

Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2006).

Human desire has shaped the built environment, sometimes in ways that today we judge as unsuitable for the common good. Representing ideologies and institutions like false idols, historical architecture has often contributed to repressive environments. Modernity has rightly judged this sort of building practice faulty and dangerous. As a pragmatic alternative it has proposed that buildings should fulfill the wishes of individuals in a democratic society: a desire for shelter and protection from the elements, for a home and a place to work where humans may live their lives in as pleasurable a way as possible.

Perez-Gomez argues that the materialistic and technological alternatives for architecture, however sophisticated and justifiable they may be in view of our historical failures, do not answer satisfactorily to the complex desire that defines humanity. Man's greatest gift is love, and he is invariably called to respond to it. Despite our suspicions, architecture has been and must continue to be built upon love. I will show how this foundation possesses its own rationality, one that the built environment will not follow if it is based on premises drawn from normative disciplines or abstract logical systems. While recognizing the dangers of traditional religions, moral dogmas, and ideologies, true architecture is concerned with far more than fashionable form, affordable homes, and sustainable development; it responds to a desire for an eloquent place to dwell, one that lovingly provides a sense of order resonant with our dreams, a gift contributing to our self-understanding as humans inhabiting a mortal world.

The overriding aim of this book is to interpret the relationship between love and architecture in order to find points of contact between poetics and ethics: between the architect's wish to design a beautiful world and architecture's imperative to provide a better place for society. Architectural meaning is interpreted beyond the traditional, often polarized understanding of aesthetics as an eighteenth-century science of beauty, and ethics as a collection of normative rules, clarifying architecture's quest for beauty and the common good. Ethics and aesthetics reduced to rules are useless: ethical action is always singular and circumstantial. It always seems miraculous and unique, a transformative experience that is significantly analogous to our encounter with beauty in works of art.

"Post-critical" discourses have expressed a deep dissatisfaction with formalist and "hard" computer-generated architectures as being unable to respond to the expectations of cultures in the early third millennium. For over two centuries, architects, critics, and theoreticians have been arguing functionalist and formalist positions, opposing art to social interests, ethics to poetic expression. Architectural writing ranging from popular professional journals to sophisticated theoretical books perpetuates this polarization that diminishes architecture's capacity to embody beauty and to

promote social development. In stepping away from these prevalent oppositions, this book uncovers the deep connections between ethical and poetic values in the primary tradition of our discipline.

Built upon love architecture engages the inhabitant as a true *participant*, unlike the remote spectator of the modernist work of art or the consumer of fashionable buildings *cum* images. If this is not obvious, it is partly because architectural meaning has been “explained” through a deceptively simple assumption that confuses our human quest for happiness with hedonism. Love, in its multiple incarnations as desire, is as open-ended as life itself and remains the ground of meaning even in times of obsessive materialism. According to Plato, this erotic principle is operative among human souls and everywhere in the universe. Yet, love and our transcultural quest for beauty will never be reduced to a mere pursuit of pleasure. A poor understanding of this issue is evident in recent writings foregrounding the interest in algorithms to generate novel architectural forms, in critical practices that stress the social history of architecture emphasizing political correctness and a critique of “authorship,” and even in architecture driven by well-meaning ecological concerns. A partial or total ignorance of the deep relationship between love and architectural meanings has dire consequences, perpetuating the modern epidemic of empty formalism and banal functionalism, condemning architecture to passing fashion or consumable commodity, and the cultures it frames to their present dangerous pathologies. This book shows how the appropriate engagement of desire through the articulation of ethical and political positions in the form of seductive projects is the fundamental responsibility of architecture.

The early lyric poets invented Eros, an invisible force that remains at the root of our capacity to create and comprehend the poetic image. Both Eros, the name of the divinity that accompanies Aphrodite (Venus for the Romans), and *philia*, the love of friendship that entails mutual responsibility among equals, was born during the cultural transformation that culminated in classical Greece. The first part of this book examines the nature of architectural form in the light of *eros*, seduction, and the tradition of the poetic image in Western architecture. Successive chapters examine relationships between *eros* and creation, *eros* and the Western understanding of space, *chora*, and limits, and the relationship between love and the primary modes of recognition and representation in architecture.

Philia, perhaps drawn from geometry by philosophers and politicians, is the emotional link that allows for the participation of equal citizens in the new democratic polity and its institutions, both sacred and profane. After a brief interlude arguing the common ground among seemingly diverse forms of love, the book discusses the connections between *philia* and architectural program, tracing its history through ritual and exploring the position of architecture at the limits of language. A chapter is dedicated to the examination of linguistic analogies that underscore the inception of modernist theories, followed by a comparative study of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century theories of the Viel brothers, who articulated complementary positions concerning the communicative capacity of architecture as a political act. The book concludes by drawing points of contact between ethics and poetics that can be gleaned for the contemporary practice of architecture under the sign of love, incorporating both *eros* and *philia*, drawing especially on the notion of the project as a promise driven by a quest to further humanity’s spiritual evolution.