable file that can be opened with Microsoft Word. Please be sure to include your name at the top and append your contact info and a very short bio (no more than 40 words) to the end.

We prefer to receive texts in customary manuscript format (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman, 1" margins, US letter-sized page).

While we work with authors to refine submissions, we request that all submitted essays be carefully edited and as complete as possible. Please consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* for appropriate stylistic standards for text and footnotes.

Images

Images may be collected and submitted, along with caption and credit information, in a single (multipage) low-res PDF; please do not embed images in text files.

Total submission size should not exceed 2 MB.