

# Representational Acts

STEPHEN A. WISCHER, North Dakota State University

**The Architectural Lessons of Anselm Kiefer's *La Ribaute*: The Material of History and the Space of Dramatic Representation**

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HANNAH HOPEWELL, Auckland University of Technology

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ERIKA PETRIC, Technical University of Graz

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## The Architectural Lessons of Anselm Kiefer's *La Ribaute*: The Material of History and the Space of Dramatic Representation

STEPHEN A. WISCHER

Associate Professor

North Dakota State University, Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture  
Fargo, North Dakota, USA

stephen.a.wischer@ndsu.edu

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This paper examines how, by understanding “history through the body,” the work of the German artist Anselm Kiefer provides vital lessons for architectural representation, thinking and doing.<sup>1</sup> Through examples of Kiefer’s earliest performances as well as his more recent creation of *La Ribaute*, his former home and studio, we explore how the artist’s work raises significant questions about our assumptions regarding architectural form and space, about the experience of time, and most emphatically, about our relationship to history and its value to present thinking.

Framed in relation to the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur we explore the way Kiefer’s creations incite a transformation of various themes that are not born from a conceptual idea applied to the work but which are rather discovered in the “hard labour” of its creation, through the *performance* of an initial image or idea. Whether digging labyrinthine tunnels into the earth, raising-up towers or storing, re-integrating and moving materials back-and-forth across painting, sculpture and architecture, Kiefer’s work *moves* possible meanings from one state to another.

In the current context of architectural creation more-and-more obsessed with applications of information that leave behind their frame of reference, Kiefer’s work involves us in the full context of cultural reality by preserving a space of translation in both the making and reading of the work. Posing a challenge to the modern assumption regarding space—as consisting of homogenous dimensions—or the modern understanding of time—as progressive and linear, Kiefer’s work serves as a crucial counter-position to historically shallow and formalist modern work by transmitting, reinterpreting and transforming traditions in a living way.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Rosenthal and James A. Speyer, *Anselm Kiefer* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 10.

## Clouds of Action: Rethinking Urban Contexts as Differential and Participatory Fields

HANNAH HOPEWELL

PhD Candidate

Auckland University of Technology, School of Art and Design  
Auckland, New Zealand

[hannah.hopewell@aut.ac.nz](mailto:hannah.hopewell@aut.ac.nz)

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This paper asks can acts of presence and acts of representation be brought closer together in critical practices of urban design to reveal latent elements of space and place? Being present denotes reflexive bodily awareness within a situated experience, whilst representation forms projections of this experience via either image or word. Presence by definition slips from representations comprehensive capture, leaving the vector of experience potentially incomplete. What happens in this process of pre-cognitive 'edit', where does 'what is left behind' go? These questions draw attention to the prospective role of affect in design action where experience is translated to image, sensorial to cognitive, and ultimately individual knowings to entanglements within collective consciousness of space and place.

Affect as a form of thinking, elevates and authorizes sense as a mode of knowledge production. Capacities of affect are methodologically implicated within design analysis process and cloud firm distinctions between the designing body and the variant immaterial and material bodies of the urban context under scrutiny. Through affective force I suggest the unrecognized, the unthought, and the unformed begin to find their way beyond acknowledged spatial or social structures where their agent capacities often go unseen.

To experiment with this situation I reframe the operative concept *urban context* as differential and participatory fields of habits where the designer's acts, (or non-acts) of analysis form vital experiential relationships. This approach co-opts polyvalent logics to include intensive environments so a designers cognitive and sensorial perceptions can co-exist analogously. Through the work of eminent philosophers and theorists, including Jane Bennett, William E. Connolly, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Serres, Peter Sloterdijk and Nigel Thrift, two theoretical threads underpin this enquiry: firstly, developments in the thinking of environments from *process philosophy* and *new materialism*; and, secondly, in theories of affect that, whilst increasingly prevalent, have not yet found productive footing in the field of urban design practice. To demonstrate beyond the theoretical I offer this short paper around the fieldwork of an urban waterfront situation in the Pacific City of Auckland.

## Photography as a Phenomenological Tool in Architectural Representation

ERIKA PETRIC  
PhD Candidate  
Technical University of Graz  
Graz, Austria

e.petric@student.tugraz.at

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Being widely recognized as the most interesting topic in photography, along with the fact that development and introduction of digital technology is forcing the change of paradigm in theoretical approach, architecture photography is becoming one of the crucial topics in architecture discourse today.

Leaving behind two distinct historical approaches to early architecture photography as being either documentation or pictorial impression, we propose the establishment of research based on understanding the personal creative enquiry of the photographer him(her)self. Shifting the attention on the photographer as *acteur* in the process of reception and representation – exemplified by photographic work of Italian Photographer Paolo Rosselli – we are introducing reading and qualification of this process in terms of Husserl's Phenomenology. The base premise of questioning the biased interpretative process of perception, expressed in Husserl's theory as the concept of phenomenological reduction, has its technological equivalent not only in the mechanical recording function of the camera, but equally in the possibilities of digital post production. As the utilization of new technologies provides new strategies, the emphasizing, or bringing to the surface of all visual layers recorded in a digital image can be seen as a method of constructing the image as a phenomenological evidence, which can be re-experienced. The structure of the image becomes the grammar of its narrative, changing and enlarging the scope of what can be consciously detected and interpreted out of any given scenery. Thus, the representational act can be seen as an intentional architectural tool that significantly transcends the goal of positive publicity for the architect.

Research based on image- and quantitative content analysis of the interviews with Paolo Rosselli is showing that photography, as a fragmentary repository of the world and its experience, if constructed by an artist, has the potential to transmit experience of space and become indeed architectural.