

new luxuries: comfortable beds, hot showers, and last but not least, an iconic quality that allows its sponsor, the ETH Zurich, to situate itself on the cutting edge of environment-conscious technology.

In the diffuse sphere of atmospheric space, ecological abstinence melts by means of hedonism. The planned eco-cities in the oil states promise true miracles: you save the environment while skiing down a slope inside an energy-saving hall, just the way you support the economy in Europe by wrecking your old car and purchasing a new one. Technology brought us into this mess, technology will save us – architects and engineers proudly present their latest “green” products, and politicians need spectacular results urgently. It is interesting to see how the environmental projects that emerged from the era of cold war anxiety show similarity with more contemporary concerns regarding climate change and environmental erosion. From the urban dome over Manhattan, proposed by Buckminster Fuller, to Archigram’s bubbles, there is a continuous interest for different scales of a customizable protective climate.

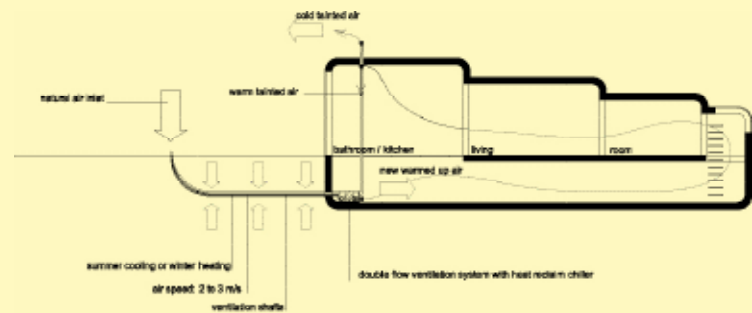
The notion of atmosphere, as discussed by the German philosophers Hermann Schmitz and more recently by Gernot Böhme, corresponds well to the interest in exploring the new interiors of global capital (Peter Sloterdijk). The concept can be understood as an attempt to thematize this dimension, which seems to resist scientific analysis and is easily overlooked as an everyday experience. To speak about atmospheres means to reject the usual reduction of perception to the merely visual. Atmospheres are neither exclusively subjective nor exclusively objective: they are invisible extensions of matter, they generate sensations, but at the same time they are not mere projections, they touch us as a real part of our environment.

The seductiveness of the “atmospheric” spaces in Swiss architecture – such as the thermal bath in Vals by Peter Zumthor or the Swiss pavilion of the EXPO 2000 in Hanover – shows a difference between an argumentation based on authenticity and the ethics of exquisite craftsmanship as a resistance to the cult of the spectacular in consumerist society, and the omnipresent traces of the architect as scenographer, creating and directing media attention. What makes Philippe Rahm’s understanding of atmosphere different is his total disregard for the issue authenticity. He chooses to emphasize the ecological correctness of his proposals, and remains silent about the desires of his “digestible Gulf stream”, a garden of Eden for the senses, which he exhibited in Venice. Which aspect of his proposal fascinates us? The hedonistic or the ascetic? Should we understand them as a call to save the Earth’s atmosphere or as knowledge of how to control our bodies? By isolating climate as the component of architecture which is generally neglected but in which he is interested, he conducts a scientific experiment, turns the house into a laboratory.

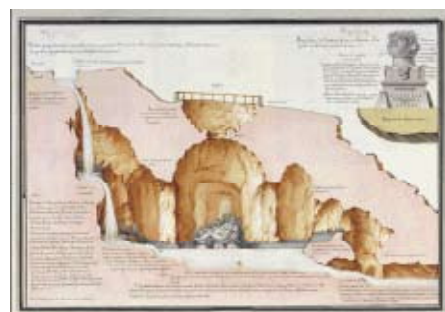
Under the conditions of the recent financial crisis we all feel like involuntary agents in an experimentation of global dimension. By declaring architecture meteorology, Philippe Rahm wants to provoke us: he wants architecture to finally realize the deficits of the almost obsessive search for meaning, and of positioning “meaning” and “understanding” almost exclusively within the realm of the visual. But he also calls attention to the responsibility of the architect to understand the delights and dangers of atmospheric utopias as invisible realms of power.

Climate, although generally understood as an element of nature, is also a cultural category and as such, frequently used to advance a wide range of interests – political, cultural, economical and so on. The year 1973 marked a first break with the dream of the society of excess, as signified by the image of erupting oil gushers. Facing the prevailing responses toward the melancholy of limited resources, the aesthetics of atmospheres might prepare the ground to a more responsible practice of daily living. Still, I understand the sub-title of this symposium, Towards an Atmospheric Architecture, not as a call for a diffuse environment of “wellness”, but to accept atmosphere as a condition of unpredictability, and take it as an invitation to experiment collectively on the conditions for our living. The blankness, the spatial void at the center of these works, through their strategic lack of signification, asks their inhabitant to make practical-living contributions, rather than projecting their ecological unconscious, their feeling of guilt in the form of aesthetic atmospheres. **ÁKOS MORAVÁNSZKY**

## DAVID GISSEN DANKNESS (UMIDITÀ)



**DAL MISTERO DEL SOTTERRANEO AGLI SCAVI PER LA VENTILAZIONE PASSIVA: UNA STORIA DELL'UMIDITÀ DEL SOTTOSOULO QUALE RAPPRESENTAZIONE ORIGINARIA DELL'ARCHITETTURA**



Sipotrebbe sostenere, in linea generale, che la teoria dell’“architettura” emerge in Occidente in relazione a un clima sfavorevole. Nell’ambito delle trattazioni di cui consta la teoria dell’architettura dal XVIII al XX secolo l’architettura appare originariamente come miglioramento dell’ambiente.

Dal razionalismo francese degli scritti di Laugier al materialismo tedesco delle teorie di Semper, i primi atti architettonici sono risposte all’“aria cattiva”, all’umidità sgradevole e malsana presente in determinate forme di abitazioni naturali – principalmente lo spazio freddo, buio e umido delle grotte naturali e artificiali. Laugier, per esempio, concepì la capanna primitiva come un miglioramento strutturale e climatico rispetto a questo tipo di ambiente naturale. Nella narrazione di Laugier è stata l’umidità a spingere letteralmente fuori dalle caverne l’uomo primitivo. Nella sua lettura della storia l’uomo finirà per erigere una struttura assai diversa concettualmente, strutturalmente e climaticamente dalla sua tana cavernosa. Il pensiero razionalista francese è pervaso da una generale ostilità nei confronti dell’umidità: Le Corbusier inveiva contro lo “spazio modesto” delle cantine, di cui ridicolizzava l’aria fredda e umida. I cinque punti di Le Corbusier possono essere considerati un’idea strutturale e formale, che prevede però anche un diverso trattamento del sottosuolo e della sua umidità.

Se i modernisti tendono generalmente a diffidare dell’umidità, alcuni di loro dimostrano un certo qual affetto per questo clima, se non altro perché è stato oggetto di studi approfonditi. Nei primi approcci modernisti al tema dell’umidità essa veniva considerata la culla di un’atmosfera mitica, di un’atmosfera che precede la modernità. Nel XX secolo, in particolare negli scritti di Bachelard, il sottosuolo umido

IN ALTO, **PHILIPPE RAHM, DIAGRAMMA DEL SISTEMA DI VENTILAZIONE DEL PROGETTO DI CONDOMINIO MODELLATO IN BASE AI FLUSSI CONVETTIVI.** A SINISTRA, **JEAN JACQUES LEQUEU, PROPOSTA DI CAVERNA, 1790 CIRCA.** A DESTRA, **GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI, SOSTRUZIONI DEL PONTE CHE CONGIUNGE LA RIVA DEL LAGO INTERROTTA DAL CANALE DELL'EMISSARIO, IN: LE ANTICHITÀ DI ALBANO E DI CASTEL GANDOLFO, ROMA, 1762-'64.**

TOP, **PHILIPPE RAHM, DIAGRAM OF AN APARTMENT VENTILATION SYSTEM BASED ON CONVECTIVE FLUXES.** LEFT, **JEAN-JACQUES LEQUEU, PROPOSAL FOR A CAVERN, AROUND 1790.** RIGHT, **GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI, ANCIENT WATERWORKS, LE ANTICHITÀ DI ALBANO E DI CASTEL GANDOLFO, ROME, 1762-'64.**

viene lodato proprio in ragione del suo carattere antimoderno. Bachelard desiderava rimettere in contatto con le profondità atmosferiche delle cantine il soggetto cosmopolita, urbano e modernizzato. Cogliamo, infine, sprazzi di lucido apprezzamento dell’umidità negli scritti e nelle idee di Anthony Vidler o Peter Eisenman; il loro interesse collettivo per lo scavo e il mistero degli spazi sotterranei ha funto da correttivo al progetto di razionalizzazione, ma ci ha anche spinto a rileggere le immagini delle caverne come spazi per la sua articolazione fisica.

Oggi, in nome dell’ambientalismo, gli architetti scavano il suolo allo scopo di liberare le sue particolari proprietà climatiche. I progetti di ventilazione passiva comportano spesso costruzioni sotterranee come ‘labirinti’ o ‘termosifoni’ che liberano l’aria fredda e umida della terra. La terra raggiunta dagli architetti è ormai così tecnologizzata e razionalizzata, così misurata e studiata da non contenere quasi più aspetti mitici o misteriosamente inquietanti. Ma questo ritorno al sostrato della terra apre altre possibilità. Invece che cercare nella terra una qualche qualità mitopoietica o misteriosa potremmo provare a sviluppare una nuova sensibilità, magari tentando di comprendere la terra dell’architettura e la sua umidità: dobbiamo finalmente riconoscere che anche l’umidità ha una storia. L’umidità non è solamente una qualità del terreno, è anche un’atmosfera storica – una rappresentazione climatica del passato dell’architettura. Il clima della terra, dell’umidità è cioè la rappresentazione originaria dell’architettura e della sua storia discorsiva. **DAVID GISSEN**

**FROM THE MYSTERY OF SUBTERRANEAN DEPTHS TO EXCAVATIONS FOR PASSIVE VENTILATION: THE STORY OF UNDERGROUND HUMIDITY AS AN OUTLINE OF THE ORIGINS OF ARCHITECTURE**

One can claim, with modest qualification, that “architecture” as it was theorized in the West, emerged relative to an unfortunate climate. Within the discourses that constitute the theory of architecture, stretching from the 18th to the 20th centuries, architecture appears in its first iteration as an atmospheric improvement. From the French rationalist writing of Laugier to the German materialist theories of Semper, the first architectural acts respond to the “foul atmosphere,” the dankness found in given forms of natural habitation – chiefly the cold, dark and wet space of caves and grottoes. Laugier, for example, imagined his primitive hut as both a structural and atmospheric improvement over this type of nature. Within Laugier’s narrative primitive man is literally driven from the cave by its dankness. In his story, primitive man will eventually erect a structure quite different in concept, structure and climate than his former cavernous lair. A general antagonism toward dankness extends throughout French, rationalist thought: Le Corbusier railed against the cellar’s “mediocre space” and ridiculed its moist and cold air and lack of light. One can interpret Le Corbusier’s Five Points as a structural and formal concept, but one that features a key reworking of the underground and its dankness.

While modernists generally held dankness in suspect, a few held a certain type of affection for this atmosphere, if only because it was an object of intense scrutiny. The

earliest modernist rapprochements with dankness saw it as the cradle of a mythical atmosphere, an atmosphere that preceded modernity. Within the 20th century, particularly in the writings of Bachelard, the dank underground is embraced precisely because it is such an anti-modern quality. Bachelard wished to bring the cosmopolitan, urban and modernized subject back in touch with the atmospheric depths of the cellar. Finally, we see fleeting senses of dankness in the writings and ideas of Anthony Vidler or Peter Eisenman; their collective focus on excavation and subterranean uncanny space served as a type of corrective to a project of rationalization, but it also returned us to images of grotto-like spaces for its physical articulation.

Today, in the name of environmentalism, architects are digging into the earth in an effort to release its particular climatic qualities. Passive ventilation schemes often involve underground constructions such as “labyrinths” or “thermosiphons” that release the earth’s cool and wet air. The earth that architects reach into is one that has been so technified and rationalized, so measured and considered, that it barely contains mythical or uncanny aspects. However, this return to the earth’s substrate enables other possibilities. Rather than turn to the earth to find a mytho-poetic or uncanny quality, we might develop a new sensibility. Perhaps we can understand the earth of architecture and its dankness through the lens presented within this brief essay. In other words, it is time that we understood dankness to hold history itself. Dankness is not only a quality of the ground; dankness is a historical atmosphere – a climatic representation of architecture’s past. The climate of the earth, of dankness, is the primal representation of architecture and its discursive history. **DAVID GISSEN**

It is time that we understood dankness to hold history itself

