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Untimely Thinking of Alberto Pérez-Gómez

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TIMELY MEDITATIONS

SELECTED ESSAYS ON ARCHITECTURE

VOLUME 1

ALBERTO PÉREZ-GÓMEZ



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Foreword: The Untimely Thinking of
Alberto Pérez-Gómez
by Peter Olshavsky

“All essential philosophical questioning is necessarily
untimely.”

Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Questions of
Metaphysics* (1959)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THINKING TO BE UNTIMELY? If we trust the dictionary, it is something “done at an unsuitable time.”¹ This definition implies that an action or event has missed its mark by being “too late” or “too early,” revealing the term’s association with linear chronology and failure. For Friedrich Nietzsche, to call thinking untimely does not categorize it as failure; for him, the untimely is a standpoint out of step with the dominant attitude of his day. This untimeliness occurs, Martin Heidegger explains, when thinking is “projected” into the future or when it “connects the present with its antecedent.”² The intention of untimely thinking, Gilles Deleuze adds, was “to think the past *against* the present [...] *in favour*, I hope, of a time to come.”³ In these volumes by the architectural historian, theorist, and educator Alberto Pérez-Gómez, essential philosophical questioning shines in the spirit of Nietzsche’s untimeliness.

This selection of twenty-eight texts, gathered together for the first time, is organized into two volumes. The first volume addresses architectural theories and practices, both past and present. Its themes range from examinations of classical architectural terms to the contemporary task of the architect as seen through several key figures. The second volume focuses on architectural philosophy and hermeneutics. It addresses diverse issues, from modern science and globalization to love, performance, and attunement. The content of these two volumes is too complex and rich to paraphrase. Some readers will recognize articles from diverse periodicals and books spanning Pérez-Gómez’s career. While these volumes could never do justice to the full breadth of the author’s published scholarship, incisive thinking, mellifluous

prose, and generosity of spirit, these essays are a perfect way to understand this eminent scholar's position and enter into his larger body of work. These volumes are more than a repository of past work. Their readers will encounter texts that have been revised and updated by the author to more fully engage contemporary architectural questions.

The untimeliness of these texts on architecture, history, and philosophy is a welcome departure from today's incessant demand for the timely. Moreover, the interrelationships between the articles provide further insight into Pérez-Gómez's thought, even for those familiar with his work. These articles engage with central and marginal figures from architecture's past, converse with contemporaries who hold a sympathetic stance, and engage diverse philosophical positions. The essays draw from other fields of inquiry: philosophy, theatre, literature, art, dance, and neuroscience, to name a few. It is through these interdisciplinary conversations and the questions they generate that the works manifest their full power, rendering currently-ignored issues visible by thinking the untimely. Against some of our most assured convictions and protocols, Pérez-Gómez consistently seeks meaningful sites in which to re-negotiate the architect's task of imagining the world otherwise. This is done without affectation or pretense, acknowledging the task's difficulty in our late-modern world. By joining past, present, and future, the texts offer their gift: the hopeful shaping of a time to come. This remarkable collection is a testament to three decades of thinking, whose untimeliness will challenge and reward readers, placing the search for dwelling, belonging and love at the heart of architecture.

A Well-Timed Journey

To more fully understand the context of the scholarship assembled in these volumes, some background on the author is helpful. Alberto Pérez-Gómez attained an undergraduate degree in

architecture and engineering from Instituto Politécnico Nacional in Mexico City. Following graduate work at Cornell University, he enrolled at the University of Essex in England. Working with the influential tutors Dalibor Vesely and Joseph Rykwert in the Department of Art, he was awarded a Master of Arts (1975) and a Ph.D. (1979).

Since then he has taught at a number of schools in Mexico, Canada, Europe and the United States, including Houston, Syracuse, Toronto, the Architectural Association, and Carleton University's School of Architecture, where he was the Director from 1983 to 1986. In January 1987, Pérez-Gómez was appointed Saidye Rosner Bronfman Professor of the History of Architecture at McGill University where he currently directs the post-professional History and Theory program. From March 1990 to June 1993, he founded and was the inaugural Director of the *Institut de recherche en histoire de l'architecture*, co-sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Architecture, the Université de Montréal, and McGill University. Students of Pérez-Gómez now teach at most Canadian architecture programs, and in many North American and European universities.

His first book in English, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (MIT Press, 1983) won the Alice Davis Hitchcock Award in 1984, a prize awarded by the Society of Architectural Historians every two years for the most significant work of scholarship in the field. Pérez-Gómez then penned *Polyphilo or The Dark Forest Revisited* (MIT Press, 1992), an erotic narrative and theory of architecture which retells Francesco Colonna's love story of the famous novel and treatise *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) in late twentieth-century terms. This text has become the source of numerous projects and exhibitions.

In 1994, he inaugurated and co-edited the book series entitled *CHORA: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture* (McGill-Queen's University Press), with Stephen Parcell. This series curates essays exploring questions fundamental to architectural

history, theory and practice. This was followed by a major book co-authored with Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (MIT Press, 1997) that traces the historical developments by which perspective drawing and modern geometries became associated with architectural practice. *Built Upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (MIT Press, 2006) examines points of convergence between ethics and poetics in architectural history and philosophy, and draws important insights for contemporary practice. In his most recent book, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science* (MIT Press, 2016), Pérez-Gómez calls for an architecture that embraces the concept of “attunement” (*stimmung*) to meaningfully and emotively enhance its location and its inhabitants’ capacities.

While understanding the contours of the author’s distinguished career is useful to contextualize the man and his work, the reader of these texts also discovers the ways in which the texts build upon each other. Insights gained in one text provide the ground for further inquiry in another. Provocations expressed in one book are worked through in the next. This encourages deliberation over the full trajectory of work because it empowers the reader to think with the author. In the following essay I want to do precisely this, drawing on Pérez-Gómez’s thinking to engage a particular current issue: the generally unchallenged value of innovation as the result of “design intelligence” that seems to drive practices nowadays.

Disciplinary Shift

Assessing the crisis of meaning that has afflicted architecture since the nineteenth century, Daniel Libeskind observes: “the practice of architecture, like the culture it embodies, is irremediably caught between the paradoxical alternatives of unreason and the ardent faith in a salvation through knowledge.”⁴ By the

late 1970s and 80s, others in the field were less optimistic. “The events of 1945, the full comprehension of the meaning of the Holocaust and atomic destruction,” Peter Eisenman says, “have changed the bases on which life can be lived. For man faced with a choice between imminent or eventual mass death, heroism [...] is untenable [...] and the continuous ‘narrative’ of the progress of Western civilization has been broken.”⁵ In this conflicted though productive period, old certitudes were called into question, including the narratives of universal reason and progress.⁶ In these changes, David Harvey sees “a deep skepticism as to any particular prescriptions as to how the eternal and immutable should be conceived of, represented or expressed.”⁷

An example of this scepticism underlies Charles Jencks’s best-selling book, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977). In synthesizing what he perceives as the emerging aesthetic characteristics of Post-Modern architecture, he notes many of its proponents have relinquished certain ideals. “Like its progenitor,” Jencks says, “the movement is committed to engaging current issues, to changing the present, but unlike the avant-garde it does away with the notion of continual innovation or incessant revolution.”⁸

For a number of architects and designers educated in this milieu, postmodern thinking’s scepticism became increasingly troubling. This subsequent generation sought to recuperate aspects of modernity. With this recuperation, innovation was thrust into the foreground to counter the perceived malaise of the preceding decades. While these efforts might be valuable in specific applications, they can become pathological when innovation is mistaken as an end in itself. Evgeny Morozov has levelled insightful criticism against Silicon Valley’s obsession with this thinking.⁹ Within architecture, the recent shift towards post-critical practices has created its own version of this pathology. This dilemma has consequences for designers that need to be discussed from a position other than complicit reverence.

Pérez-Gómez's work argues for a richer approach. We cannot simply accept reductive forms of practice that blindly promote innovation. We are invited to shift focus from "foreground intelligence," with its emphasis on technical novelty, to a hermeneutic position that draws on a less articulate background to innovate appropriately.

Following the turn of the millennium, the dominant architectural conversation has shifted away from what Anthony Vidler describes as an "Age of Discourse." Critics maintain that this shift mirrored social changes. In "the knowledge society," Michael Speaks argues, architecture is no longer propelled by "grand ideas or theories realized in visionary form."¹⁰ As an early critic of Euro-American discourse, he and others point to the troubles of the critical project, which draws from the work of Karl Marx, Manfredo Tafuri, Jacques Derrida, Theodor Adorno, and various others. Specifically, he criticizes ineffectual approaches that have sought the "resistance" and "negation" of consumer society and metaphysical or political hegemony. "There is in the deepest motivations of architecture," Rem Koolhaas similarly observes, "something that cannot be critical."¹¹ In some respects, Speaks's insights are correct. However, he overreaches by quickly moving past K. Michael Hays' notion of "criticality," to question theory as a whole.¹² "Theory was interesting," he says, "but now we have work."¹³

In his discussion of academically inclined practitioners of the past forty years, such as Eisenman and Diller+Scofidio, Speaks asserts that too much has been said and too little done. In his opinion, a theoretical orientation should be supplanted by the demand that architecture "just works!" to misappropriate a quote by Steve Jobs, the patron saint of innovation. This is supported by the claim that "use-value" is more important than "truth content."¹⁴ He stresses that one must consciously build upon the teachings of our age. Architects should reshape their practices to innovate because global society demands nothing less. While

this view might help some academics and practitioners frame their practices outside of “criticality” and undo the postmodern renouncement of innovation, it is still problematic. Speaks’s new-found pragmatism reeks of rupture talk and all of its attending troubles, but his central error is his devotion to an end that is only a means, neglecting the background for the sake of the foreground, as he frames practices that are “after theory.”

Design Intelligence

“Design intelligence” was coined by Speaks to characterize a diverse group of practices from Asymptote to George Yu and Neil Denari. It appeared, he says, in the 1990s but was “inaugurated” by the events of September 11, 2001. From his perspective, the multitude of knowledge generated during the design process is valuable to the business of architecture, but this knowledge is frequently overlooked in favour of the design. Contrasting these practices with the previously-referenced academic architectural vanguard, he promotes a less object-focused practice.¹⁵ The “dislocative” possibilities of formal novelty, central to the earlier architects, are framed as a retreat from productive relevance. Design intelligence, which he advocates instead, offers an important area for design research without rejecting the reality of current technologies and economy.

Design intelligence, he explains, is manifested through versioning or scenario planning that creates a set of “possible solutions.”¹⁶ These options are sought primarily through “prototyping.” Architects work rapidly with prototypes to physically test design solutions. This discourages the practice of first critically assessing an existing situation and then acting to propose a design response. Instead, action and thinking purportedly happen in unison. Speaks describes this as “thinking-as-doing.” Yet, as we learn through Pérez-Gómez’s writings, this “prototyping” should not be confused with “making” in the sense of Giambattista Vico,

for whom human truth is more knowable because it is made. For Vico, making is anti-Cartesian and not simply technical because one needs to understand the historical background from which practices arise. Speaks's "thinking-as-doing" codifies a single type of studio-based production and brands its feedback and output as intelligence. By promoting instrumental production, Speaks has little concern for an individual craftsman, as his focus is the market viability of this knowledge. In contrast, Vico is after a reflective model for an individual's self-understanding because it provides a "practical wisdom" so a maker is able to act prudently in a host of settings.¹⁷

Speaks has little concern for prudence. Design intelligence, he argues, is limited only by technical exigencies. Practitioners in this vein hold "no philosophic or professional truth, making use of no specialized theory, these practices are open to the influences of "chatter" and are by disposition willing to learn."¹⁸ Pursuing, controlling, and applying intelligence are what matters. The architect sacrifices ideology for the sake of *realpolitik* and solution-focused instrumentality. Adhering to philosophical values can create situations in which one might have to compromise their stance for the sake of commercial action. Instead of taking a stance that might (and often does) create conflicting situations, the architect embraces openness and accepts information without questioning it in order to face rapidly changing "real world" circumstances.

By claiming a monopoly on the "real," Speaks marginalizes criticism while framing design practice as a chiefly neutral process. This monopoly and its attending neutrality conceal the ideological nature of the architect's efforts. If one has "real world" demands, then nothing else matters. But to meet project requirements or even market demands, one has to recognize the complexity of the present situation, what came before, and how to act or "project" by employing design intelligence. The complexity of these actions suggests a point of view and a range of ideologically

motivated evaluations, including a host of pre-judgements that are inherently tacit. Even the seemingly obvious and self-evidently true belief that an architect's intelligence is valuable and can contribute to society stems from a brand of ideology. Ideology, understood through Pérez-Gómez's philosophical orientation, is not construed as false consciousness but as what constitutes one's intentions and actions, emerging from the nature of human thinking and action itself. This constitution, which is both explicit and implicit, allows the architect to make sense of his practices and acts. As Hubert Dreyfus notes, following Heidegger, all human action is rooted in a background setting, much of which is pre-reflective.¹⁹ If we fail to recognize this background, as design intelligence does, can we be sure we are not excluding outlying or exceptional intelligence?

Chatter and Information

Even practices open to what Speaks calls "chatter" run the risk of excluding meaningful information. The term chatter describes contemporary reality as it is intertwined with digital information. Chatter might be "published on the web, found in popular culture, gleaned from other professions and design disciplines."²⁰ The term, according to Speaks, tries to account for the ability to process massive collections of information, analyze it instantly, and draw sometimes-surprising outcomes from the results. The diverse information and range of opinions accessed by our encounters with chatter potentially escalates our contact with alternatives. Information, as Cass Sunstein observes, might open a person to "a range of chance encounters, involving shared experiences with diverse others, and also exposure to materials and topics that they did not seek out in advance."²¹ But exposure is countered by the capacity to filter information based on one's tacit background, one's preferences, or one's use of control methods in a pre-determined or unknowing way. The divided consumption of news in the United States is a case in point.²² When

conducting an architectural analysis of a site, one might be able to diagram the demographics and spatial conditions of an under-privileged neighbourhood, yet still know nothing about its people, their history, the qualities of their architecture, or their stories. In other words, one might unconsciously select information that appears in the foreground of chatter while overlooking the less-quantifiable values that constitute the background. Chatter can offer surprises, but it can equally exclude, obscure or reinforce what one already knows.

From Speaks's various writings one can surmise that information dredged up from this chatter can inform our design analysis, influencing what constitutes the boundaries of inventory, who participates, types of practices, ideas, visualizations, feedback loops, and design innovation. But these acts of information-gathering are not neutral actions. Even simple information extracted from chatter is beholden to a specific orientation. No matter how consciously reflective, one's ideological position is a manifestation of our tendencies towards apophenia in any of the above settings. Our present position includes a range of issues, including our sedimented past, future expectations, and the fact that we "are" our bodies.²³ Ideological biases are part of being human. They inevitably shape the patterns we discover. This is not always an a priori problem. To unpack this dilemma, the two congruent philosophical positions that underscore Pérez-Gómez's writings, phenomenology and hermeneutics, are most helpful. In fact, phenomenology teaches that consciousness is itself intentional. Any practice, whether entirely open ended or scientifically inclined, is beset by prejudices.²⁴ These are not necessarily heinous, but are pre-reflective judgments which open us to experiences. Even a seemingly banal act like collecting information for an architectural inventory of a building site assumes there is something to be found, studied and perhaps represented in communicable forms. These pre-judgments help make sense of one's design practice, but they also shape its orientation.

In the Euro-American context, information drawn from chatter can become a veil of legitimacy by simple association with the unquestionable authority granted to the techno-sciences. Information, though fabricated, can be reified and exaggerated as fact. This further veils its orientation, as was made explicit, for example, by the multitude of American and British “intelligence” after 9/11 that buttressed the call to war. If information is reified, it can be excluded from the possibility of personal and political change. The way in which methods and metrics are deployed shape the evidence retrieved. Referencing CIA intelligence gathering, Speaks shows that information impacts practice, which makes practice more adaptable. Yet practices do not seem to impact information, which implies that information is placed beyond purposeful shaping. It becomes impervious to critique or, worse, seems “natural.” Intervention can be dismissed as interference with information’s natural order. Attempting to manage or reconfigure it becomes a hopeless enterprise. We simply must listen and obey.

Innovation of Design Intelligence

While theoretical discourse can be criticized as intellectual posturing, in certain circles, including the Essex School, it was and still is understood as a way of orienting oneself and one’s work.²⁵ Theory of architecture was interpretative, open to argumentation and never a static construction. Yet, Speaks frames it as a straw man: “Theory is not just irrelevant, but was and continues to be an impediment to the development of a culture of innovation in architecture.”²⁶

Furthermore, he distinguishes between “innovation” and “problem-solving.” Whereas problem-solving reactively addresses an issue, innovation is a proactive approach. Innovative designers do not simply address an existing problem; they “add something unexpected, something not given in the brief

or competition guidelines.”²⁷ An innovation is a “change that creates a new dimension of performance,” which might lead an innovator beyond a present predicament to new products, services, and perhaps new businesses.²⁸ It offers clients “alternative solutions” to their problems. This, Speaks claims, makes design intelligence “inherently innovative.” In other words, innovation is framed as a nearly autonomous pursuit. It is valued outside of virtually any framework, except that it creates monetary value and “new potential for satisfaction.”²⁹ In this way, it papers over its solution-focused core while distracting us with grand claims, modernist refrains of technological progress and speculative promises of capitalist morality.

The way in which innovation happens is not as important as the ideology underlying the goal of innovation and its implications for architects. In fact, the ideological issues associated with innovation raise more questions than answers. Are innovative designers after the greatest social impact when designing projects, or do they aim to meet the client’s demands, see their work published, be awarded funding, or to achieve fame? Does the urgency to innovate attenuate discussion of what constitutes our dilemmas? Does it promote practices that overlook the messy background, which has always beset architecture with uncertainty and contingency?³⁰ Are we simply innovating for the sake of innovation?

Consider “the world’s first eco-city” by William McDonough and Partners in Huangbaiyu, China. McDonough is best known for the 2002 book *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, co-written with Michael Braungart.³¹ This book puts forward a biomimetic account of innovation in which people should act like communal leaf-cutter ants and architecture is at its best when it patterns itself on a cherry tree. McDonough was given the chance to plant numerous works in Huangbaiyu as part of China’s broader effort to urbanize 250 million rural residences. However, the innovative design of the eco-city of 400 houses for

1500 people did not account for the villagers' historically grounded social, cultural, and economic needs, and was therefore inappropriate. From plots of land that are too small to farm or tend livestock, to garages for people lacking the means to afford cars, its failures have been made plain.³² In Huangbaiyu, the architect's innovative solutions created an untenable situation.

A site framed as rife for innovation might be a compromised site appropriated for alternate usages, given the characteristics of its setting and the site's inhabitants. This has been the case with graffiti. Typically, graffiti is seen as an irritant in the smooth operations of many cities due to its associations with urban blight and the cost of its removal. It has been suppressed with surveillance, defensible well-lit spaces, buildings networked to the authorities, and smart anti-graffiti materials. But these have not eliminated graffiti and likely never will. New paint, adhesives, and other forms of marking will be invented or co-opted by creative or marginalized peoples. This raises the questions of why and for whom one innovates. Any unmanageable environmental element might enable positive personal, cultural or economic developments for people in a particular situation. The rise of street art is an example. Not every kid with a spray can merits the esteem given to Banksy or Barry McGee, but this is beside the point. Certain neighbourhoods, such as Belleville, Paris and Shoreditch, London, have embraced graffiti to cultivate a social, cultural, and economic setting, instead of attempting to employ another graffiti-fighting technology to eliminate it.³³ These examples suggest that the desire to solve problems through material innovation can veil alternatives that acknowledge competing interests and the way in which citizens engage these interests in buildings and cities. To recognize when and where innovation should occur, must an architect account for more than design intelligence allows?

Innovation Built Upon Love

Many people assume our crises are so overwhelming that they constrain us yet force us to innovate. While this dire assessment of our global situation is likely true, it does not follow that an innovative practice must be reductive and ungrounded. An ethical praxis can be drawn from the nuanced and historical orientation found in Pérez-Gómez's *Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics*.³⁴ Its emphasis on interpretation, phronetic knowledge, disclosive work, and a questioning process distinguish this orientation from design intelligence, and show Pérez-Gómez's stance is a more appropriate way to foster meaningful innovation today.

Chatter | Interpretive Orientation

"An agent free from all frameworks," Charles Taylor explains, "rather spells for us a person in the grip of an appalling identity crisis."³⁵ Without orientation, one would be set adrift in the space of appearances. An architect would be unable to judge or make informed qualitative evaluations necessary for action. Design intelligence assumes that being set adrift (if it were possible) is positive because it empowers the architect to be informed by chatter. Yet what emerges from this ungrounded view is a stance that is blind to its own position. This blindness, while liberating in some ways, does not guarantee positive behavioural, socio-political or disciplinary change. It might in the end encumber all of these.

"Genuine innovation," as Pérez-Gómez suggests, "requires a wide-ranging hermeneutic of the discipline (a historical understanding of form, program, and intentionality) that provides the architect with an appropriate language to verbalize a position."³⁶ This orientation goes beyond a flippant engagement with chatter. This necessitates, as Pérez-Gómez notes, "a broad cultural foundation to be able to generate an ethical response."³⁷ Its framework grounds personal imagination, which is placed in dialogue with

the intentions of one's contemporaries, of different cultures, and of other historical epochs. Through dialogue involving interpretation, which is always courteous and critical, an architect can establish a better ground from which meaningful agency might spring.

Design Intelligence | Phronetic Knowledge

Architects should offer more than speculative promises and capitalist morality because “consumption and possession” are the “bastard aims of desire.”³⁸ Contrary to this view, Pérez-Gómez argues for practical philosophy: “Only work grounded in ... practical philosophy is capable of contributing effectively to cultural communication, becoming authentic innovation rather than mere fashionable novelty.”³⁹

Practical philosophy is rooted in “phronetic knowledge,” which comes from the Greek word *phronēsis*, meaning practical wisdom of the proper ends of life. Phronetic knowledge is cultivated “through a profound comprehension of history and culture.”⁴⁰ It is embodied and transmitted by specific stories, such as Leon Battista Alberti's *Momus* or Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. This knowledge comes from the bottom up and is based on understanding normative conditions, including the values, habits, and background from which information and practices emerge. Phronetic knowledge is not dogmatic nor does it dictate to practice. Rather, it evokes sound judgment, learns from reflection, and seeks out what is meaningful. This knowledge addresses what is right to do in a given situation, as well as what it means to be good. Instead of foregrounding the instrumental concern of how an architect might innovate, it emphasizes the ethical considerations of why an architect should innovate and what innovation means for action.

Innovation | Meaningful Innovation

Innovation, contrary to Speaks's suggestion, is not an end in itself. To avoid this shortcoming, Antoine Picon argues, "architectural innovation" must "make sense;" therefore it should be attentive to meaning.⁴¹ Recently, meaning has been devalued by pointing to its contingency upon subjective experience. But according to Pérez-Gómez, "meaning" should not be construed as a sign or intellectual construction. It is "more than merely information; it is knowledge of the world and its sensuous materiality understood by the body: a carnal, fully sexual, and therefore opaque experience of truth."⁴² It appears during a work's reception. Meaning is "both the experience of something new, even destabilizing, while also recognizing the experience as familiar."⁴³ True innovation is described similarly to meaning as "a work that appears new and unexpected, yet familiar – a work that lasts."⁴⁴ It is not simply disruptive for economic gain. Thus innovation is genuine when it is meaningful.

Creating meaningful innovation is similar to love. "Love and, by analogy, creation," Pérez-Gómez argues, "have their origins in the deeply felt experience of beauty itself, sometimes destabilizing and never in line with the principles of logic."⁴⁵ It is not tied to any given aesthetic, rationalized practice or code of conduct. No matter how forcefully one attempts to systematize genuine innovation for the sake of professional interests, it will not fit comfortably within normative design models, methods, or production. This should not be lamented but celebrated.

When meaningful innovation in architecture appears in the space of lived experience, it speaks to one's most profound sense of existence. One may think of the work of Antoni Gaudí's Casa Batlló, John Hejduk's masques, Frederick Kiesler's endless architecture, or Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial. These examples constitute "an architecture that might be both beautiful and just, responsive to cultural contexts and genuinely creative, [therefore] the architect must recognize his medium is the space

of desire. Thus architecture can inspire emotion and induce pathos, being both compassionate and erotic.”⁴⁶

Aesthetic | Disclosive Work

Genuine innovation that reconciles poetics and ethics, it should be noted, cannot be reduced to aesthetic work.⁴⁷ As Vesely argues, there is a potential “inability to see that an uncritical faith in symbolism, historical reference, meaning and so on could be, and very often is, only a disguised form of technical rationality.”⁴⁸ What differentiates a true and false alternative can be summarized in the distinction between an aesthetic work and disclosive work. The former, conceived as analogous to instrumental reason during the Enlightenment, is an absorbing visible appearance that is framed and “essentially dislocated” from its context.⁴⁹ This can engender emotion but it is limited in its capacity. Unlike an aesthetic object that gains its import from this distance, a disclosive work opens an ontological “world.” Drawing on Heidegger’s *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια), which has been translated as “unconcealedness,” a disclosive work is rooted in the background from which it draws its transformative capacities as it unfolds in the world.⁵⁰

From Mary McLeod’s perspective, even the disclosive work lacks the capacity to substantially alter political praxis.⁵¹ She might be correct when considering the work as a “politics of problem-solving,” but as Nicholas Smith explains, world-disclosure develops through a process of “rendering articulate.”⁵² When a world is unconcealed, insights are made visible. These insights provide orientation, human understanding, and can help others re-interpret their situation anew. A truly innovative work has the capacity to reveal and even transcend its conditions in a singular fashion. This architecture, as Pérez-Gómez suggests, “lovingly provides a sense of order resonant with our dreams.”⁵³ It might even change one’s life.

Problem Solving | Asking Questions

An obsessive focus on problem solving, whether it adds something new to design work or not, is like being equipped with a hammer; it's only a matter of time before one contrives nails of all sorts. Instead of eagerly "projecting," architects should ask themselves "just what sort of world they are projecting..."⁵⁴ In short, when facing a world in crisis, there is more to doing good work than enthusiastically "making a difference." It is not only important to "reason out the need for the need," but to demand a more enduring commitment.⁵⁵

My criticism of design intelligence should not be misconstrued as opposition to a newfound faith in architectural knowledge, a broader conception of practice, or as an avoidance of problems in our crisis-ridden world. Nor am I promoting a retreat into criticality or post-modern conservatism. "Design," as Pérez-Gómez argues, "is neither problem solving nor mere formal innovation."⁵⁶ Instead of these false alternatives, it is important that the architect seeks questions worthy of consideration. Many of these questions are older than we think. Their roots extend into the past, which demands that they be unearthed, traced, and regenerated. These reformulated questions, Pérez-Gómez maintains, "have contributed imaginative, poetic responses to our universal call for dwelling – answers from which we can learn and develop an ability to act here and now."⁵⁷ This is the untimely potential of history and the practical wisdom it informs.

Rather than a means without an end, inquiry from a grounded position is an attempt to respond to the true complexity of our situation. This includes human limits and cultural differences, where the paths to change can be slow, full of ideological traps, and are always tied to a rich background against which our practice and work makes sense. These differences are crucial, lest we eliminate precisely those issues which make possible an architecture built upon love.

This task should not be taken for granted, as these two volumes of essays by Alberto Pérez-Gómez show us. There is work to be done. In their call to action, these texts encourage present and future generations of readers to expand the range of works we examine, deepen our shared knowledge, work through our increasingly technological environments, invest in others, and find alternative ways to promote ethical and poetic practices. It is in these enduring actions, as Heidegger suggests, that “what is untimely will have its own times,” yet again....⁵⁸

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NOTES

1. “Untimely,” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003).
2. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Questions of Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 8.
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006), 241.
4. Daniel Libeskind, “‘Deus ex Machina’/ ‘Machina ex Deo’: Aldo Rossi’s Theater of the World,” *Oppositions* 21 (1980): 3.
5. Peter Eisenman, “The Houses of Memory: The Texts of Analogy,” in Aldo Rossi, *Architecture of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 5.
6. Mary McLeod, “Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism,” in *Assemblage* 8 (Feb. 1989): 24.
7. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 116.
8. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1978), 6.
9. Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013).
10. Michael Speaks, “Intelligence After Theory,” *Perspecta* 38 (2006): 106.

11. Rem Koolhaas, quoted by Beth Kapusta, *Canadian Architect Magazine* 39 (August 1994): 10.
12. For an examination of the critical/post-critical debates see George Baird, "'Criticality' and Its Discontents," *Harvard Design Magazine* 21 (Fall 2004/Winter 2005): 16–21; and Jane Rendell et al., eds., *Critical Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).
13. Michael Speaks, "Theory Was Interesting ... but Now We Have Work," *Architectural Research Quarterly* 6 no. 3, (December 2002): 209.
14. Michael Speaks, "Intelligence After Theory," 104.
15. Michael Speaks, "Design Intelligence. Part 2: George Yu Architects," *A+U* 388, no. 1 (January 2003): 150.
16. Michael Speaks, "Design Intelligence. Part 1: Introduction," *A+U* 387, no.12 (December 2002): 16.
17. Giambattista Vico, *On Humanistic Education: Six Inaugural Orations, 1699–1707*, ed. Gian Galeazzo Visconti, trans. Giorgio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee, intro. Donald Phillip Verene, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 8.
18. Speaks, "Intelligence After Theory," 106.
19. Hubert L. Dreyfus, "From Socrates to Expert Systems: The Limits and Dangers of Calculative Rationality," in Carl Mitcham and Alois Huning, *Philosophy and Technology II: Information Technology and Computers in Theory and Practice* (Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel, 1986).
20. Speaks, "Design Intelligence – Part 1," 18.
21. Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11–12.
22. Pew Research Center, "Political Polarization in the American Public," *People-Presses*, (Jun. 12, 2014), accessed May 15, 2016, <http://www.people-press.org/files/2014/06/6-12-2014-Political-Polarization-Release.pdf>
23. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 3–5.
24. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London & New York: Bloombury, 2013), 289–292.
25. The Essex School refers to the Master's courses formed by Joseph Rykwert with Dalibor Vesely in the Department of Art at the University of Essex. Their approaches, underwritten by hermeneutic and phenomenological frameworks, have influenced several generations of architects, historians and educators, including Pérez-Gómez, Daniel Libeskind, David Leatherbarrow, and many others. See Helen Thomas, "Invention in the Shadow of History: Joseph Rykwert at the University of Essex," *Journal of Architectural Education* 58, no. 2 (Nov. 2004): 39–45.
26. Speaks, "Intelligence After Theory," 74.

27. Speaks, "Design Intelligence. Part 2," 150.
28. Speaks cribs the ideas of Peter F. Drucker, a prolific writer and renowned organizational management consultant. Peter F. Drucker, *Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Practice and Principles* (New York: Harpers Business, 1993), 30–36.
29. Peter F. Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1974), 60.
30. Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).
31. William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (New York: North Point Press, 2002).
32. Shannon May, "Ecological Crisis and Eco-Villages in China," *CounterPunch*, (Nov. 21-23, 2008), accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2008/11/21/ecological-crisis-and-eco-villages-in-china>.
33. "Mur de graff au square Karcher," *Mairie20.Paris*, accessed November 20, 2013, http://www.mairie20.paris.fr/mairie20/jsp/site/Portal.jsp?page_id=1104.
34. Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 187–201.
35. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 31.
36. Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love*, 201.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 5.
39. Ibid., 110.
40. Ibid.
41. Antoine Picon, "Architecture, Innovation and Tradition," *AD* 83, no. 1 (January/February 2013): 133.
42. Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love*, 109.
43. Graham Cairn, "Conversation with Alberto Pérez-Gómez," unpublished manuscript, unpaginated.
44. Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love*, 185.
45. Ibid., 28.
46. Cairn, "Conversation with Alberto Pérez-Gómez."
47. This is contrary to the thesis developed in Mark Foster Gage, *Aesthetic Theory: Essential Texts for Architecture and Design* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).
48. Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Productivity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 276.

49. Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 18–23
50. Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 70.
51. Mary McLeod, “Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism,” *Assemblage* 8 (Feb. 1989): 40.
52. Nicholas H. Smith, *Strong Hermeneutics: Contingency and Moral Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 164.
53. Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love*, 4.
54. Reinhold Martin, “Critical of What?,” *Harvard Design Magazine*, 22, (Spring/Summer 2005): 4.
55. Teju Cole, “The White Savior Industrial Complex,” *The Atlantic*, March 21, 2012, accessed February 01, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843>.
56. Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love*, 210.
57. *Ibid.*, 209.
58. Heidegger, *Metaphysics*, 8.