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# idea journal

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(extra) ordinary interiors:  
practising critical reflection

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vol. 18, no. 01

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2021

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the journal of IDEA: the interior design +  
interior architecture educators association



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interior architecture educators association**



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**cover image**

Lying motionless, listless. Consuming time; being present, each moment folds into another. Surfaces becoming expanses of inflections of hue. Normality expands into a stream of observing luminosity. Still image from video by Chora Carleton, 2021.

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### this issue's provocation

(Extra) Ordinary Interiors calls for contributions from academics, research students and practitioners that demonstrate contemporary modes of criticality and reflection on specific interior environments in ways that expand upon that which is ordinary (of the everyday, common, banal, or taken for granted).

This theme has two agendas: First, the desire to amplify critical reflection as a key practice of the disciplines associated with this journal's readership. In short, to prompt interior designers, interior architects, and spatial designers to be more proactive and experimental in asserting their specialist knowledge and expertise as critical commentary. This asks authors to reconsider the role of critique and criticism in their scholarly and creative works, or, to demonstrate how to reflect critically upon a design and to locate the design's relation to material, political, social, cultural, historical and geographical concerns. Such an enterprise may reveal whether models of criticality centred on judgement, authority and historicism are relevant, constructive, insightful or generative, or, as Bruno Latour poses, have they 'run out of steam'?<sup>01</sup> This exercise may prompt some to revisit key thinkers who pose new discursive, visual and temporal models for critical practice in this recent age of criticality. We draw your attention to *Critical Spatial Practice* by Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen, which asks for thinking "about 'space' without necessarily intervening in it physically, but trying to sensitise, promote, develop and foster an attitude towards contemporary spatial production, its triggers, driving forces, effects and affects... [to] speculate on the modalities of production and potential benefits of the role of 'the outsider.'"<sup>02</sup>

We also look to Jane Rendell's introduction to *Critical Architecture*, which asserts that criticism and design are linked together by virtue of their shared interests in invoking social change.<sup>03</sup> Whether it takes written, built or speculative form, criticism is an action, which according to Roland Barthes, is a calling into crisis, a moment where existing definitions, disciplinary boundaries and assumptions about normativity are put into question.<sup>04</sup>

The second agenda of this journal issue takes heed of the ordinary, and how, in its intense observation, what is normal or often taken for granted exceeds itself, becomes extra or more ordinary. Everyday spaces such as supermarkets, service stations, laundry mats, hardware stores, parks and four-way street intersections, and banal gestures such as washing the dishes, walking the dog or street sweeping become subject to critical scrutiny and introspection. Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage Around My Room*, Julio Cortázar's *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*, and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* are but a few historic examples that draw out critical depth and aesthetic meaning about ordinary interiors, interiors understood in the most liberal sense.<sup>05</sup> What new actions to the crisis of critical commentary lurk restlessly in ordinary interiors?

While a nostalgic or romantic response to this journal's theme may dwell on interior situations with no special or distinctive features, or explore the persistence and abundance of ordinary interiors, even commonplace spaces, noticed or not, it can not be denied that recent pandemic events world-wide have flung the many facets of everyday life into crisis, including long-standing notions of proximity, intimacy, hapticity, privacy, freedom and rights to access 'essential' services. For many, the world has become home and home has become an internal world, an interior contaminated or augmented by virtual technologies serving as lifelines to a previous highly social and diversified lifestyle. As the interior of one's domestic space finds coincidence with one's isolation bubble, many are finding that interiority and interiors are conflating to take on new meaning, new function, and new configuration. Ordinary scenes of dead flies on windowsills, sun rays pointing to poor house-keeping habits, mounting bags of uncollected rubbish and recycling, shuffling of mattresses, improvised work surfaces, revised chores rubrics, commandeering of the bathroom, and the commodity of headphones and adapters highlight an intensified condition.

Authors are prompted to practice a form of critical reflection on one (extra) ordinary interior.

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# opening expanding spaces: interiors in lacaton and vassal

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## abstract

The aim of this article is to address the work of the interior in the architecture of Lacaton and Vassal. Integral to the overall argument is the claim that the interior does not have an essential nature. It is thus the site of different forms of life. The linkage to life is intended to create the conditions for actual critical reflection on the presence either of claims about the interior in general or projected specific designs.

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Lacaton and Vassal, Heidegger, interior, relational architecture



## introduction

The overall aim of this article is to begin to question how the interior might function as a concept within the history and theory of architecture.<sup>01</sup> Rather than range across an array of architectural instances to support a general claim about the interior — as though the term designated no more than a simple generality — this article will concentrate on the presence of what might be taken to be the interior in certain works of the contemporary French architects Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal. The article can be interpreted, therefore, as an attempt both to contribute to a genealogy of the interior and to create the conditions for a critical evaluation of specific interiors.<sup>02</sup> As a beginning, it should be noted that it is not as though what counts as an interior has automatic fixity or a clear referent within the history of architecture. The interior does not have an essential quality. Hence the need for a genealogy. Indeed, in methodological terms, this is an important point of departure, insofar as it then allows the interior to be situated within particular historical and political frameworks. Moreover, the separation of the interior from the exterior has different ideational and political configurations; the ways those configurations occur would then become the object of architectural history. The interiors of Palladio's villas, as Antonio Foscari has recently demonstrated, have a complexity and a specificity of their own. Were attention paid to what is particular to them, it becomes clear that their particularity cannot be assimilated to other pragmatic determinations of interiority.<sup>03</sup> For example, the interior of a Palladian Villa cannot be assimilated to an interior whose

particularity as an interior is defined, in part, by the illegibility of that interior on the façade. The latter occurs in Adolf Loos' Haus Müller.<sup>04</sup> Different senses of interiority are almost inevitably at work.

And yet, the presence of differences does not preclude the recovery of generalisable, if importantly divergent, possibilities. Part of the overall argument to be presented here is that there is an important divide within conceptions of the interior. (Again, this a position with more general methodological implications, insofar as it reinforces the fact that, despite the presence of such possibilities, the interior cannot be seen as having an essential quality). In the first instance, if interiors, whether understood on the level of the building or the level of city, were only understood in terms of exclusive and excluding oppositions — for example, interior/exterior, inside/outside — then, to the extent that such definitions are maintained, interiors are subsequently understood, not just in terms of separation, but equally, in terms of control. The interior then has a specific, abstract configuration. In such a setting it would be defined as held in place by a set of border conditions; conditions which, while they cannot be attributed a specific singular form, equally cannot be separated from the diverse ways in which power operates. Once divorced from its identification with sovereign power, power, as Foucault has demonstrated throughout his writings on the history of sexuality, prisons etc., that power is always strategic and dispersed. As Paul Hirst has argued in relation to Foucault, 'power relations have no single centre, but are diffused through



the whole social body in complex networks and diverse relations.<sup>05</sup> At its most emphatic, this sense of the interior has to be secured by differing modes of policing. In addition, in architectural terms, occupiers are constrained to operate within already produced relations and subjects' positions. Life within such a setting is not just positioned, it is determined in advance. Forms of life have specific architectural forms. Form is always informed; form creates limits. However, the suspension of those limits yields openings, thus allowing the possible creation of differently informed sites and other senses of interiority. A division emerges. In the first instance, the accuracy of Foucault's insight could lead to a form of quietism, in which the ubiquity of power engenders forms of complacency on the level of the political as much as it would be more strategic within design. However, it might also be argued that its acuity sanctions interventions that take the suspension of the logics that organise the distribution of power as their point of orientation.

The second of these possibilities still maintains inscribed subject positions. Architecture is, after all, the housing of life. However, the other site of inscription — site always becoming sites, plurality predominating — involves fundamental differences. These differences, while maintaining architecture, allow life other possibilities. Hence, if there is a countermeasure to the first conception of the interior — namely, a counter to that conception of the interior which, even though it may be diverse regarding form, still incorporates predetermined subject positions and policed borders — then it depends upon

circumscribed openings and thus continuities of movement. Within these openings and continuities, while interiors emerge, they entail a conception of freedom understood in terms of the actualisation of a capacity for participation, and thus equally of forms of self-organisation, both of which are the effects of other determinations of spatial relations. In other words, the interior would then have to be incorporated into a thinking of architecture — a thinking that opens as much towards analysis as it does towards design — in which what predominates is the primacy of relationality, and where fixity is both always an after-effect and open to the continual possibility of its own self-transformation. To be clear, this setup is opposed to a conception of relationality in which relations demand closure, separation, and in the end, policed borders. The claim is, therefore, that while relationality may have an obvious ubiquity, the countermeasure proposed here, and which can in part be identified in aspects of Lacaton and Vassal's work, leads to a conception of relationality that is defined by indetermination, movement, and porosity, resulting from the role of both materials and instruments. It is therefore an understanding of relationality, one that moves toward the suspension of what can be described more generally as logics of policing. Suspension becomes, therefore, a strategic moment in the design process. Moreover, the possibility of suspension depends upon both knowledge of the logics that are taken to be already at work and judgments made about them.



The project here is to develop these opening considerations in relation to the work of Lacaton and Vassal. It is essential to note that the approach taken here works against an account of the interior as having defined and essential characteristics. Instead, it works in favour of a genealogical account in which the differing modalities of interiority are central; this means that subsequent argument and analysis cannot be focused on only one interior. Hence, the discussion of Lacaton and Vassal will range, of necessity, across several examples.

There is an additional point that needs to be made here. The move to relationality needs to be understood as a development within architectural thinking in which both loci of analysis and prompts for design are no longer simply defined by the interplay of object and form creation. While form is always essential and the object constrained to emerge, in taking relations — defined by indeterminacy and openness — as having priority, a different conception of fixity emerges. Fixed points are then understood, as suggested above, as after-effects of relations.<sup>06</sup> Equally, the repositioning that continues to give priority to this sense of the relational means that additions and adaptations become further relational possibilities inscribed as potentialities within the designed object. As a result, dwelling is no longer understood as passive inhabitation. Other forms of agency will then become possible. In the case of Lacaton and Vassal, transformations in the question of agency, as it pertains to both architect and occupier, is a defining aspect of their practice.<sup>07</sup> They have formulated their position in this regard

in terms of the following question: 'What are we able to propose in the field of housing that could help raise the quality of life and the sense of appropriation of their own living spaces by the dwellers?'<sup>08</sup> The connection between architecture and life is not arbitrary. It marks a fundamental reconfiguration of the design process. Instead of emphasis being given to the object, as though volume creation defined the architectural, this reconfiguration means that a concern with life and thus architecture's relation to it continue to emerge as fundamental.

Lacaton and Vassal gave a lecture at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard in 2015, in which they presented both projects and some of the design prompts behind them. Part of the unfolding of their work involved a careful elaboration of how they understand the 'interior.' Remembering, of course, on a formal level, the non-generalizability of the term. Hence, what matters here is allowing the sense of interior at work within their projects to begin to emerge. Crucial moments in the lecture staged the connection between what they designated as the 'interior' and the 'city.' Their comment establishes a set of connections that work at a range of scales.

The city is conceived as a series of to-be-continued situations and mobilities. Living well, to be well in your living room, on the landing, to be close to services, shops; to feel well while walking through the park, to meet people... Any intention of densification must be linked to this strategy of relationships, and ease and continuity



between the quality of an interior, a common area, and a public space.<sup>09</sup>

In discussing the connections between the interior and the exterior — and it should continue to be noted that forms of exteriority can have an internal presence — in the overall design of their Ecole architecture at Nantes, they argue that in their projects Lacaton and Vassal ‘try to work with a porosity between what is inside and what is outside.’<sup>10</sup> The effect is then clear. Accepting, if only at the outset, the givenness of the distinction between the inside and the outside creates a limit that is undone by the way they then go on to define that relation in terms of porosity rather than of the presence of delimiting and restrictive borders. Emphasising porosity means locating the interior in a process defined by movement and pragmatic limitations. This move brings about a transformation in how the relationship between the inside and the outside would then have to be thought. (Again, the thinking in question attends both analysis and design.) Opposition would cede its place to porous relationality. As a result, what is different is the sense of positioning entailed. In Massimo Faiferri’s terms, the primacy of relationality in Lacaton and Vassal can be identified in the way their work engages with what already exists. Faiferri states that the work always starts ‘from what exists, subjecting it to variations, developments and transgressions.’<sup>11</sup> This allows for formal transformations. And this makes specific what was mentioned earlier in terms of reconfigurations. Again, through simple adjustments in terms of interior spaces and the relation to the exterior, the refurbished apartments at Chalon-sur-

Saône — a project undertaken in 2016 — can also be addressed as a form of porosity. Worked into their lecture was an assemblage of terms that can be seen as encapsulating central aspects of their overall design strategy: ‘Transparency, visibility, porosity. Mixing of climates, mixing of possibilities...’<sup>12</sup>

Once these terms are taken as central to how the relation between the interior and the exterior is to be thought, forms of enforced separation no longer have a determining effect. Each of the terms noted above marks the refusal of fixity and, as a result, the necessity to engage an architectural openness. In part, this occurs as a result of decisions made in relation to use. Lacaton and Vassal design in order that the decisions concerning use devolve back, where possible, to the occupiers. This is not simply a programmatic possibility. It is equally the result of building techniques and the use of specific materials. (It will be essential to return to this point). The question of what counts as an ‘interior’ is re-posed — a movement that results from this particular architectural practice. As a result, the term ‘interior’ becomes both provisional and relational. When they write that ‘there are always views’ this needs to be understood as claiming that both sight lines and bodily positions are brought into play, such that porosity and transparency are as much effects of the body as they are of the strictly material. The interplay between bodily presence and occupation, on the one hand, and what materials can actually effect, on the other, underscores the fact that the plurality of possibilities occurring within and as the



architectural are not just forms of dwelling, as though the claims made about their architecture were purely formal. The contrary is the case. What they stage — though this is the work of architecture as a spatial activity and not its reduction to the creation of volumetric objects — are other possibilities for life. Possibilities that are given within the divide that continues to mark the term 'interior.' The divide is between the restricted and already determined in the first instance and then, in the second, the inscription of the 'interior' within the indetermination and openness of fluid and porous relations. Occupation and dwelling continue to coalesce within the life of the building. That life is itself, of course, always positioned by this divide.

In order to grasp the significance of the connection between dwelling and life, it is essential to turn, albeit briefly, to Heidegger's engagement with 'dwelling' in *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*. For Heidegger, dwelling admits of a certain form of generality. He writes of 'the proper plight of dwelling' (*die eigentliche Not des Wohnens*).<sup>13</sup> Dwelling is marked therefore by its own sense of generalised propriety. Moreover, generality and propriety combine. Thus, he essentialises human being within such a formulation; in sum, to be is to dwell. That essentialism can be productive, given the assumption that life is housed and that, as a consequence, the question of dwelling has an ineliminable and insistent quality. However — and this is the difficulty Heidegger faces — essentialism loses any acuity it may have had initially, if it is differentiated radically from the complex ways in which dwelling occurs. (Again,

methodologically, this underlies the force of moving from an approach to the interior that essentialises it, to one that locates its differential presence within a genealogy). And yet, in the context of *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, Heidegger proposes such a differentiation. He draws a fundamental distinction between perceived actual housing shortages and the precarity to which they give rise on the one hand, and what he identifies as a more profound sense of homelessness on the other. Hence, he argues that:

The real plight of dwelling (*die eigentlich Wohnungsnot*) is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older also than the increase of the earth's population and the condition of the industrial workers. The real dwelling plight (*Die eigentliche Not des Wohnens*) lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the essence of dwelling (*das Wesen des Wohnens*) that they must ever learn to dwell.<sup>14</sup>

For Heidegger, dwelling properly has to begin with the recognition that human being is estranged from that which is essential to it.<sup>15</sup> A specific predicament obtains. The only possible response to Heidegger is to argue that, while being and dwelling have to be thought together, this opens up the possibility for a different thinking of the structure of propriety. Rather than propriety being understood in terms of that which has to be recovered, propriety can always be thought in terms of an immanent condition and thus as a ground of judgment. In other words, if life is always housed, then it is not just that



human life has to be thought in relation to architecture; that relation contains differences in which the affirmation, or not, of a good life endure as possibilities. This means that what matters are the differentiations within dwelling; differentiations judged in relation to the identification of being and dwelling. This, it can be argued, is the initial force of Arendt's claim that: 'In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men during their life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech.'<sup>16</sup>

Human worldliness indicates that dwelling is always already taking place. The question then is the quality — in every sense of the word — of that dwelling. While resisting any quick distinction between the public and the private, if only because in architectural terms such a distinction has become increasingly problematic, the presence of the 'human artifice' — provisionally, architecture — is positioned in terms of propriety. What counts as 'propriety' has, however, been transformed. It is now linked absolutely to life. The position that underscores the necessity of the interplay of life and judgment is carried in Arendt's formulation by the term 'fit'

As a term, 'fit' brings its own set of complexities into play. Etymologically, 'fit' is of 'unknown origin'. Nonetheless, what it designates is clear; namely, that what has to be provided is whatever it is that is necessary to sustain life, where life is identified with activity, and thus with both 'action and speech'. Life is not bare, individuated life. On the contrary, life is defined relationally. Life, rather than the single province of individual subjects,

is the identification of being-in-common. While this may be a philosophical description of human being, to the extent that architecture is understood as the housing of life, then the project of architecture is the provision of that which is fit for life, where the latter — namely, life as the locus of necessary diversity — is always understood relationally. One important consequence of this understanding of life is that it is not reducible to biological life. It should not be forgotten, of course, that while architecture can create that which is fit for life, it is also the case that architecture can create what is uninhabitable, i.e., that is not fit for life. Though here, it is important to note that the uninhabitable allows life to continue — slaves and prisoners live on. And yet, architecture, at the same time, has created what does not allow the life of action and speech to continue. While architecture can provide what is fit for life, it is also possible that what it creates can be unfit for it. There were, after all, prisons and torture chambers in Sforzinda.<sup>17</sup>

Lacaton and Vassal remain sensitive to the question of dwelling and inhabitation. As they argue:

The concept of inhabiting is very important to us. It does not only relate to housing: in French 'habiter' means the state of being somewhere: space is whatever its use is. Starting from this principle, even though our projects have distinct programmes, functions and uses, they all propose generosity of space, freedom of use, and possibility of appropriation.<sup>18</sup>



And yet, generosity, while linked to the creation of surplus, does not generate surplus as mere addition. Surplus becomes another way of describing what has the quality of the *yet-to-be-determined*. It allows for reconfigurations and developments. The creation of surplus has to be linked, therefore, to what has already been described as indetermination. Hence, they argue that 'Indeterminate space, or even unprogrammed space, space left to the will of the end user, is the basis of our approach (*démarche*).'<sup>19</sup>

Here, it is important to be cautious. Indetermination is, of course, not absolute. Moreover, it is neither utopian nor to be equated with the positing of pure empty space. Indetermination is always conditioned by the determined. (That is why it is more accurately understood as the creation of spaces that are *yet-to-be-determined*). Terms such as 'indeterminate space' and 'unprogrammed space' — to maintain the language of Lacaton and Vassal — need to be redescribed. They are effects. Located, of necessity, within that which is already programmed, e.g., a school of architecture, an apartment block. In other words, the indeterminate and the unprogrammed are not just located; more significantly, they already have a determined setting. Hence, both the indeterminate and unprogrammed have a critical dimension, insofar as they presuppose the suspension of the already determined within and as the work of architecture.

What must be done at this point is track these positions through some of the projects by Lacaton and Vassal. If there is a generative

diagram that can be extracted from the work of Lacaton and Vassal, then it can be in the formulation that Ilka and Andreas Ruby use to summarize their work, namely, *tabula non rasa*.<sup>20</sup> The relational always has priority. Hence, centrality has to be given to how the relation is understood within and as a design practice. This sensibility is linked to the commitment to life, and thus, to the creation of architecture that, to reuse Arendt's term, is fit for life. Once emphasis moves to the centrality of life, then this allows for an opening up of the programmatic both in its own terms and in ways that are equally delimited by economic and environmental considerations. The importance of life is that it has an inevitable plurality. And yet, once there is a sustained suspension of already given determinations that link social activity to specific economic and environmental models, and, because of that suspension, life is opened by the freeing space, then fit means the interplay of the determined and the *yet-to-be-determined*. It is at the threshold of the two — a threshold that can only work as such if porosity prevails — that freedom can be located. The interior both as a concept and as a built reality must be defined in terms of this threshold.



**Figure 01:**Cité du Grand-Parc (2019), Lacaton  
& Vassal, Druot, Hutin.

The builder's work that was done on the *Tour Bois le Prêtre* in Paris in 2011 involved, as a result of the addition of a self-supporting structure, the extension of floor plates (Figure 01). The initial external wall became part of the literal interior. That transformed interior then incorporated an area that functions as a form of internalised outside. It registers seasonal variation and provides a garden space as an extension of living quarters. The structural alterations created indeterminate spaces within the context of an apartment. Both the economic arguments — the control of costs

— and those made in relation to sustainability were compelling. The extension of the floor plate from 8900m<sup>2</sup> to 12460m<sup>2</sup> was the creation of a form of surplus. A similar logic is at work in a number of the transformations of other apartment blocks. In the *Cité du Grand-Parc* (2019) in Bordeaux, the nature of what occurs with the interior/exterior relations are clear from the before and after axonometric drawings.



While both the economic aspects of the development as well as questions pertaining to structural possibility warrant detailed consideration in their own right, what these drawings reveal is the way the simplicity of the extension creates, not just an additional space; once that creation is then worked back through the already existing spaces, this would stage an alteration in how the network of relations comprising the apartment — as a set of spatial and programmatically inflected relations — would then have to be understood. What is significant here is the nature of the architectural intervention. This is one of the key points. That intervention is no longer structured by the logic of the object. Rather than the destruction of one object and the creation of another, for a range of reasons — some economic, others environmental — what occurred was the incorporation of an exterior wall into the building that created, from that exteriority, another interior that had the effect of transforming what counted as the literal interior. Those transformations are clear in the drawings. The juxtaposition of the different shadings — blue and grey — means that the question of the relation has to be posed. They are also there in the photographic documentation that accompanies these projects. The windows, which in the initial iteration interrupt the wall by piercing it and thus constricting and containing both light and views, become the wall. Ground to ceiling glass drastically changes the quality of the space as a result of the effect of the internal registration of light and views. Both are now subject, though in fundamentally different ways, to the control of occupiers.

The project in *Mulhouse* (2004) by Lacaton and Vassal for 14 single-family houses was again driven by the need to increase size while maintaining cost. This occurred by creating platforms above living spaces that incorporated greenhouses. The greenhouses had different qualities during the seasons as a result of the way they were heated. The greenhouses alternated between a winter garden and a shaded domain. Each of the duplexes had a range of spaces that were an effect, initially, of the post/beam structure. The project, as several commentators have pointed out, recalls decisive elements of one of the architects' very first projects, namely, the *Maison Latapie* (1993). Addition and development depended upon a simple pallet of materials to create additional spatial relations. A concern with volume as an end in itself is displaced in favour of the ways in which architecture can house differing possibilities for life.

The *Ecole d'architecture* (2009) by Lacaton and Vassal, built in Nantes, is divided into three levels. The levels are not uniform. Divisions within the building emerge at different heights: i.e., nine, sixteen and twenty-two meters above the ground plane. An external ramp connects the ground to each of the levels and thus the levels to each other. The alteration of height levels is enabled by the use of a lightweight steel structure. (Again, the use of lightweight materials influences cost, and equally, the building's environmental footprint). It is the shift in heights that enables the building to function as a school of architecture while simultaneously allowing it to develop within an already existing frame.



In more strictly programmatic terms, the presence of double-height volumes allows for unpredicted modes of occupation and use to occur, and thus, for the relation between the determined and the *yet-to-be-determined* to be part of what life means within the actual school. There is an important reciprocity between structure and the way forms of freedom are allowed. It should be remembered, therefore, that the complex set of programmatic possibilities that can be identified here cannot be separated from the use of the steel structure that facilitates them. A similar approach was proposed in the architects' plan for the *Royal College of Art in Battersea London* (2016). The structure would have offered levels of different heights with a ramp system. Again, it would have been the interplay of structure and a distinction between the determined and the *yet-to-be-determined* — a distinction that sets up areas of porous connections such that the life within the building which would be the life of the building — could develop in ways that were not automatically determined in advance.

It should be clear that, while there is a place for a distinction between the exterior and the interior in the work of Lacaton and Vassal, the distinction needs to be incorporated into larger architectural concerns. What is of genuine significance are not exterior/interior relations as simply given, but the way the relation between the determined and the *yet-to-be-determined* repositions what counts as the exterior and the interior, while at the same time calling attention to the fact that such positionings are also effected by structure and the work of materials. Having made this point, it is possible to return to the distinction that was noted at

the outset between the two ways of conceiving of the interior. One in terms of policed borders and the other in terms of porosity and openness. Clearly, what Lacaton and Vassal have proposed is a way of understanding the second of these. What is proposed is not just a countermeasure to a conception of the interior necessitating policed borders, but one that is linked to a design practice that transforms how both the interior and the exterior are thought. Both terms become sites of negotiation — thus places of a specific design practice — rather than having already fixed determinations. Finally, therefore, in this regard, it is not surprising that Lacaton and Vassal wrote the following: 'Any act of architecture is an act of urbanism in terms of the system of relationships, proximities, juxtapositions and superimpositions it generates, we want as many relationships to be produced within buildings as within its urban system.'<sup>21</sup>

The effect of this claim is that it has become impossible to hold to a strict distinction between architecture and urbanism. As a result, the distinction dissolves. It is that dissolution, however, that allows the terms to be recreated and thus have use beyond the hold of a strict and mutually excluding opposition. Equally, the work Lacaton and Vassal maintains the distinction between interior and the exterior. It should be clear, however, that it is maintained in a way that, while allowing it to be dissolved, that dissolution creates the conditions for the terms then to be recreated. What that means is, of course, that a critical engagement with the interior has implications as much for the development of architectural theory as it does for design.



**author biography**

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## notes

- 01 This article is part of an integrated research project on relational architecture developed by Gerard Reinmuth and Andrew Benjamin. In addition to a range of jointly written and individual papers, the research has also involved a four-year Master's Studio (2017-2020) in the School of Architecture at the University of Technology, Sydney.
- 02 This article needs to be read in relation to my forthcoming paper — 'Karel Teige and Minimum Dwellings: The Bauhaus' Other Possibility?' In *Bauhaus x IKEA*, edited by Thea Brejzek and Lawrence Wallen (URO Publishing 2021) — in which the engagement with the interior staged here is linked more directly to questions of housing.
- 03 Antonio Foscari, *Living with Palladio in the Sixteenth Century* (Zurich: Lars Muller, 2020).
- 04 Regarding Haus Müller, see Leslie Van Duzer and Kent Kleinman, *Villa Müller: A Work of Adolf Loos* (New York, Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 05 Paul Hirst, 'Foucault and Architecture,' *AA Files*, Autumn no. 26 (Autumn 1993): 56.
- 06 For an introduction to a rethinking of architecture in terms of the centrality of relationality, see Gerard Reinmuth and Andrew Benjamin, 'Autonomy-within-relationality: An Alternative for Architecture After the Global Financial Crisis,' *Interstices* 20 (2020); Gerard Reinmuth and Andrew Benjamin, 'The Architecture of the Counter-Measure,' in *On Power in Architecture*, edited by Mateja Kurir and Urška Jurman (Ljubljana: Maska /Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory, Museum of Architecture and Design (MAO), 2021) [in Slovene]; Andrew Benjamin, 'Towards an Ontology of the City: Baukuh's Rossi,' *Journal of Architecture* (forthcoming).
- 07 There is an interesting affinity between the way agency and design are understood by Lacaton and Vassal here, and Pier Vittorio Aureli's recent arguments concerning how transformations in construction methods and their connection to design are also linked to recasting questions of agency; See his 'Architecture Beyond Creation,' *OASE* 196 (2020): 55-61.
- 08 Speech: affordable housing, 'Interview Anne Lacaton — More Space, More Light, More Green: A New Vision of Social Housing,' 2014, 246. <https://www.lacatonvassal.com/data/documents/20141120-18001914Speech12.pdf>
- 09 Anne Lacaton and Jean-Pierre Vassal, *Freedom of Use* (Berlin Sternberg, Press, 2015), 15.
- 10 Anne Lacaton and Jean-Pierre Vassal, *Freedom of Use*, 23.
- 11 Massimo Faiferri, *Re-Invent. Reuse and Transformation in Lacaton and Vassal's Architecture* (LISt Lab, 2018), 25.
- 12 Anne Lacaton and Jean-Pierre Vassal, *Freedom of Use*, 25.
- 13 Martin Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking,' In *Martin Heidegger. Basic Writings*, edited by D. F. Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 2004), 156. Emphasis added for sake of translation.
- 14 Heidegger, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, 164. Emphasis added.
- 15 The concept of 'homelessness' in Heidegger is more complex that can be dealt with adequately here. For a further discussion of some of the issues involved, see Pieter Tijmes, 'Home and Homelessness: Heidegger and Levinas on Dwelling,' *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 2, no. 3 (1998): 201-213.
- 16 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 73.
- 17 Sforzinda is a visionary ideal city named after Francesco Sforza, then Duke of Milan. See Hubertus Günther, 'Society in Filarete's "Libro architetonico" between Realism, Ideal, Science Fiction and Utopia,' *Arte Lombarda, Nuova Serie*, 155 (2009): 56-80.
- 18 Interview with Anne Lacaton, *Icon* February (2017), 103.
- 19 Interview with Anne Lacaton, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 424 (2007), 47.
- 20 Ilka and Andreas Ruby, 'Extra Space, Extra Large: On the Recent Work of Lacaton and Vassal,' in *2G / Lacaton & Vassal Spain* (2007), 8.
- 21 Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, 'Structural Freedom, a Precondition for the Miracle,' *2G / Lacaton & Vassal Recent Work*, 60 (2011), 175.