Architectural Frontier/Spatial Story: The Problematic of Representing the Everyday
Mirjana Lozanovska
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The "tools" of architectural discourse—maps, plans, sections, elevations, photographs—are one way of representing an architecture of the everyday. In this article, the theoretical problematic of representing the everyday is investigated through a specific site, Zavoj, a village in the Republic of Macedonia. How do we look at, document, and analyse a place that is outside the map of western architectural interest? The tools of architecture are staged as the mechanics of an architectural frontier against the narratives that describe the processes of dwelling, the spatial stories of the inhabitants of the village. Stories and words of a fictive reality intervene in the clear geometry of architectural representation and thereby produce a complexity to the representation of the everyday. The article, however, does not settle within this hypothesis; rather, it invests the siting of a particular place as a struggle for the discourse.

Introduction

What does it mean to produce a plan of the village of Zavoj, in the Republic of Macedonia, within and through discourses of architecture? To my knowledge, there was no plan/map of the village prior to my production of one. Spatial knowledge about and of the village are through means other than maps—people follow daily itineraries in relation to the spatial conditions of the village. Everyday spatial practices produce an associational sense of one's whereabouts; people's movements are interlaced with mental and cultural maps accumulated over time. Michel de Certeau (1984) argued that the plan or map is a territorial force that colonizes space, conquers...
the figurative content of space, and gradually erodes “the pictorial figurations of the practices that produce it” (p. 121). Does the plan initiate and generate a process of colonization, and is the “spatial story” one way to resist this process?

In this article, I have set up the “tools” of architectural discourse—maps, plans, sections, elevations, photographs—as the mechanics of an architectural frontier. My method is to stage this architectural frontier against the “inhabitations,” “uses,” “practices,” “making do”: the action verbs of de Certeau that suggest that the production of space has something to do with time and therefore with dwelling as a verb, a process, rather than as a determinate spatial configuration. My hypothesis is that these will produce another spatiality, a spatiality that defies the codes of architectural tools, and another textuality within the discourse about architectural space. These are spatial stories, narratives of mundane daily activities, of memories, of past environments, of fictions about identity, of epic tales and legends about the village. It is not the thesis of this article that these constitute an authentic “forgotten” architecture and the maps are merely an artificial and reductive construction; rather, it is a way of investigating the problematic of representing everyday architecture or, put inversely, the architecture of the everyday. By way of words, literary threads slip into the linear and geometric discourse of architecture and urbanism. Another way of speaking about architecture and a way of speaking about an unplanned architecture might be made possible. The architectural plan, proponent and exponent of architecture’s raison d’être, makes a “turn” and precisely a “return” to the methods of textiles; it results in an interwoven discourse.

Context

Several issues that are problematic in contemporary critical theory become associated with the project of representing the architecture of the everyday and, in this case, the architecture of a village not known within architectural discourse. These include an opposition between Diaspora and village. Diaspora circumscribes both a field of study and a geopolitical mapping and is perceived as antithetical to the concept of “village” and “place.” In imaginary terms, Diaspora is defined by a loss of place, a loss of the symbiotic relationship between place and self. It is a field unleashed by migration and edged by a kind of eternal homelessness or placelessness, paradoxically signaled by ongoing home building and construction of settlements. Diaspora is the projected field of desire coming from places like Zavoj (a mountain village in Macedonia). In A Seventh Man, Berger and Mohr (1975) write compellingly about this desire for migration: “Everyday he hears about the metropolis. The name of the city changes. It is all cities, overlaying one another and becoming a city that exists nowhere but which continually transmits promises” (p. 23).

The figure of the migrant embarking on a freedom contingent on loss can turn into the figure of the foreigner who illuminates contemporary theories of the loss of the subject with the bittersweet sense of the stranger within each one of us. What, then, is the desire for the other side of Diaspora? Is it the desire for “place,” a desire that attempts to overcome the contingencies of time and history? A village inscribes a profound and understated sense of the term place. At some epistemological locale, village and place are one and the same thing—a kind of generic fixity that is crystallized in a historical moment, but it is not a specific historic moment, belonging to a specific cul-
ture, or a specific time, but an unconscious and imaginary one, for nowhere can we find this “idea” and “idealization” of place realised in history. The village gives a scenic setting to an imaginary past, and in turn a village as “place” itself, generic rather than specific, is locked into a frozen time. The village is a place that is generically left behind as if it were a dimension of time.

This article is as much about Melbourne, Australia (or any other city in Diaspora), as it is about Zavoj, Macedonia. It is about the present. It turns “back” to Zavoj as a gesture to negotiate conditions of economic and intellectual forces about space and time, culture and globalisation, being and agency. Although Diaspora in imaginary terms is about the loss of place, in symbolic terms it is the desire for a place, a place or places that are invested by and through economic/political interests. Conversely, although the village Zavoj in the Republic of Macedonia is generically a place, the history that has conditioned an emptying out of its life, the mass exodus of its inhabitants and the meaning of its practices, constitutes an erosion of place.

Changes in the village, in Zavoj, are parallel and simultaneous with changes in a city built on migration—Los Angeles, Toronto, Munich, Melbourne. Macedonia is a term produced both inside and outside of its national borders. Paraphrasing Berger and Mohr’s (1975, p. 21) notes, the development of the latter is dependent on the underdevelopment of the former. Zavoj and these cities are intrinsically and historically linked.

Second, poststructuralism’s investigation of the “author” and his or her illegitimacy to speak authorally of others is problematised through the issue of the “self” and “self-identity” in relation to those “others” that may not always have access to self-representation. Academics sometimes study places that are not on the maps of architecture’s interests, the maps of its own locations of culture, and these can become places through which the disciplinary map is renegotiated. What draws an academic to a particular place? There may be a number of reasons, but the one that I want to think about in this article is the strategic performance of the self in relation to place and culture. It is always possible to impose an overdetermination between the identity of the author and the place, assumed to be linked. This so-called burden of authentic representation has been critiqued in contemporary cultural theories; here I want to cite Hall and Du Guy (1997) on identity as a way to start to argue why to make an account about Zavoj is not a private act of writing:

Actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not “who we are” or “where we come from,” so much as what we might become, how we might represent ourselves . . . they oblige us to read . . . not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our “routes.” They arise from the narrativisation of the self, but the necessary fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness . . . through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field. (p. 4)

Implicit in this article is this tension between concepts of author and its public sense of authority and concepts of self as private and how this might orient a particular textual production about a place, the object of study.

The method of empirical fieldwork is also intersected by the problematic of author and self. Made very unpopular through its historical association of controversial anthropological knowledge production, it is here revisited. However, this history is lay-
ered through the popularity in architecture of the “master’s sketchbook,” the sketchbooks of figures like Le Corbusier as he travelled in what is now the Balkan region, engaging in self-education of architecture through a close observation and experience of the vernacular. The architectural journey is retraced by many aspiring architects and holds both an ideal and unrepresented place in his or her education.

Theories of the everyday have gained momentum in architectural discourse. Interpretations of two seminal works by prominent French intellectuals and social theorists, *The Practice of Everyday Life* by Michel de Certeau (1984) and *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre (1991), within architecture have generated architectural texts,
publications, and interest in the architecture of the everyday. The theoretical premise would suggest a vastly different orientation to architecture’s earlier affair with populism in the 1970s led by postmodernist pioneers such as Venturi and Scott-Brown and Graves, even though it has semantic association. It is not my claim to resolve this dilemma in this article; architecture has a way of associating very odd histories, and sometimes this can be productive. However, this dilemma is implicit in this article through the problematic of representing the everyday. The staging of the architectural frontier against the spatial story attempts to make the problematic perceivable.

Desire-Map/Nostalgia-Text

Zavoj is not a publicised place and therefore lacks architectural visibility, or relation, position, even perhaps location on the map of architectural cultures. Thinking about maps as tools of travel, maps and mapping are trajectories of desire. To place a dot is also to trace a line between one site and another, and this line is a trace of desire. Desire is articulated through visibility. The trace of the dot and the line bring into visibility what was invisible. Zavoj, a “nonplace” on the architectural map, is bought into focus and thus becomes an object of desire traced by a trajectory between Melbourne and Macedonia (and by association, any city of the Diaspora). Desire is thus seen as the architectural academic’s projection: locating Zavoj, mapping Zavoj, representing the built environment of Zavoj.

To my knowledge, there was no plan or map of the village prior to my production of one. Zavoj was paced, measured, and checked through orientations to the sun and adjusted by the angles of walls. For the map, fragments of Zavoj recorded on A3 sheets are overlayed into a single, smooth orthographic plane, something like the folding and unfolding of white sheets. A3 sheets are taped together to give the sense of the whole village. An impressive image, unified and visible all at once. Later, it is worked on again, additional adjustments are made with drafting tools, cross-checking according to observations and photographic documentation, and further integrated into a single smooth orthographic plane. Discrepancies are erased. The oneness and plan(e)-ness of orthographic projection are pleasing. The plan made the village representable, visible, and legible: We can read the plan, and we can read off the plan. It can be the base for systematic overlays of morphology, of opens spaces, of roads, of structure and infrastructure, of massing, of public buildings. It is a useful architectural tool.

Complementing the empirical method of orthographic projection is a panoramic photograph. It is a seductive image offering a breadth of vision and an atmosphere of an impossible perspective. The village is on a mountain, a few buildings are dotted on its topography, and a white cube-church reflects the light and is itself illuminated.
A black-and-white photograph can present the other side of the rationality and empiricism that produced the orthographic projection. To gaze at the image exemplifies the unleashing of nostalgia, a nostalgia that “may paradoxically undo the concept of the unique and unitary self” (Gunew, 1994, p. 115). In the shadows of rationality and empiricism is an aesthetics of nostalgia.

It is not that the village and the surrounding countryside are not always already known, already discovered; every bit of the countryside has a name, every valley, every rise, every turn, every twist—it is all named and has been walked through. The inhabitants’ words and stories distracted from the representation of place as orthographic projection and photographic image. A small number of the inhabitants in Zavoj are elderly people. All others have emigrated. What will happen when there is no one left to speak, to tell the story? There was an urge to produce a map, to make a plan, before everything is lost. The plan, for the architectural academic, is a way to consolidate memory, to make history. But do the black solid lines on the white surface of the architectural plan cast into oblivion all the labours, the movements, the bodies, the histories on which their inscription is contingent? De Certeau’s (1984) critical theory about the map and the consequence of visibility and invisibility is perhaps revealed in architectural practice through the scribbled notes in the margins of the white page on which the plan appears bold:

Its visible, it has the effect of making invisible the operation that made it possible. These fixations constitute procedures for forgetting. The trace left behind is substituted for the practice. It exhibits the (voracious) property that the geographical system has of being able to transform action into legibility, but in doing so it causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten. (p. 97)

What is preserved through orthographic projection? In this gesture, the strange realness of the everyday is gone, and the trace of architecture is not the graveyard of the inhabitants, not the site of memory but rather something much more absolute. Representational traces of vernacular architecture signal the site of repression, the site about which the discipline repeatedly forgets what it has already forgotten. Repression might be stated as the site of the indiffERENCE to other coexisting architectural cultures that are not fantasmatic projections of dominant architectural discourse.

My focus now turns to the study of the domestic ground, the zone of each household’s domestic space, and specifically how labour is always in an active relation to an architectural frontier that tends towards objectification of place.

“The Object Speaks”

The domestic domain comprises the house proper and a number of outbuildings: the bread oven, the barn, the “summer” kitchen, the sac room, the pig house, the water closet, the shelter, and the ground (and for some households, the rakija distillery). These outbuildings are not within a strictly private territory; their locations are divided by the roads and paths to which the public has access. Public roads and communal paths cross private domestic domains. Vernacular texts typically give a romantic view of this layering of public and private, suggesting the wonders of communal peasant life. The lives of the inhabitants tell another story.
Within the zone of her domestic domain, each woman is preoccupied with daily work. Her work is constituted through daily spatial practices that set her moving continuously from one work site to another. Women move across space: to the barn, inside the kitchen, to the pig house, to the vegetable garden, sometimes to the shop and the edge of the village (to check on the cows). Women are never out of sight. And are also seen to be working. The spatial ordering of the house and outbuildings functions as a system of surveillance through exposure. Exposure operates as a collective witnessing. The spatial structure is one that is easily policed because of its noninteriorisation—any woman is subjected to the random gaze of another woman passing by; the women are turned into private detectives.

In an essay, “Untitled: The Housing of Gender,” Mark Wigley (1992) argued that the interiorisation of woman within the house gives way to an intricate management of patriarchy whereby the woman becomes the guard of the house (and herself within it) in the same way that her husband guards her. The subject of that essay is the bourgeois Eurocentric woman (generic subject of Western White Anglo-Saxon feminist and nonfeminist theory), and its object is the merchant’s house. Spatial relations between woman/house/man as discrete elements means that there is a focus on the “gaze” between them as a function of supervision. The intersection of public and private spaces in the order of the domestic domain of the village produces a more complex structure of engendering. Domestication, and its intrinsic relationship to architecture as an ordered system, is a dual function of labour and supervision, confusing the relationship of the gaze between subject and object. Wigley made a suggestion of this confusion—“herself within it”—proposing that the woman is somehow a physical component of the house as well as its guard.

Women’s corporeality becomes visible through her labour within the domestic domain. It is, however, supervised by other women. In engaging with a specific architectural text, Wigley’s (1992) essay signaled the current limits of the investigation of gender and space. For example, it did not consider the divisions between women, the women whose labour reproduces domestic domains and not merely oversees their reproduction, and the division between women who watch one another as equals. Spatial stories between women engender the order of architecture as much as the spatial stories between woman and man do.

In addition, the field academic participates in this structure of surveillance. Tensions between labour, speaking, and watching charge the spatial order of the domestic domain. Questions arise, questions of representation, in two senses: on one hand, delegation within the scene. Who works, who watches, who speaks? On the other, the translation from the scene to textual production to another public. At what cost do “I”
speak about other women, and what is at stake to not speak about them? The scene of fieldwork entails questions of subjects and subjectivity: They are watching me as curiously as I am watching them.

It is not merely that the specific layering of public and private space produces a system by which women's domestication is on display but that an ongoing labour by and through her moving body continuously binds the domestic domain. Architectural objects such as the barn or the bread kiln are not merely engaged with through visibility alone but through use, through the mutual cooperation between the building and her corporeal labour in production. The shuttling of her body is like a reel of thread that produces a weave of all the dispersed buildings, a complex knit of the domestic space in which her body is totally enmeshed. The domestic domain is produced as a unity, a well-functioning unified front.

The representation of architectural boundaries in the plan is entangled with the daily movements of the women. Architecture is reproduced as a highly bounded space—one that is like the surface of a ball of wool rather than a smooth, white, flat surface. Movements in space suggest corporeal presence in production and the reproduction of the domestic domain. Her body merges with the space. Like a time-sequence photograph, à la Muybridge, her rapid movements blur the boundary between her body and the architecture. This is especially perceptive in the choreography of her movements between buildings. Her body momentarily fills the space in between forms. She moves through doorways, between inside and outside; her body momentarily passes the space of the threshold. If, as I have argued in another essay, desire occupies the space in between architectural objects, a desire that is held in tension across two forms, then the woman's movement in between buildings signifies that desire is itself a woman (Lozanovska, 1997). This movement gives a “blurred woman-effect”—a fetish of her lack of presence and therefore also her unattainability.

It is said that the body occupies space, and yet in this sense woman's body is preoccupied with/by space. Although it is specifically a corporeal preoccupation, in this...
scene it is one that depends on corporeal movement. A moving, not a static, corporeality is preoccupied with the empty spaces between architectural forms. In the binary division of architecture between form and space, women’s moving corporeality becomes the content that transforms the concept from abstraction to labour. Architecture’s reproduction as domestic space and inhabitable space is by and through woman’s corporeal labour.

Architectural representation dissolves a material order by suffocating the labours of the corporeal within the folds of white sheets that are later flattened out. If architecture is only sustained through the affects of the labours of the body, how can these affects enter discursive practice? In the film Dom Za Vesanje (by Emir Kosturica, 1988, produced in Bosnia-Herzegovina [ex-Yugoslavia]), there is a scene in which a model of the Milan Cathedral is wrapped and entangled in the red wool of the gypsy grandmother. It is such a vision, dreamlike and imaginary, that tells something of the affect, something of the impressions that woman’s labour so choreographically marks on the black-and-white geometry of the architectural plan.

Imaginary Relations of Love and Symmetry

Where on the plan of the village are the places where women meet? Often, the women are walking, perhaps just wandering, perhaps not. They meet somewhere, and they might sit on a pile of logs, an unused cart, some benches by a house. They “make do” with the site. In contradiction to their seemingly predestined, premapped lives, there are stories about movements and trajectories that traverse paths and places. These movements slip within the “geometric” ordering lines; they are tactical in that they sneak out of the scope of the panoptic vision of the village plan. They cannot be marked on the plan, unable to be reflected in the transparency of the rational white surface of the paper; they cannot be monitored because they do not really exist from that perspective. Women’s movements weave places together and effect a proliferation of meeting sites, making it impossible for the plan to sustain such an eruption of spaces. Such sites have no definition as place until the women meet there. Thus, women’s meeting sites are at once nonexistent, not on the plan, and yet exist everywhere in space. Through the construction of boundaries, geo-
metric enclosures, and proper paths, architecture establishes a representational frontier that has the effect of erasing these movements and these sites.

Conversations with the women initially centred on themes of hard work, poverty, marriage, and family and then, after a moment’s silence or laughter, came the secret pleasure about walking alone in the mountains. The architecture of the village pinned them to their place, widows forgotten by the world, but because power depends on visibility, these widows in black moved with the agility of those that know they cannot be seen.

This is what we live on. This fresh mountain air, this and the spring water we drink. We don’t eat much. It is the air we breathe that makes us healthy and fit and alive. (Subject A, interview, field research in Zavoj, 1988)

Kaj sakas si setas. Here we can go anywhere. If you want to go to the top of the village, down to the creek, if you want to go into the hills, we’re not afraid to go into the hills, we’ve learnt about this. (Subject B, interview, field research in Zavoj, 1988)

The sky isn’t up there: it’s between us. (Irigaray, 1985, p. 213)

These old women have chosen to live in the village on their own after their husbands have passed away rather than with their sons in the town. They would prefer to look after themselves, often walking up and down the 2-kilometre climb of the mountain gathering food. Why? It is not that they have led a parochial life; many have visited the smaller towns, and some have been abroad, to the dream cities of Diaspora. One woman described her impressions of Melbourne suburbs during her visit to her daughter’s house: zatvor, “prison,” she stated emphatically, always locked up inside, nowhere to walk.

What do we do with this response? What impact does it have on how we think? What does it mean to us? For the woman, it meant the return to her place, to the village, Zavoj. What is it to think cross culturally? Often, the women did not understand me.10

In the final photo, a woman is walking with a stick in one hand and sits somewhere, alone, in silence. We watch this image; it is Rodin’s The Thinker, emblem of Western civilization and reason. And yet it is not. She is a widow in black in an empty village, somewhere at the margins of the map of the global economy. We do not know what she is thinking. The subject of architecture evades our representation of the plan. Yet the architecture of the village is sustained in and through her spatial story.

Notes

1. Parts of this article have been investigated in earlier texts (including Lozanovska, 1995, chap. 5; 1989; 1999).
2. For a critique of maps and mapping, see chapter 3 in De Certeau (1984).
3. Space, in De Certeau (1984), is in contradistinction to place; it occurs as the effect of a number of intersecting spatial forces that may be in conflict and yet for that time produce a multivalent space, a space that is produced by specificity, by a situation, by a temporal event—a space that cannot be simply identified as a stable place. The tactical movements of the weak carry out a labour that constantly transforms places into spaces (De Certeau, 1984, p. 118). We may call these spatial practices, and a narration of them, spatial stories. This labour is persistent, subtle, tireless, ready for an opportunity, and scattered over the terrain of the dominant order.
4. Texts on “vernacular” or “primitive” architecture deploy the term “place” in a naturalised ahistorical way. Place is conflated with indigenous methods of building, and yet these methods are invariably contested by changing societies.
5. For two very different critiques of the effects of migration on the site of emigration, see John Berger (1975, part 3) and Michel de Certeau (1984, chap. 9).

6. See Sneja Gunew (1994) for a critique of the boundaries of (Australian) literature, which she argued is too quick to label and dismiss works of ethnic minority writers as "authentic migrant experience." Gunew interpreted the writings of "ethnic" writers because they produce innovative and complex networks between speaking positions, linguistic traditions, and subject constructions.

7. I use the term indifference here to note first a level of repression that is part of the method of the location of interest within global capitalist economies. It is a term that is associated with contemporary definitions of difference that "implies that each term exists in its own right" as a way of resisting the hierarchy of binary concepts (Grosz, 1989, p. xvii). In addition, it is a term that interrogates our conceptual imaginations as in Henri Lefebvre’s (1991, p. 170) investigation of the relationship between the body and space.

8. This phrase is a citation from Luce Irigaray’s (1985) psychoanalytic critique of the subject/object dichotomy.


10. The real and imaginary "placing" of the self in the text about Zavoj is the site at which identity is understood as a becoming rather than a fulfilment of a unity or a discrete form in relation to other forms. It is at this intersection between secret, private, and political selves, between culture, psychoanalysis, and the social, that cross-cultural thinking is a critical and productive possibility. Through the repetition of “going back,” the circling about our repressions, through the drive of imaginary memories, and through the fantasy of forging associations, new maps of attachments and engagements between author, self, others, and other places might be made possible.

References


Mirjana Lozanovska is a senior lecturer in the School of Architecture and Building at Deakin University, Australia.