

Notes on Architectural Persons

AUTHOR

Timothy Hyde

The contours of architectural history are anything but smooth when shaped—as they so frequently are—by the sharp lines of personality. Buildings are the prominent features, most often, but they are rarely unaccompanied by persons. Think of John Soane, memorialized in his house-museum. Or imagine Ruskin in Venice, his perambulations halted for the painstaking recording of a palazzo in watercolor or daguerreotype. And what are the buildings of Great Britain without the inexhaustible Nicolas Pevsner staring up at them? When considering the sweep of twentieth-century architecture perhaps the scenes that come to mind include the pseudonymous Le Corbusier climbing toward the Acropolis, or chatting up Josephine Baker, or swimming at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. Perhaps Philip Johnson winding his way into the sheltered office at Taliesin West for an audience with Frank Lloyd Wright.

As architectural history has pursued its concern with persons, three categories have roughly sufficed to describe them: architects, patrons, and inhabitants. These categories in their various synonymic designations persist as the figures of explication for intention and through intention, causality. cursory scrutiny of any one of them has of course opened upon a broader and more complex field of instigations, events, and meanings, and such complexities may be acknowledged as the crucial facts of evidence or interpretation. Yet it is not always the case that interpretation frees itself from the constraints of the category from which it was originally illuminated. This binding of persons and historical explanation does not misdirect interpretations, necessarily, but it does endow them with a very particular temporality, a temporality that will be designated here as presentness.

How do the many persons who populate the narratives of architectural history as embodiments affect the temporalities ascribed to buildings and projects?

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Presentness refers to a temporal sense of discrete moments of time existing as elements that are at once irreducible (they cannot be dissolved into other circumstances or existences) and not expansible (they are bounded and do not increase to subsume a wider range of events). This temporal sense forges a narrative order, commonly chronological, that accompanies the appearance of persons, so that it is most clearly exemplified by the expression of the significance of a person being ‘there’—being literally present—thus confounding a spatial attribute with a temporal one. Emphatic descriptions of the moment of inspiration (of the architect) or the moment of arrival (of the inhabitant) are only the most obvious and familiar demonstrations rehearsed in architectural histories. In narratives that emphasize a succession of present moments, a sequence of authorial decisions, for example, or a sequence of subjective experiences, the encounter of architecture and person still occurs in the present tense, repeatedly synchronizing intention and consequence, or feeling and effect.

Such an emphasis on presentness is not an error, but it may well be a liability, because among its consequences is the obscuring of forms of multiplicity or collectivity in which the presumption of a unified time would be misleading.

Presentness is, moreover, a highly disconcerting emphasis in architectural history, a discipline that possesses a keen sense of duration. The existence of architecture in time, across long spans of time, is in some sense the founding realization of the discipline of architectural history. But this knowledge of duration, if understood only as a continuity of time or as the inseparability of one moment in time from prior and subsequent ones, translates into a reductive insight. A focus may be placed upon an architectural object, for example, in which case duration may be recognized in the programmatic transformations of the structure, or, and most commonly, the material decay of the structure. Or, if the focus is placed upon the architect, duration appears quite directly as the lifespan of that architect. But with this lifespan readily dissoluble into a series of present moments the presentness that circumscribes historical accountings is not far away.

The disciplinary knowledge of duration is more substantial, consisting also of duration as the layering of temporal periods or events. Duration in this sense is the persistence of one moment into the presence of another moment in time, but without the elision or prioritization of one in favor of the other.¹ There have been architectural histories that imply such temporalities; in Rudofsky’s “architecture without architects,” for example, or what Giedion called “anonymous history,” the sharp definitions of personality are purportedly

removed, to reveal what must presumably be regarded as an architectural unconscious at work in the course of human development.² Such conceptions veer drastically away from the concerns of motive or purpose, reducing such concerns to human or technological essence. On the one hand, then, are narratives that assert the decisive authority of intention, and on the other, those that propose the relentless opacity of instinct. The problem of explanation—and it is indeed the problem for the discipline of architectural history—very often appears intractably bound to these two extents of irreducible personality and biological humanity.

The disciplinary difficulty, then, is that the appearance of persons in the narratives of architectural history often diminishes the examination of duration and exaggerates the exploration of presentness. What is needed is a means whereby interpretation may preserve duration, even in the depiction of personhood. Between the two extents of actual individuals and generic humanity, many other modes of embodiment exist, instrumental and readily discoverable in the workings of a variety of disciplines. Among these, architectural history might find direction in another discipline with an equally fundamental recognition of duration: the law. And more specifically, in the manifestations of legal subjectivities, embodiments or legal persons, which attain qualities of duration while retaining models of intention, motive, and desire. The notes that follow examine two cases, not to offer a definite evidentiary interpretation of their details, but in order to place a focus on modalities of embodiment itself, and to propose how an altered focus on the properties and means of embodiment might adjust the contours of architectural history by introducing differentiated temporalities alongside and within examinations of architectural persons.

Signatures

The person of the architect was a central concern in the lengthy affair known as the Mansion House Square project in London. Now simply called Number One Poultry, (after the address of the building finally realized in 1997 to a design by James Stirling) this project and its intricate history commenced decades earlier. In 1958, the property developer Peter Palumbo (now Baron Palumbo of Walbrook) set out to purchase plots of land in the City of London in the blocks near Mansion House and the Royal Exchange.³ Four years later, with the intention of acquiring enough adjacent lots to assemble a sufficiently large parcel, he commissioned from

Mies van der Rohe the design of an office tower and an open plaza. Mies, who had never built in London, accepted readily (agreeing to collaborate with the English planner William Holford in order to include a colleague more familiar with local planning issues and building codes), and visited the site in 1964. Mies and his Chicago office then prepared a scheme for the tower and the plaza to be presented to the City of London planning commission.

Palumbo readied his application for the planning commission in 1968, seeking permission for the extensive demolition required by the project, and approval for the proposed tower. The city authorities viewed the proposal favorably, however because Palumbo owned only some of the properties that were to be demolished, permission was withheld with an instruction that he must first attain sufficient control over the relevant properties to ensure that the project would go ahead. Palumbo followed this instruction over the next fourteen years, buying up the smaller properties with a view to the eventual realization of his office tower. With some additional refinements made to the design in Mies' office, a set of working drawings was developed and prepared for presentation in 1982, when Palumbo returned to the planning commission with almost all of the required property under his control.

By this time, more than twenty years after Palumbo had initiated the project, a number of relevant circumstances had changed. A much stronger trend of preservation had emerged in Great Britain, in reaction to the rapidity of reconstruction after the war, so that the demolition of older buildings, even those of minor distinction, was approached with more hesitation than previously. Conservation areas had been defined within the City, one of which included blocks in the proposed development, and some of the existing buildings marked for demolition had been listed. More generally, a significant reevaluation of architectural style and aesthetic movements had, in Britain as elsewhere, catalyzed a concentrated hostility toward modernist architecture paralleled by an increased approval of English Victorian architecture, and of traditional and classical architecture more broadly. In consequence of these changes, the architecture of Mies van der Rohe would no longer be presumptively contemporary, and nor would the Victorian commercial buildings on the existing site be so promptly devalued.

Palumbo's renewed application faced strong criticism, and was turned down by the planning commission. Palumbo chose to appeal this decision, prompting a review of the case

by an appointed inspector with authority to gather information and opinions and then to convey a recommendation to the Secretary of State for the Environment. To carry out this process, and aware of the now considerable attention focused upon the proposal by media and by professional groups, Inspector Stephen Marks convened a public inquiry held over ten weeks in 1984. This inquiry, while not actually a legal proceeding, was nevertheless organized as one, with witnesses called to testify in favor or in opposition to the appeal and guided by legal representatives through testimony and cross examination. Inspector Marks, an architect appointed to the role, performed not unlike a judge in directing the events of the inquiry.

In this forum, the differentiations of architectural and legal persons came distinctly into view. For of all of the changed circumstances since 1968, perhaps the most consequential was that Mies had died in 1969. Considered within the referential frame of the architect's life, this significant moment transferred the design from the catalogue of work by a living architect to the list of unfinished works. Nevertheless, the design was still bound in its attachment to the person of Mies van der Rohe, and in 1984, this attachment assumed a considerable importance in light of the markedly diminished regard for the proposed development on the part of planning authorities. In order to make their case, Palumbo and his supporters—the historians John Summerson and Kerry Downes among them—placed the person of Mies van der Rohe at the center of their argument, pointing to his stature as one of the most prominent architects of the century and the widespread valuation of his realized works as evidence of the importance and the value of the prospective tower.⁴ They argued, in essence, that the City had an opportunity to build a building by Mies van der Rohe, for the acceptable cost of losing a collection of Grade II listed buildings by lesser-known architects.

While proponents of the scheme affirmed its architectural value by pointing to its author, his architectural accomplishments, and his reputation as proof of their assertions, opponents of the scheme sought to undermine precisely this argument by declaring that in fact the design could not with certainty be designated as a Mies van der Rohe building, due to the architect's death and the absence of indisputable evidence of his hand in authoring the design. Where were the sketches or original drawings, asked John Harris, historian and founder of SAVE Britain's Heritage?⁵ The building was a mere derivative of Mies' iconic Seagram

building said Philip Johnson in a letter submitted to the inquiry. The historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock also indicated to the inquiry that Mies' involvement could only have been preliminary (although in a minor controversy during the inquiry, supporters attempted to induce him to recant). In short, the opponents argued that the building was not definitely bound to the person of Mies, in biographical terms, and it therefore did not possess, in aesthetic terms, the superior value attributed by its advocates. Forced to rebut this line of argument, Palumbo's legal representative brought to the inquiry Peter Carter, Mies' former employee and collaborator. Carter, the job architect for the design who had continued this and other projects in the firm upon Mies' death, assured the inquiry that the building had been designed with the full involvement of the famous architect, whose typical working method left little in the way of sketches and original drawings. Mies had, Carter testified, known and approved of the revisions pending following the first application, and any subsequent changes were minor and had no effect upon the appearance of the design.

This was not the only point of evidentiary contention during the Mansion House Square inquiry, but it is the most salient for the consideration of architectural persons. Duration, if understood in its direct terms as the twenty-five year span from the project's inception to the inquiry, imposed a difficulty of interpretation, manifest quite literally in the death of the author. Duration and the events it contained produced an undecidability within the inquiry, which consequently illuminates a difficulty within subsequent historical interpretation. The testimony presented to Inspector Marks asserts equally that the design is by Mies and that it is not by Mies, that it is part of Mies' biography and that it is not part of Mies' biography. These opposing claims share, crucially, a framework that adopts the actual person as the relevant architectural person. But their very opposition, as it took shape through the testimonies before the inquiry, enabled the emergence of a slightly different framework that would embrace the difficulties of duration somewhat differently. In this framework, the architectural person under scrutiny is not the living (or deceased) Mies van der Rohe, but the signature "Mies van der Rohe."

The architectural drawing has long been regarded as an extension of the architect's mind, functioning as an expressive object whose attribution enabled the recognition of the architect to occur at a remove from a physical building or an actual body. Such distancing mechanisms within design (a list might include the separation of design from construction, or the collaborative nature of architecture

firms) are familiar facts even though they are quite often veiled by personality. And in 1984, the drawing had seemingly lost none of its standing to invoke the recognition of agency. Carter, however, brought to the inquiry an exacting description of the same distancing figured not by the architectural drawing, but by discussion, review, approval, and other habits and conventions of architectural practice.⁶ And his version, depending as it did upon the figural representation of a consciousness, occupied the same boundary between biography and ephemerality as would the original drawing in the master's hand. In other words, both versions of the story (the Mies and the not-Mies) prompted a translation of the person into the personification of signature.

The cartoonist Louis Hellman had cleverly satirized the Corporation's refusal of the scheme in 1982, with a mocking account in which Christopher Wren and his 1666 plan for the rebuilding of London stood in for Mies van der Rohe and his Mansion House Square proposal. (The then Secretary of State, Michael Heseltine is made into King Charles II, and Peter Palumbo is the still alliterative Christopher Columbo.) By associating Wren and Mies in this way, Hellman drew attention not simply to the stature of the latter (and the conservatism of his opponents) but also indirectly registers the suggestive presence of signature. For, the parody here depends upon transposition—Mies' head wearing Wren's wig—which sets aside the determinations of biography for the more flexible characteristics of signature. Though signature now inevitably invokes starchitects and their signature buildings, the architect as brand is only one narrow manifestation of signature, which might be understood more usefully as an embodiment, or the translation of personhood into a medium other than the actual person.

Understood in this way—as the translation of personhood into a medium other than the actual person—signature forges a particular contract with history, one that acknowledges a relation between a work and its creator at a specific moment, but that also extends that acknowledgment indefinitely forward into the future even in the absence of an accompanying body. When understood as a person and addressed through the technique of biography, the architect appears with an emphatic presentness; with the reenactment in the present of the prior decisive moment unqualified and unchanged. This presentness is the repetition of an already determined intention that, although it occurred originally in the past, is being placed before its audience as unchanged fact. In this sense, personhood forges an isolation from context, with the completed fact reasserted

without reciprocation to its newer historical moment. When understood as signature, the architect may be addressed differently through a technique of inquiry that acknowledges the distancing of embodiment and the distancing of time, of duration. Signature moves forward in time, always newly aware of its changing context.

The literary theorist Seán Burke, in an essay on the “Ethics of Signature,” described this effect as a “structure of resummons whereby the author may be recalled to his or her text.” The signature, he continued, is addressed to the future; it “offers itself to any tribunal which may be subsequently established upon the basis of the signatory’s text in relation to as yet unrealized historical circumstances. The signature accedes to this tribunal.”⁷ Burke elaborated this potential for resummons as an ethical function, whereby, for example, an author could be called to account for his words at some later date. He noted also that this function might serve to protect an author from the interpretation of a work, or indeed, to protect a work from the interpretation of its author.⁸

In proposing that signature sets the conditions for a resummoning by a future tribunal, Burke added that the “shape, agendas, and composition [of this tribunal] will necessarily be unknown at the time of signing but [the tribunal’s] distinctive form will in some sense be predicated upon the manner of signature and the relation of the signatory to what has been signed.”⁹ The Mansion House Square inquiry was in quite literal terms just such a tribunal, resummoning the signature, and as Burke describes, although the form of the tribunal was unknown at the moment the signature was produced, the signature nevertheless is fully incorporated into the tribunal’s structure of thought. In other words, where the tribunal is simply forestalled through the biographical address of a person—because Mies was dead, this address could achieve no more than repetition—it is freed by the inquisitional address of signature, able to examine and resolve the relation of architect, building, and present context.

The tribunal is not thereby arriving at a conclusion as to whether or not Mies designed the Mansion House Square scheme; rather, it is producing an embodiment that enables it to evaluate the scheme in both its prior and its present context, without implicitly privileging one over the other. The testimony heard by the inquiry did not establish points of certainty; to the contrary, that testimony produced an area of uncertainty, in which signature was not a mere personification, but an embodiment of a process of

architectural practice. Not a personification of Mies, that is, but an embodiment of the acts and operations of Mies' office and its client. It would be more correct to say that the signature stands in for what is actually a complex anonymity, with anonymity understood here not only in its colloquial sense of an unknown authorship but in a theoretical sense as an uncoupling of the consequences of authorial presence from individuated acts of authoring.

There is therefore an opportunity in the circumstances of the case of Mansion House Square for architectural history to consider the consequences for a signature's contract with history when that signature reads "Anonymous," a signature fully within history yet in a particular way unrecognized by history. Michel Foucault in his essay "What is an author?," noted that with the modern notion of the author (or what he characterized as the "author-function"), the relation between author and text (or here between architect and architecture) was fixed by signature so that the circulation of illicit or transgressive discourses could be disciplined, contained, or curtailed.¹⁰ An author's signature was an acceptance of liability for the undersigned contents. And so, in order to evade just that discipline, that curtailment, the signature Anonymous appeared in its modern form.

Anonymity rewrites the contract with history, loosening—though not severing—the conjunction of work and persona so that any future tribunal can no longer resummon the author in the same way or to the same standard of presence. When the signature reads "Anonymous," no specific identity can be entered under judgment. No determined past is announced, and therefore no lineage can be established through the persona and out toward the work. A past exists nevertheless, manifest in the existence of the work, in its embodiment of decisions made and situational potentials realized. This past however cannot be described by the tribunal; it must instead be posited, put forward as a claim, a claim which burdens judgment.

As a simultaneous assertion and withdrawal of authorship, anonymity voids (but does not erase or extinguish) signature by its refusal to articulate motives while still asserting the deliberateness of motivation. With the signature Anonymous, the motivation that inevitably accompanies signature initiates a more contingent state, in which motives are assigned provisional attributes rather than being seen to possess definitive personal ones. The anonymous signature would then predicate a different shape and agenda of inquisition of an architectural practice by a future tribunal—whether of historians or lawyers—with the particular

relation of signatory to what has been signed a relation premised upon a determinate void, a distance, or a displacement.

In effect, motive now attaches not to a person, but to the function of a person, in a sense analogous to the mathematical definition of function as a transformation applied to a given circumstance. Motive, thus displaced, is in a literal sense depersonalized. It does not however become abstract or non-human. Rather the depersonalized condition effected by the Anonymous signature consists of a transfer between attributes of personality and personhood and attributes of institution, system, or technique. Although this signature places such attributes into an embodied form, that form remains inaccessible to biographical interrogation. By preventing the binding together of an act of design and the intention or decision of a person, the anonymous signature forestalls the presentness, the emphatic isolation of temporal moments that would result from the biographical perspective. Instead, the anonymous signature solicits the projection of the tribunal's own motives and intentions and desires. Embracing duration, this different contract with history executed by Anonymous might thus construe in advance—at the moment of signing—a very different tribunal, a tribunal that will judge functions rather than decisions.

The Man in the Clapham Omnibus

When examining an architectural event by considering the person of the inhabitant rather than the person of the architect, the historian confronts different and difficult structures of embodiment. How to reconstruct the experience of the inhabitant, for example, or in the case of a project or discarded alternative, how to imagine the hypothetical experience of the inhabitant? The many synonymic designations of the inhabitant, from the “subject” to the “user,” signal the problematic range of postures: biological beings (such as those invoked the by essentialism of bio-mimetic or neuro-aesthetic theories of architecture), the fictive persons (of post-structuralism, for example), the totalizing collectives (of social theory) and, of course, the simply human (as described by realists, among others). Even in the case of an individualized home, the difficulty of assembling the structure of expectations, attitudes, and responses that shaped its reception would be immediately evident; any urban architecture immersed in the social,

economic and political flows of its situation possesses an intimidatingly diffuse audience.

Another case, again from London, will help illustrate this difficulty. The recent announcement of a proposed renovation of the Southbank Centre in London was noteworthy not least for perpetuating what has already been a decades-long sequence of efforts to “fix” the deficiencies of this architectural complex.¹¹ No sooner had the first phase of what was then called the South Bank Arts Centre in London opened in 1967 than a *Daily Mail* survey nominated it as “Britain’s Ugliest Building.”¹² That epithet has since attached to the complex with remarkable consistency, supplemented by a supporting cast of adjectives like dank, surly, and bleak. Even advocates tended to offer quite temperate praise; Peter Moro, for example, predicted that over time the design might “assert itself and make people learn to like what at first was unfamiliar and hateful.”¹³ It would seem however that many have not been made to learn, judging by the frequent emergence of proposals to alter the architecture in significant ways. Duration here confronts the architectural historian once again, manifest not in changes made to the building, but in changes proposed, and also in the consistency of affective response to the complex. But though the dislike of the past fifty years has been consistent, it surely has not been constant, in the sense of being similarly motivated and expressed. How then is the inhabitant of this architecture to be conceived, without substituting isolated individual moments of experience for the encompassing duration of affect?

The South Bank Arts Centre stands alongside the River Thames next to the Royal Festival Hall, the centerpiece of the 1951 Festival of Britain. Where that building adopted the linear forms and referential conceits more typical of prewar modernism, the architects of the South Bank Arts Centre assumed the emerging attitudes of the New Brutalism. Inside clustering, irregular forms that disregard compositional geometries and that ignore existing configurations implied by the site, three volumes contain the programmatic spaces; two concert halls, the Queen Elizabeth Hall facing the river with the Purcell Room behind, and one art gallery, the Hayward Gallery at the back of the site. Above street level, a deck loosely wraps the concert halls and gallery; a pedestrian who descends onto the deck from Waterloo Bridge, or climbs up to it from below can circumnavigate along a rambling route up and down stairs and along constantly widening or narrowing paths. Much of the lower level is given over to car and service access and to a large undercroft that opens toward the river. One can survey

the river and surrounding city while moving toward, away from, or past the entrances along the deck. All of the surfaces—the deck, the walls, the railings, the steps—have the unvarying grayness of a material palette limited to precast aggregate panels and exposed cast concrete.

This complex was the work of the Department of Architecture and Civic Design of the Greater London Council, formerly the London County Council (LCC). In 1953, the Town Planning Division of the LCC formalized an outline for the future development of the South Bank site all around the existing Royal Festival Hall, with a plan that included a conference center placed northeast of the Hall in a tapered block. The taper was the formal indication of a radial arrangement that, hinged at the rear of the site, would retroactively fix the Festival Hall within a new geometric plan. Over the next several years, the overall scheme was revised largely in response to programmatic changes, including the replacement of the conference center with a concert hall and an art gallery. In 1961, the Architects' Department of the LCC published its new, detailed proposal for the complex, which had now assumed the very different appearance.

Writing the entry on the South Bank Arts Centre for his authoritative *Buildings of England* series, Pevsner conceded that its walkways produced “a thrilling experience, if the weather is fine and you are at leisure. But,” he objected, “what if it rains, what if you are late, what if you find steps a strain?” The nearest comparison to the walkways’ “bleak effect [would be] Piranesi’s *Carceri*.”¹⁴ Pevsner’s critique reveals the discomfiting sense of un-empathetic architecture. The encounter between person and building is all roughness: the coarse surfaces that are both tactile and injurious; the rambling terraces that solicit chance encounters but foil planned itineraries; the distortions of scale and orientation that defy commensuration; and the unsettling disarticulation of the architecture into parts and fragments. What can be summarily defined as the ugliness of the architecture is in the relation between the architecture and the person who encounters it. As a disproportionality between architecture and a person, ugliness compels disgust and displeasure, as rendered in all of its acts and metaphors of repulsion, and this self-preserving repulsion sharply and immediately distances a person from the ugly object. The bleakness Pevsner feels, the stained surfaces he sees, and the difficulty sensed in navigating the decks accumulate in displeasure at the building’s insufficient accommodation of its human users.

Here ugliness has a subtle key, one that prompts an affect akin to irritation. Where the urgency of disgust compels an unmistakably urgent withdrawal, the nagging affect of irritation emerges from a relentless proximity. The ugliness of this architecture irritates because of proximity, because it produces the experience of a mistaken conflation of architecture and person. Affects, as the relation between circumstance and consciousness detached from individual persons, diffuse such an experience into a separate, encompassing mood. Because they do not narrate the experience of a singular, coherent subject, affects differ from emotions. An “ugly feeling” such as anxiety emerges not from explicit causation, but from the perpetuation of the layered stimuli of a given situation, and is induced by the lingering proximity of its source; condensing and confusing the interlaced causes and elements of a given situation, rather than apportioning them clearly as would the sharp emotion of anger.¹⁵ The ugly feeling provoked by the South Bank Arts Centre thus summarizes several different instances of a felt antipathy into a generalized but vivid mood: irritation. And the passive manner of irritation, or any ugly feeling, can only be overcome by a complete transformation of the situation from which that feeling emerges. In the absence of that transformation, irritation persists as a simultaneous pulling-together and pushing-apart of person and architecture.

This persistent irritation enables ugly architecture to participate dynamically in the mutable experiential configurations of the city. The diffuseness of the affect and its concomitant lack of narrative resolution are a sharp contrast to the didactic performance of buildings that offer legibility through form or style, and for that reason remain viable during the inevitable evolution of the city. This persistence, rather than the physical preservation or transformation of the building, is the dimension of duration that a historical inquiry into the South Bank Arts Centre would seek to examine. But since this persistence has been identified as experience of the building, who is the person that an inquiry may question? The person who experiences irritation at the South Bank Arts Centre is not the solitary individual, not Pevsner as he skirts puddles to navigate labyrinthine passages. Nor, in contrast to the Festival of Britain, is the subject of this architecture was not, as in the Festival of Britain, a national subject or, not the citizenry. This architecture addressed instead a metropolitan body politic, the body politic that the London County Council not only represented but in fact constituted, since that body

politic had no prior historical, social, or geographic source of consolidation.

Modern London emerged not from a core but from the amalgamation of discrete and separately governed towns, and by establishing a structure of governance encompassing the diverse fragments of the metropolis the LCC summoned up a corresponding metropolitan body politic. The metropolitan body politic is at once precise—the civic population of London—and entirely diffuse—the aggregation of specific differentiated individuals. However, this discrepancy does not necessarily mean that that audience of this ugly architecture is unknowable. The social body that inhabits a city leaves records and traces. What is necessary then is to examine the structures of that social body in a manner that reveals embodiments, which reveal in turn patterns of expectation, attitudes of interest and disregard, and responses both positive and negative. Contemporary accounts are one source, with newspapers and essays, radio broadcasts and films, one possible consolidated measure of the disparate emotions and reasonings of the city's inhabitants. But other useful embodiments exist as well.

One such personification of the metropolitan body politic is the famous “man on the Clapham omnibus.” Not a representation of the common man but rather a hypothetical reasonable person, the man on the omnibus is a surrogate for a standard of judgment in English common law.¹⁶ This embodied figure is called upon to signal norms of behavior within the metropolis' environment of chance. The reasonable man is a typicality, used in law to summon up normalizing conventions of behavior. He is not equivalent to the common man, or the man in the street, or the everyman, because his purpose is not to establish a generic normalcy of opinion, but rather an anticipated standard of behavior or intention. The man in the omnibus entered into common law in the context of cases regarding that most modern of concerns, liability. In considering whether liability should be assigned in cases where some harm had accidentally occurred, judges considered whether the accident in question might reasonably have been anticipated. What, the law frequently asks, would the man in the omnibus reasonably have expected to happen? This anticipation was embodied in the person of the reasonable man, a man of normal but not exceptional powers of foresight, a man with conventional intentions and adequate but again not exceptional capacity for making decisions.

As its more elaborate phrasing suggests, the man in the back of the Clapham omnibus was quite specifically a

metropolitan citizen, an individual incarnation of the metropolitan body politic. It is this aspect of the reasonable man that suggests the possibility that the man in the omnibus is not only a legal concern but an embodiment of significance to architecture as well. Consider an architecture that addresses a metropolitan body politic, such as the South Bank Arts Centre. This architecture is encountered by actual individuals, to be sure, but its historical accounting is more fully rendered in relation to the man in the omnibus.

At the South Bank Arts Centre, it is the man on the omnibus who experiences irritation as the collective experience of the metropolitan body politic, because the customary legal formulation that the man on the omnibus “would have anticipated that...” meets with the frustrating deferrals of an ugly architecture indeterminate in form and appearance. The social function of the man on the omnibus is not to provide summary *judgment*, but to define a measurement of *expectation*. And the temporal orientation that he brings is not in-the-present-ness but in-the-future, or more precisely a future anteriority; a drawing of the future expectation into the decisive context of the present. His irritation does not cast an aesthetic judgment, but proposes expectation, the certainties of the future anterior, and it is these that are disconcerted by the ugliness of the South Bank Arts Centre. Only through such particularities of an embodiment like the reasonable man can the affect of the architecture be defined and examined as a persistence in the city.

The Temporality of Architectural Persons

The future anteriority introduced by the reasonable man mirrors the structure of temporality invoked by the signature, which anticipates the resummons that will be issued by a future tribunal of judgment. From the point of view of historical assessment, these two anterior positions forge similarly complex temporal durations which can be thought of as folds or layerings of time. Again, duration in this sense is not simply the continuous extension of time, but the persistence of one temporality in adjacency to another. The signature draws the past—the circumstances of signing—into coexistence with the present—where the signature still functions as an instrumental embodiment, such that the present tribunal must form its judgments in engagement with those prior circumstances but not in obedience to them. The reasonable man foregrounds the present against an anticipated future, forestalling any possibility of regarding the present event as singular and complete, and forcing

instead the recognition of the coexistence of that event and a different course of events that would have been the actions of the reasonable man. Both signature and the reasonable man preserve the fuller sense and significance of duration as a layered temporality, which is otherwise diminished by the presentness invoked by the insistent persons of the architect or the inhabitant.

By examining these two embodiments, the signature and the reasonable man, the preceding notes aim to suggest that these and other embodiments have the potential to introduce differentiated temporalities into the assessments of architectural history, even and especially when those assessments deal with architectural persons. Where the emphasis on architectural persons in its conventional appearances (biography, individual genius, intentionality, etc.) pursues verification and therefore a necessarily retrospective retracing of a path to its origin, an understanding of architectural persons as personifications or embodiments diffuses the significance of origination and the immediacy of presentness and might thereby indicate a manner of incorporating duration into modes of architectural explication. To conclude, then, with an assertion and a speculation: the dependence of architectural history upon rendering the intention and experience of actual persons is accompanied by a temporality of present moments, each one bracketed so that even in sequence they produce the narrativity of isolated events. This structure prevents the representation of the temporality of duration, through which present moments or events are understood to be layered, coincident and coextensive with prior and future ones. To perceive and reconstruct the temporality of duration, architectural history might explore not the lives of actual persons, but those of legal persons as well, embodiments that constitute the subjectivities of the city and the formation and reception of its architectures.

✓ Transparent Peer Reviewed

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¹ Though no direct citation is intended, the background of this essay certainly includes modern theorizations of temporality, those of Henri Bergson and George Kubler in particular. ¹

² See Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects: An Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964) and Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to*

Anonymous History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948). [↑](#)

3 The purchase of these initial properties was undertaken by Rudolph Palumbo, Peter Palumbo's father. The project was soon taken up and subsequently pursued by Peter Palumbo. [↑](#)

4 For the proofs of evidence submitted by witnesses to the inquiry, see the papers pertaining to the Mansion House Square inquiry contained in the RIBA Archives. For an analysis of Summerson's testimony in relation to his concerns about preservation see Michela Rosso, "An Open Space at the Constricted Centre of the City: Summerson and the Artificial Inflation of Victorian Values," in *Summerson and Hitchcock: Centenary Essays on Architectural Historiography*, edited by Frank Salmon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 155-169. [↑](#)

5 John Harris, "Was the design by Mies van der Rohe?," *Financial Times* (30 April 1982) [↑](#)

6 Peter Carter, "The design was by Mies van der Rohe," *Financial Times* (5 May 1982) and "Expert Witness: Peter Carter," *Architects' Journal* (22 & 29 August, 1984) 24-25. On the historiographic problem of corporations and corporate practice see John Harwood, "Corporate Abstraction." [↑](#)

7 Seán Burke, "The Ethics of Signature," in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader*, edited by Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995): 289. [↑](#)

8 The well-known instances he references, of Paul de Man and Martin Heidegger and the increasingly detailed accountings of their activities before and during the Second World War, are accountings in both senses of the word; they are inventories of facts and moral assessments. Mies van der Rohe has received a similar scrutiny in this regard. [↑](#)

9 Burke, "Ethics of Signature," 289. [↑](#)

10 See Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader* edited by Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995):141-160. [↑](#)

11 The Southbank Centre announced a shortlist of architects in July 2012, including OMA, Allies and Morrison, and Grimshaw Architects LLP. In October, the Centre announced the selection of Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios as lead architect for the project. [↑](#)

12 Cited in Charles Jencks, "Adhocism on the South Bank." *Architectural Review* (July 1968): 27-30. [↑](#)

13 Peter Moro in "Concert Halls," *Architects' Journal Information Library* (26 April 1967): 1003 [↑](#)

14 Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Public Buildings of the South Bank." In *London 2 South (The Buildings of England)*, edited by Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner. (London: Penguin Books, 1982): 350 [↑](#)

15 See Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) [↑](#)

16 The reasonable man entered into English common law by the middle of the 19th century, and the man on the Clapham omnibus made his appearance in the late decades of that century. [↑](#)