

## Introduction: *Thinking Architecture*

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In *Thinking in an Emergency*, Elaine Scarry exposes a fallacy: that in emergency situations thinking must cease for quick action to prevail.<sup>1</sup> She returns to this false opposition of thinking and acting in the closing chapter of *Thermonuclear Monarchy: Choosing Between Democracy and Doom*.<sup>2</sup> While the thrust of Scarry's argument is that weapons of mass destruction are incompatible with democracy, her underlying premise – that thinking does not oppose action but orients action – is also significant for the democratic art of architecture. Deliberative thinking enables action in the best direction. This capacity for deliberation, which Aristotle called *bouleusis* and aligned with *phronēsis* (prudence or practical wisdom), is essential for good decision-making, where the goal is not simply to act, but to act well in the midst of particular situations replete with complexities and uncertainties.

Scarry's call for thinking resonates with Hannah Arendt's insights on action and judgment, as presented in *The Human Condition*,<sup>3</sup> *The Life of the Mind*,<sup>4</sup> and a recent set of essays based on Arendt's "Thinking Journal" (*Denktagebuch*).<sup>5</sup> While architecture is not the target of Arendt's political thinking,

her insights on the public realm, social cohesion and plurality, and the power of collective speech and action to renew social relations and engender viable societies are instructive for architects (and anyone) concerned with the common good.

At a time of urgency, when architects are calling for less talk/more action in response to global crises ranging from a climate emergency to related crises of social and economic injustice, it is timely to reflect on the role of careful and imaginative thinking and to recover thoughtful speech and discourse as productive forms of architectural agency.

The “Call for Thinking” for this sixth volume of the *Montreal Architectural Review* invited papers, book reviews and discursive experiments exploring crucial manifestations, modalities and milieus of architectural thinking. Authors were encouraged to probe any one or combination of the following themes: embodied, situated and material modes of architectural thinking; places for thinking, which enable wonder, truth, justice, happiness and a beautiful life, as Marco Frascari advocated;<sup>6</sup> ensemble thinking, or thinking in concert (and tension) with plural agents in dramatic situations; philosophical models for architectural thinking, or what Aristotle called in *Nicomachean Ethics* “architectonic *phronēsis*”;<sup>7</sup> and habits of thinking fostered via architectural education.

The contributions assembled in this journal intersect many of these themes. The first essay by **Rebecca Williamson**, “Thinking Through Building,” situates key questions of this call via historical analysis, framed by contemporaneous concerns. Interpreting definitive statements by Étienne-Louis Boullée and Marc-Antoine Laugier in relation to aspects of twentieth-century discourse, Williams reveals how theoretical distinctions between building and thinking give way to a *praxis* of creative interdependence. This essay argues that the practice of architecture enacts its own distinctly hybrid form of thoughtfulness: through agencies of time, reciprocities of reflective and projective thought, and the polyphonic nature of communication necessary for constructing and construing any socially meaningful work.

The second essay by **Marcia Feuerstein** considers a particular wall of a single building via personal encounter, contemplative musing and hard facts. “In the sky with diamonds” describes the constellation of thoughts and events leading to the uniquely mysterious, yet surprisingly understudied, star-like array of apertures within the East wall of Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp. Through scholarship infused with material imagination, this essay and its original montages exemplify the revelatory potential of situated thinking and patient (re)search, while showing how typical construction methods and marks may metamorphose to cosmological significance via serendipitous *in situ* encounters.

**Mathew Mindrup**’s essay, “Thinking and Imagining Architecture at a Distance with Models,” explores the gap between physical models and buildings as a crucial distance not to be overcome or eliminated, but to be thoughtfully engaged as a space of imagination, anticipation and memory. Indeed, it was precisely this space between representation and reality, Mindrup argues, that was embraced as a profound

opportunity for invention for eighteenth and nineteenth century designers. Grounded in textual sources and tangible testimony from a variety of treatises, archives and *kunstkammers* (cabinets of curiosity), Min-drup shows how architects have continued to seize the fictive agency of models (and building fragments) to think and rethink, assemble and reassemble built and desired realities.

In “Paper Architecture as a Site for Thinking, Writing and Spatial Agency,” **Tordis Berstrand** turns from prose to poetry to experiment with language, metaphoric image and the space of the page as media and milieu for architectural thought. In a way that recalls Hannah Arendt’s proposition that thinking is an unending dialogue “between me and myself,”<sup>8</sup> Berstrand engages a dialectic of question and response to explore the resonance and interchangeability between building, writing and thinking.

The final contribution, by **Jonathan Foote**, provides a probing review of Paul Emmons’ 2019 book entitled *Drawing Imagining Building: Embodiment in Architectural Design Practices*. This timely and provocative work celebrates hand drawing as not only inseparable from architectural thinking but also imperative for fostering the ethical imagination of architects. Emphasizing the book’s significance to our understanding of *embodied* drawing, building and imagining, Foote highlights Emmons’ method of narrating the corporeal and phenomenal bases for typical drawing marks, methods, tools and gestures. As Foote makes clear, these insights into embodied drawing are all the more important in this post-digital era, reminding architects of the persistent role of corporeal imagination in projecting multi-sensorial environments for our human world.

An additional project contribution (Figure 1) represents a schematic design proposal for a “**Think-Tank**” by graduate student Eliezer Perez, devised with support of faculty at the Virginia Tech Washington Alexandria Architecture Center. This project explores how architectural thinking is intertwined with the spaces we occupy and inhabit via dreams. Perez’s drawings, themselves demonstrative of multi-modal reverie, synthesize different drawing conventions with a desire to delve deep into thought through spaces for personal and social contemplation. Framed by a comprehensive design studio, with interdependent explorations in drawing, history and theory, this contribution also offers a pedagogical strategy for cultivating thoughtfully synthetic design strategies among students. As Alberto Pérez-Gómez has argued, architecture schools should leverage their relative autonomy to focus not simply on crafting plausible solutions, but on nurturing “tactics for thought” through creative dialogue, critical debate and personal imagination.<sup>9</sup> Building on this pedagogical provocation, all the contributions in this issue may be read as raising questions for how we prepare emerging architects to think and act wisely – even in the midst of emergency.

As readers of these essays will (re)discover, architectural thinking fundamentally entails language, writing, reading and discursive exchange. While architecture in some ways transcends verbal expression, verbalization is how its meaning becomes articulated, evaluated, shared, and deepened. As Swiss architect Peter Zumthor writes at the start of his own book entitled *Thinking Architecture*, “There was a time when

I experienced architecture without thinking about it.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, his decision to assemble his thoughts through writing represents an attempt to bring awareness to those sensuous and seemingly inexpressible encounters, and to move others to consider the interplay of feeling and reason in the design and experience of architecture.

These essays participate in the perpetual project of understanding how we think through, with, about, against, in and for architecture – not solely for the sake of architecture but, as Hannah Arendt suggested, for the “love of the world” (*amor mundi*).

## Images

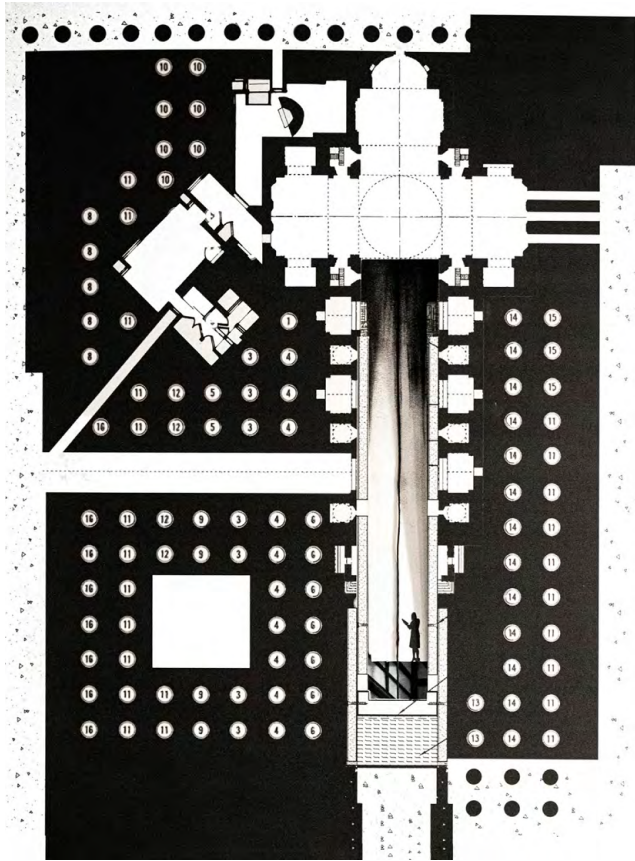


Figure 1. What makes a place conducive to thought? Inaugural drawing toward the design of an urban Think-Tank, imagining embodied thinking as immured within architecture. Prepared by graduate student Eliezer Perez at Virginia Tech, Washington Alexandria Architecture Center, Fall 2019.

## Notes

- 1 Elaine Scarry, *Thinking in an Emergency* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).
- 2 Elaine Scarry, *Thermonuclear Monarchy: Choosing Between Democracy and Doom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016).
- 3 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958).
- 4 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of Mind*, vol. I *Thinking*, vol. II *Willing*, ed. Mary McCarthy (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977). In this posthumously published incomplete work, Arendt famously asks: "What are we 'doing' when we do nothing but think?" (I, 8). The third volume was to have treated *Judging*.
- 5 Roger Berkowitz and Ian Storey, eds., *Artifacts of Thinking: Reading Hannah Arendt's Denktagebuch* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).
- 6 Marco Frascari, "De Beata Architectura: Places for Thinking" in *The Cultural Role of Architecture: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives*, eds. Paul Emmons, Jane Lomholt and John Hendrix (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 83-92.
- 7 Lisa Landrum, "Before Architecture: *Archai*, Architects and Architectonics in Plato and Aristotle," *Montreal Architectural Review*, vol. 2 (2015): 5-25.
- 8 Arendt, *Life of Mind*, vol. I, 185.
- 9 Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Early Debates in Modern Architectural Education: Between Instrumentality and Historical Phronesis" in *Phenomenologies of the City: Studies in the History and Philosophy of Architecture*, ed. Henriette Steiner and Maximilian Sternberg (Abingdon/New York: Ashgate/Routledge, 2015), 167-179.
- 10 Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1998), 9.

## About the Author

Lisa Landrum is Associate Professor and Associate Dean Research in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada. She is a registered architect in New York State and Manitoba. She holds a Bachelor of Architecture from Carleton University, and a post-professional Master of Architecture and Ph.D. in the History and Theory of Architecture from McGill University. Her research on dramatic agencies of architecture and architectural theory has been published in a number of journals and edited books, including *Architecture as a Performing Art* (2013), *Architecture and Justice* (2013), *Architecture's Appeal* (2015), *Economy and Architecture* (2015), *Chora 7* (2016), *Confabulations: Storytelling in Architecture* (2017), and *Reading Architecture, Literary Imagination and Architectural Experience* (2018).