

Tightness & Architecture: On Space, Fourier, and O'Hara (A Hidden Dialogue)

Nicholas Hauck and Fan Wu

In midsummer I watched Tonstartssbandht, a psychedelic rock band of two Florida brothers, play a miniature show in Yonge-Dundas Square.



Yonge-Dundas Square is Toronto's answer to Times Square: massively commercialized; pumped to the gills with ads; a tourist vista of the moneyed monoculture's glossy aesthetic.

I'd always been a spaced-out boy when it came to thinking about places with people inside them; the *architectural* loses ground where the *psychological* exerts its claim to my attention. Only when architecture fails as a space for community—when it's completely, unabashedly appropriated to the demands of capital—does it bring itself to bear on my thought.

At the concert, a crowd of twenty-somethings flanked the band, a predictable audience of skateboarders and second-gen hippies. But the humble show soon gathered a critical mass of its own and became a thoroughfare for non-hipster populations. Suburban moms and dads held hands while their daughters breakdanced. A town square schizophrenic didn't stop monologuing but started bopping to the beat. Roving teens dropped their bored fronts and nodded their heads to the scuzz, coming alive at least from neck up. Had I been so jaded by the political landscape that the mere mingling of unlike social realms caused a thrill of hope to run through me? Do these

little moments of ecstatic togetherness mean anything beyond the moment of their happening--need they?

So far, this is but a provocation to think about public space--and perhaps, given my training, to extend thinking through literature. (Even the McDonald's of my childhood, with its cheap red plastic and its pretenseless dinginess, is now covered with the exposed wood & stainless steel veil of money). A simple desire of mine: for public space to seduce us into difference both as the proximity to those whose forms of life are foreign to us, and as the excavation of perceptions priorly unseen, unfelt in the self.

*You're breathing so slowly that the wind is your mood
Knowing the reason you cry in your sleep
Dream us a season of the times will we weep
It goes: "I don't want to live in this anymore"
I hear a calling, a move, a tune, a window to a world
- Tonstarttsbandht, "Opening"*

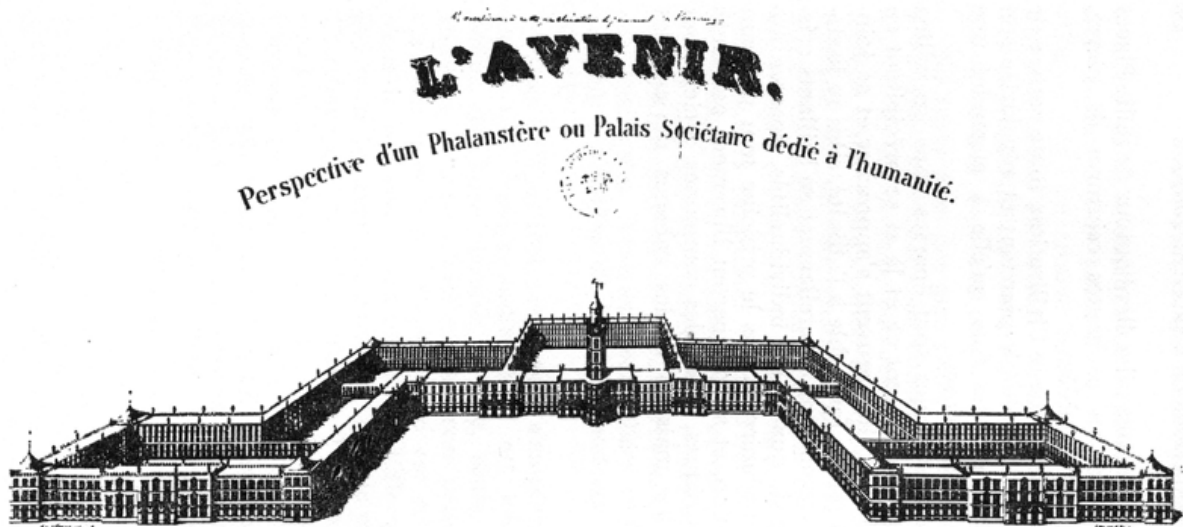
What might it mean to counterpoint built, architectural spaces with my own inner psychological architectures? What is it that makes *functioning* architecture—as opposed to *failing* architecture—establish a cerebral dominance over the physical world? I'm fascinated by the idea that when things work, they are, or become, invisible. Can one become aware of a perfected architecture, a seamlessly functioning system? I'm speaking in ideals, still... I've touched upon, or at least gestured toward, the potential seduction of space. But what to make of this desire premised on architecture's failure? What tools and processes—and their misuse—give rise to recognizably provocative spaces? Need *a window to a world* be fractured or scored for me to see through it? For me to see it? If so, then is the desire for the blemish to go away that which brings us back to the psychological vacuum? I wish I could live by Frank O'Hara's advice when he speaks of the architecture of a poem:

As for measure and other technical apparatus, that's just common sense: if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you. There's nothing metaphysical about it. Unless, of course, you flatter yourself into thinking that what you're experiencing is "yearning."

Tight enough. My habits, the things that I wear on my body and that wear on my body—this shirt, the wind from this afternoon, a comment from a friend, the gaze of a passer-by, the walls of this room—these things have to fit enough for desire to enter the room. Too loose, too far, too foreign, and what? Desire, and with it experience and the self, slip into the distance. Too tight, too uninterrupted, too enclosing, then what? Asphyxiation.

One of the most asphyxiated early 19th century French thinkers on social space, Charles Fourier, attempted to breathe new life into the architectures of eros. He imagined spaces structured equally by a respect for the other—which assumes distance and differentiation—and

cooperation with the other—which implies acceptance of the other, and even (a limited) selflessness. The liberation of individual passions underpins Fourier’s utopian project to the point where architectural structures—social, psychological, material—act in accordance with libidinal drives. Work becomes pleasure. Repression is presumably nonexistent. All human needs are met. The metaphysical “yearning” that O’Hara’s poetry rejects becomes a non-issue.



These structures get their name from the Greek word for a military unit (*phalanx*) and the French word *monastère*. This etymology brings to mind Plato’s dual ideal cities: one based on the rulership of enlightened individuals whose lives are devoted to study and scholarship; and another based on the rulership of elite guardians. In these terms, how can I reframe my experience of Yonge-Dundas Square, ruled as it is by elite corporations who’re no longer guardians of people, but of capital?

Fourier’s pants, though, were too tight. In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin writes about “the dialectic of the example: although the example as model is pedagogically worthless, if not disastrous, the gestic example can become the object of a controllable and progressively assimilable imitation, one that possesses the greatest significance.” Thus, Fourier’s “hedonistic materialism” as model is destined to fail. But is poetry, as gestic space, a counterpoint to the failure of the model? Can poetry provide the space for a lively, brainy erotics? I want to talk about the palatable architecture of thinking in book/printed form and the idea of pedagogy in the gestural sense. As in Barthes’ *How to Live Together*, where he defines *idiorrhythmy* as the real and imagined structurations required for *moments of ecstatic togetherness* to arise. Do these moments need meaning to persist beyond their here and now? They don’t need to carry significance beyond their time, but meaning isn’t the only thing to endure or linger.

Indeed, perhaps *pleasure* or *ecstatic togetherness* dawdles just most in those pockets where meaning has absconded. I could quote Barthes’s essay on Fourier forever, but I’ll select some choice morsels:

The motive behind all Fourierist construction is not justice, equality, etc., it is pleasure... Fourier's speech is itself sensual, it progresses in effusiveness, enthusiasm, throngs of words, verbal gourmandise (neologism is an erotic act, which is why he never fails to arouse the censure of pedants)... [For Fourier, we ought to] vary pleasure incessantly (never more than two hours at the same task), and from all these successive pleasures make one continuous pleasure.

I'd wager that Barthes is as much seduced by the architectures of Fourier's syntax as he is by the material specificity of his ideas. There can be no reinvention for imagined physical architectures without a corresponding innovation in the language of expression within those architectures.

We might say, with the weight of great speculation, that what I experienced during the concert's two hours of pleasure was pleasure as discontinuity carved out of the neurotic political architecture of Dundas Square, which, by ceaselessly telling us what to desire, assigns us a kind of desire squeezed dry of pleasure. The *window to a world*—the window to another structuration of society—shows the failure of existing architectures that stealthily invisibilize themselves due to our habituation to their existence.

In Fourier's world, desire might be construed as a calculation; this would rhyme with O'Hara's common-sense measurements toward letting desire in. But Fourier's calculation has the effect of exiling the considerations of individual desire by outfitting them in the schematics of collective desire. Repression must, of necessity, be nonexistent: the subpsychological realm of the unconscious is as much a threat to the social space of Fourier as the metaphysical is to the individual space of O'Hara.

And precisely on the point of repression's nonexistence, Barthes notes: *politics is what forecloses desire, save to achieve it exactly in the form of neurosis; political neurosis or, more exactly, the neurosis of politicizing.*

It's on the note of this conjunction of desire and the political that I'd beg myself to dwell on, and dwell within, my Benjamin fetish, or to locate for myself what Benjamin's point is in that sentence of his I quoted, to open up for myself what he means by *gesture*. Because I'm certainly attracted to Fourier's version of the world and curious about the critiques against its "hedonistic materialism." A utopianist's pants are inevitably too tight: it's this tightness that assures the cogency of a vision of utopia (a utopia being something theorizable at the structural level of a society, not at the level of wills and desires running amok.)

I'm torn between commenting on "repression must, of necessity, be nonexistent," and responding to my supplication to dwell in & within a Benjaminian gestural fetish for gesture. I think another poet will help me work through what I've said, followed by a collective unzipping with Fourier. This is from Andrew McMillan's *Playtime*:

*... later he will ask me
how many tattoos I have whether I have one
on my bum whether he can look to verify*

*my denial such innocence such freedom in asking
for the body of another I point him back
to the page there will be time for him for them all
to learn of the body's curve into awkwardness*

*to find their way into the rules and lessons
they will come to know by heart...*

In McMillan's poem, the speaker's refusal can be seen as a gestic example, the denial that emboldens the other—in his innocent freedom—to ask for the body to be revealed. The second gesture, pointing to the page, is more cavalier in its pedagogical tone, even if the rules and lessons are products of self-discovery. Assimilation and imitation are the operators. Echoing my wager of Barthes' twin seduction by Fourier's architecture and his architectural syntax—and I'm all in on my bet—by pointing *back to the page* (the text, the script, language) the body learns it is delicate and imperfect. I'd say this is when a kind of lived knowing—as opposed to an innocent acting—opens to the other, or the other's trace, the tattooed ass revealed without asking. The *curve into awkwardness* suggests an abandonment of the ideal or idealized self (Apollo, Form) to the eros of the other. I'd like to sit with this idea of curving toward or into desire along with Fourier's description of groups formed by attraction and their corresponding geometrical symbols. Here's an excerpt from Fourier's *The Theory of Passionate Attraction*, and the architectures/symbols of the groups formed by what he calls "passionate attraction":

At all times and in all places passionate attraction has tended and will tend toward three goals:

- 1. Toward luxury or the gratification of the five senses.*
- 2. Toward the formation of groups and series of groups, the establishment of affective ties.*
- 3. Toward the coordination of the passions, character traits, instincts, and consequently toward universal unity.*

... Second Aim: Groups and Series. Attraction tends to form four types of groups.

	<i>TYPE</i>	<i>SYMBOL</i>
<i>Major</i>	<i>Group of friendship</i>	<i>Circle</i>
	<i>Group of ambition, corporative tie</i>	<i>Hyperbola</i>

	<i>Group of love</i>	<i>Ellipse</i>
<i>Minor</i>	<i>Group of family</i>	<i>Parabola</i>

I'd like to focus on the group of love and its corresponding symbol, the ellipse. But first, let us notice how all four symbols with their varying arcs and bends stand in stark contrast to the angular architecture of fourierist buildings (the *phalanstères*). Is this geometric discord representative of what I say above, where Fourier exiles individual desire to the realm of the collective? Where the flexure and deflection of idiosyncratic appetites is made to align with the social linear, *get in line with the others?*

Mathematical definition of the ellipse: *a curve in a plane surrounding two focal points such that the sum of the distances to the two focal points is constant for every point on the curve.* For me this doesn't satisfy love formed by attraction. It's too neat. Like I say, it seems idealized; a space vacated of repression.

The ellipse as Rhetorical device: *To remove from a phrase a word which is grammatically needed, but which is clearly understood without having to be stated, often used to give the expression more liveliness.* The omission of words—like the denial of showing what is presumably an *intimate* symbol on the bum—becomes source of vigor, drive. A desired understanding based on what is *not* there. This is my fetish for the gesture, it is desire performed but not fulfilled, and maybe the only way to realize desire is through a performance which is both denial and possibility (for imitation, assimilation). The curved space of the gesture, and its plasmic architecture, let's say, can only be, or is best, explored in poetry. And so what correspondences can we think of between reimagined spaces and (new) poetic architectures? Or, to respond to my own call that *the curved space of the gesture can best be explored in poetry...*

I. I sit at the foot of his bed, the bed of this doctor who has been straight plaguing my mind. I'd been having problems with my vision, like there are feathers of light scattered through what I see. Sitting by his feet, too, I notice—though we've known each other for ten years—a new forcefulness behind his blinking, as though he (who works thirty-hour shifts at the hospital) were snatching at sleep in intervals of milliseconds, or relying on the pneumatic motion of his lids to keep him awake. Later that night we make something approximating sex; but what remains in my mind are the flickered-back shutters of his lids, disclosing to me an exhaustion he's too proud to admit, taking havocked shelter against his apartment's fluorescence, inviting me to take his lids into my arms and close them as only we, two boys who met each other in the quasar heat of our adolescence, might dream of closure...

II. I've met you in the apartments, changerooms, and alleyways of desire. In anonymous public spaces and in the cold bottoms of undrunk coffee. In delayed subways, footnotes and margins of my favorite books, and in the recycling just before someone took it away. You've showed up in mid-week casseroles and I've spotted you, more than once, in the condiments aisle. For a brief period, you watered the succulents before they

went plastic. Those pencils you brought? Still sharp as ever. As a tourist, I remember brushing up against you. As a visitor, it was a handshake, or rather a formal embrace, that cued the thought *I've met you somewhere before, but the space is not the same*. Can I hold you anyways and make up for what wasn't said?

III. *Minor group of love*. Adam... you who were the first man, mind you not *my* first man but who's counting, but the first man who stopped me midway to the barroom bathroom to say, in that nervous way I should know better than to ascribe to WASP boys but don't, to say "have I ever told you 'I love you?'" It bears repeating, your phrase: "have I ever told you I love you?" Have I ever made my love for you known—or, heard differently, have I ever uttered that innocent packet of words "I love you"? It is a way of saying *I love you* all the while denying the phrase the naked emptiness of content that is its force. I still remember the hearty green of the hallway in which you said love by not saying it, and the backwash taste of baloney in my mouth. I can't remember what I said back to you (an ellipsis to protect the ideal of your speech in its register of disclosing its own withdrawal), but it was something to the tune of *of course*: was it *of course you love me* or *of course I love you*?



IV. Paul Alamásy's kitsch photo of a couple dancing under the Pont au Change while an imperial "N" haunts the background. This is where I come when Paris is wet. I discern the bridges arches from the memories of arched dancing bodies, then a voice: "Do you come here often?" The bridge's glow makes him look like he's on the set of a Caravaggio porno: head forever tilted up to angelic light, dark eyes gazing down, mouth agape *just enough*, loose grey cloth standing in for a shirt falling off a right shoulder, thin dark tangles of hair invading a porcelain face. "I'm Fabrice," he says. Works with his hands. We sit on the edge and hang our feet, almost touching the water, the *tableau's* penultimate sketch. He tastes familiar, not experientially but phylogenetically. My tongue sketches the shape of his city; my mind builds a diagrammatic history of his evolution. On the stones, our humid imprint. A blueprint for the next dance? Napoleonic *fraternité* at its best? Who came here first, often?

V. *The denial that emboldens the other to ask for his body to be revealed.* What is the precise curvature of a kiss, a fuck? It's sublime to be together and yet—you can beg for sex to be communion, but what it is is two people going down one escape hatch that holds within two tunnels leading into two completely distinct inner worlds. You can ask as hard as you like in your most urgent voice for a body to be revealed, but all you do is tunnel back into your own fantasy. You're headed further and further from each other, under the illusion you've gone to the same place, when all you've shared is the fact of an escape hatch.