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The Double

The concept of *the double* has long fascinated—and unsettled—philosophers, psychologists, and artists, emerging as a site of tension between self and other, reality and illusion, truth and distortion. *The double* operates as a bizarre paradox—identical yet different, a reaffirmation yet an erasure. At once a mirror and a rupture, it both confirms and undermines what it replicates, exposing the fragility of authenticity, permanence, perception, and authorship. At its core, *the double* reveals that nothing—whether an idea, creation, being, or system—is ever truly singular or self-contained.

For Plato, *the double* is a fundamental problem of representation. He argues that all representation is merely a copy of a copy—an imitation of the material world, which itself is an imperfect reflection of the realm of immutable Forms, the ideal and perfect versions of all things. Twice removed from truth, *the double* deceives, seducing the senses and distancing us from knowledge. Yet if something can be duplicated, doesn't that imply its essence was never singular to begin with? Plato assumes an original, stable truth, yet *the double* challenges that very premise, revealing meaning as constructed, mediated, and unstable. *The double* does not merely distort truth—it unravels the illusion of truth itself.

Freud places *the double* at the heart of the *uncanny*, unsettling us because it is both familiar and strange. A reflection that appears to take on a life of its own fractures our belief in a stable self. Lacan extends this idea, arguing that *the double* is central to subject formation. In the *mirror stage*, an infant misrecognizes its reflection as a unified self—an illusion of wholeness that forms the *ego*, even as the real self remains fragmented. *The double*, thus, is both an idealised projection and a false image, creating an endless tension between *ego* and *alter ego*, self-perception and the divided subject.

Baudrillard pushes the concept further, arguing that *the double* is no longer just a reflection of reality but has become reality itself. If Plato saw imitation as a distortion of truth, Baudrillard contends that in postmodern culture, the copy has replaced the original. In a hyperreal world saturated with representation and reproduction, reality dissolves into simulation. *The double* no longer refers to an original—it becomes self-sustaining, endlessly circulating with no fixed connection to external truth.

For Derrida, *the double* is not a copy but a disruption that exposes the instability of meaning. His concept of *différance* suggests that meaning is never fully present but always deferred. *The double* does not confirm an original but deconstructs it, revealing that everything is already a repetition of something else. Rather than a faithful reproduction, it is a fracture of meaning, a mark of instability that reshapes what it replicates.

Deleuze, in contrast, sees *the double* not as a deconstruction of an original but as *difference in itself*. No copy is ever truly identical to its source; every repetition introduces variation, transformation, and instability. *The double*, then, is not a reflection but a mutation, a becoming-other—an act of creation rather than mere duplication. It never remains the same; it continuously escapes itself, multiplying meaning rather than fixing it.

Blanchot takes *the double* into the realm of absence and negation. For him, doubling is not just replication but erasure—a haunting presence that signals something missing. In literature and art, it often appears as a shadow, a ghost, or a doppelgänger, suggesting that the *original* was never fully there to begin with. To be doubled is also to be undone, forcing us to question whether an original ever truly existed or if it was always a construct upheld by belief in its singularity.

The double, then, is neither simple repetition nor pure opposition. It is a state of tension- between being and non-being, meaning and its unravelling. It reminds us that everything we see, create, or define is always subject to doubling. Whether through deception, simulation, deconstruction, difference, or negation, *the double* unsettles our claims to reality, compelling us to reconsider what is real, what is constructed, and what lingers in the liminal space between.

From Louis Kahn's "unified whole" and Robert Venturi's "difficult whole" to Kersten Geers' "difficult double," ***COTAA 2/2025*** explores the complexity and contradictions of *the double* in architecture. What follows is an open-ended pinboard of ideas and provocations—an invitation to question and rethink the possibilities of *the double*.

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Photo of a Model of a Model in a Photo

Thomas Demand's photographs challenge our trust in images, exposing the gap between appearance and reality.

Demand is a creator of worlds. He painstakingly builds paper models based on scenes from the media or historical archives—often referencing key moments in Germany's history—but with a twist. Stripped of people and historical markers, his scenes feel strangely generic. He constructs these models at 1:1 scale, ensuring every detail matches his vision, then photographs them with a large-format camera to make them look as real as possible. The kicker? Once the photograph has been taken, the model is destroyed.

What's left are images that feel disturbingly real but, on closer inspection, reveal their artificiality. Pencil marks, exposed edges, and uniform lighting expose them as carefully constructed illusions. It's what Freud would call "uncanny"—what appears familiar at first becomes strangely off-putting the more you examine it. The more you look, the more you realize the images are hollow reconstructions, not direct slices of reality.

Take *Modell/Model*, for example. At first, it seems like a simple architectural model—a stark white, boxy structure on a drafting table in a featureless room. But the punchline is missing; in fact, this is a recreation of a Nazi-era photo of Hitler and architect Albert Speer inspecting the German Pavilion model for the 1937 Paris Exposition. By removing the characters, symbols, and everything that would tie the image to its historical context, Demand leaves behind a ghostly, decontextualized scene.

The pavilion itself was a political power move. Hitler was furious when the French placed the German pavilion across from the Soviet one, featuring a socialist sculpture of a man holding a hammer and a woman holding a sickle. Speer retaliated with a taller structure, topped with an eagle and swastika. Though the exposition promoted peace, this rivalry foreshadowed the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact and the war that followed. Demand's *Modell/Model*, created in 2000, taps into debates about the problematic nature of national pavilions at world fairs, sparked by Expo 2000 in Hannover.

Demand's work directly addresses Plato's theory that art is a "copy of a copy," disconnected from truth. Plato argued that art is a mere imitation of an object, which itself is a copy of the ideal Form of that object. In *Modell/Model*, we're faced with a photograph of a model of a model in a photo. How far from the *truth* can you get? Demand forces us to question the artificiality of what we think is real, challenging photography, history, and truth itself. In Demand's world, seeing is *not* the same as knowing.

Blinded by the Light

A flash is not only a photography tool that bursts light to brighten dark scenes or freeze fast-moving action but is also a very powerful metaphor. Psychologists use the term "flashbulb memories" to describe vivid, emotionally charged mental snapshots of major events. Like a camera flash, these memories capture moments of deep social significance, imprinting them onto our collective consciousness.

In 2003, Belgrade media artist Milica Tomić took the concept of "flashbulb memories" and turned it on its head with her light installation *National Pavilion* for the Serbian and Montenegrin pavilion at the 50th Venice Art Biennale.

After the Yugoslav Wars led to the breakup of Yugoslavia, the newly formed State Union of Serbia and Montenegro inherited the old Yugoslav pavilion at the Biennale. However, as a listed historical monument, the building's architecture—including its massive JUGOSLAVIA inscription—couldn't be altered. Yugoslavia was gone, but its name still loomed over the pavilion like a ghost that refused to fade.

Tomić decided to light the whole thing up—literally. She outfitted the pavilion's façade with 400 custom-made flash units, all wired together, set to go off every minute. The flashes created a blinding burst of light, making the pavilion vanish in the dazzle. The intensity of the light temporarily blinded viewers, throwing them into an optical shock. As their eyes recovered, the flashes fired again, keeping the pavilion hidden in a never-ending cycle of blindness. The result? The pavilion—a symbol of a defunct state—was wiped from view. Swallowed by the light, it remained constantly invisible.

With her intervention, Tomic turned the violence of nationalism back onto the pavilion itself, the very embodiment of nationalist discourse. For Tomic, the only true "flashbulb memory" of the Yugoslav Wars isn't an emotional snapshot—it's the flash itself. Nationalism's blinding light doesn't reveal anything; it just plunges everything into darkness. Wars, she suggests, are irrational and incomprehensible, and the flashes of gunfire and explosions blind us to human suffering and the darkness of death.

Façade

Mark Wallinger's installation *Façade* (2001) at the British Pavilion in Venice was one of the most striking architectural interventions ever staged at a national pavilion. By entirely covering the pavilion's front with a life-size colour photograph of itself—printed on vinyl-coated fabric and mounted on scaffolding—*Façade* blurred the line between reality and representation, challenging perception, identity, and the ambiguity of appearances.

Known for his satirical critiques of Britishness, Wallinger often explores themes of mirroring and illusion, questioning how belief systems shape our understanding of the world. His fascination with doubles—both literal and conceptual—reflects a broader investigation into the fluidity of identity and the illusions that sustain cultural and political narratives. Drawing on Freud's concept of the "uncanny" and the existential and cultural implications of the doppelgänger, Wallinger exposes the fragility of both individual and national identity.

Wallinger's Venice exhibition functioned as a single immersive installation, seamlessly integrating new and existing works to explore the intersections of faith, meaning, and perception. *Façade* served as the entry point to this experience, disorienting visitors by making them step through an image of the very building they were about to enter. The illusion referenced the common practice of using photographic billboards to conceal renovations, yet unlike these practical applications, the British Pavilion was not under construction—its covering served only to reflect its own image.

By leaving visible the seams of the printed façade and the scaffolding that held it up, Wallinger deliberately exposed the artifice behind both his illusion and the illusions of state power. The work also plays on the dual meaning of the word *façade*: both the front of a building and a deceptive outward appearance of someone or something. The British Pavilion, with its imperial symbolism, becomes the subject of Wallinger's critique, as *Façade* subverts its grandeur, transforming it into a flat, hollow projection.

Drawing on Bataille's view that architecture is inseparable from power, Wallinger dismantles the British Pavilion's constructed authority, revealing it—both literally and metaphorically—as nothing more than a *façade*. In doing so, he challenges our trust in appearances, exposing how identity—whether national, personal, or cultural—is not merely expressed but continuously performed and reinforced.

The Chance Encounter of Mies and J.C.Decaux at a Bus Stop

When invited to design a pavilion for the 1990 *What a Wonderful World* exhibition—where five renowned architects created structures across Groningen to showcase music videos—Rem Koolhaas proposed something with lasting utility: a bus stop where commuters could pass the time waiting for their bus by watching interesting clips.

Bus stops usually come in pairs, positioned on opposite sides of the street. Koolhaas originally envisioned two identical shelters facing each other, their mirrored effect heightened by a sharply asymmetrical composition. In the end, only one was built. But this wasn't just another prefab mix of glass and steel—Koolhaas wanted an "impossibly dignified" structure. Inspired by pop music's remix culture—rearranging and altering elements of a recording to create something new—he reimagined Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion as a bus stop in a rainy Dutch city, playfully referencing its tropes while stripping away its mystique. The outcome? A striking blend of elegance and irreverence. A solid marble wall is counterbalanced by a chromium-plated cruciform steel column, both supporting a floating glass roof. A red velvet curtain shields commuters from the elements. Yet behind this luxurious drape lurks a television screen, a deliberately jarring contrast to the purity and distinction of the materials. On the exterior of the marble wall, oversized metal letters spell out words linked to music video aesthetics: *Humour*, *Sentiment*, *Politics*, *Hi-Tech*, *Dance*, *Erotics*, *Exuberance*, *Glamour*, *Specials*... Small, discreet holes in the marble wall let sound seep through, luring people toward the screen—inviting them to stop, watch, and perhaps, in the end, miss their bus entirely.

Shrouded in White: A Phantom House

In 1912, Mies van der Rohe had the opportunity to compete for the commission to design a residence for the Dutch art-collecting power couple, Kröller-Müller. Like Peter Behrens before him, Mies was asked to create a full-scale, 1:1 model of his design on the actual site. The couple wasn't convinced by small models or plans; they wanted the real deal, in all its full-sized glory. A photo of the gigantic model in the landscape eventually appeared in the catalogue Philip Johnson put together for MoMA's first Mies exhibition in 1947. Rem Koolhaas, in *S,M,L,XL*, said it looked "bizarre – as if a graft between two realities had not taken." And he's not wrong—it did. The ghost house has spawned its fair share of myths. According to Johnson's less-than-accurate recollections (cited by Koolhaas), the published photo was considered to be a collage. When Koolhaas asked Johnson about it, he just shrugged it off, claiming he had "invented" the whole story and that the photo was a fake. But letters from Helene Kröller-Müller herself show that, in the fall of 1912, Mies was working tirelessly to create this wooden and canvas model. He painted it white and personally added hand-painted brickwork onto it. The creation of this "canvas cathedral" was driven by the Kröller-Müllers' artistic whims, their seemingly unlimited financial resources, and Mies's own desire to secure the commission. What we ended up with is a story that straddles the line between architectural ideal and full-on fantasy. Meanwhile, the Kröller-Müllers had also asked Hendrik Petrus Berlage to come up with a parallel design. When Berlage's project was done, it was praised as "art," while Mies's design was dismissed as "not." Naturally, Mies cut professional ties with the couple. The Kröller-Müllers then hired Berlage exclusively for the next decade, during which he landed several commissions—but oddly, the dream house was never built.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

"But if I'm not the same, the next question is, who in the world am I?"

On Remakes, or The Futility of Architectural Originality

A remake—a "new version of an existing film"—typically follows the same story as the original but often alters characters, genre, pacing, setting, or theme. It also incorporates filmmaking technologies (like sound recording or colour cinematography) that weren't available when the original was made. Remakes are like cinematic twins, constantly compared to one another: which of the two is more visually appealing? Which one is smarter?

One particular kind of remake is when the original director returns to the project. For example, Yasujirō Ozu remade his own black-and-white *A Story of Floating Weeds* as the colour *Floating Weeds*. Alfred Hitchcock did the same with his 1934 black-and-white *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, remade in colour in 1956.

Another distinct type is the shot-for-shot remake, where the new version closely mirrors the original, with only minimal changes. A famous example is Gus Van Sant's 1998 remake of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), which mirrors the original in nearly every detail, including the script, score, camera movements, and editing, but is filmed in colour.

Then there's Michael Haneke's *Funny Games U.S.* (2007)—a striking and most extreme case because it's a shot-for-shot remake of his own 1997 German-language *Funny Games*. Unlike Ozu or Hitchcock, who remade but also reworked their films, Haneke's version is nearly identical to the original, with the same decor, props, and tone, but set in the United States with a different cast. His two films are so meticulously matched that one critic noted the only real difference is the size of the mobile phones. Haneke's remake is an exercise in precision, so much so that the two films feel almost indistinguishable.

Shot-for-shot remakes are like identical twins—cinematic doubles—and *Funny Games U.S.* is the most unsettling of them all. Despite being artistically identical in every respect, the crews for the two films were entirely different (apart from Haneke and a makeup artist). By trusting his original vision so completely, Haneke seemed to be making a statement about auteur theory, proving that *his* artistic voice—unchanged—is what gives the film its power.

But was this effort necessary? While the remake could be seen as superfluous, the question of whether *Funny Games U.S.* was "necessary" isn't really the point—what matters is that it is simply an excellent film. A great artwork (architecture included!) stands on its own and debating whether its creator should have spent time remaking it almost identically feels, in the end, unnecessary.

On Alternate Cuts

Like architecture, filmmaking is a complex endeavour—requiring a vast team, meticulous coordination, and a big budget. Despite an author's best intentions, things can go berserk, and the final product may turn out to be a failure.

A *director's cut* is the version of a film that reflects the director's original vision, often differing significantly from the *theatrical release*, which may have been altered by producers, studios, or distributors. Since directors don't always have *final cut* privileges—the authority to determine the final version shown to audiences—financial stakeholders may impose changes to make the film more commercially viable. These modifications can range from reworking endings and reducing ambiguity to trimming runtime for more daily screenings. In many cases, studio interference results in a fundamentally different—and often inferior—film.

One of the most infamous examples is *Heaven's Gate* (1980). Upon release, Michael Cimino's epic was critically panned and considered one of the worst films ever made. However, in 2012, a 216-minute *director's cut* was released to universal acclaim. Critics who once dismissed the film as a disaster now hailed it as a masterpiece, calling its studio-mangled release "one of the greatest injustices

in cinematic history."

Beyond director's cuts, there are *special editions* or *extended cuts*, sometimes released without the original director's involvement. The most extreme case is Tinto Brass's *Caligula*, which exists in at least ten officially released versions. These range from a heavily censored, sub-90-minute television edit to an unrated, fully pornographic cut exceeding three and a half hours. Despite the abundance of versions, none have redeemed the film's reputation—it remains excruciatingly bad in every form.

Sometimes, our doubles outshine us. Many times, they are worse—the dreaded *evil twin!*—and sometimes, they're just as stupid as we are.

Architectural Zombies

This is a story of resurrection—or is it preservation? —of two of modern architecture's most mythical icons.

Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion, built in 1929 and demolished in 1930, was meticulously reconstructed in 1986 on its original site using similar materials. Kazuo Shinohara's Umbrella House took a more circuitous route; built in Tokyo in 1961 in a secret location to protect its owners' privacy, it remained entirely inaccessible to outsiders until it was dismantled in 2020, shipped to Switzerland in 2021, and reassembled in 2022 at the architectural theme park of the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein.

Before their physical reconstructions, both buildings "existed" primarily through carefully curated black-and-white photographs—images deliberately chosen by their architects to circulate in the architectural media. These pictures frame the buildings as pure conceptual spaces— geometry without matter, space without place— seemingly liberated from the material constraints that typically govern architecture. The images did not portray "real" things, but rather ideals—pure abstractions made manifest.

But what does it mean to preserve an abstraction? The act of reconstruction—giving these buildings a publicly tangible presence—is paradoxically what makes them problematic. Does reuniting form and matter elevate them to a higher state, like a kind of architectural transubstantiation? Or is it an act of desecration? And when we visit these now-accessible structures, do they align with our mental image of them? The canonical photographs concealed all imperfections, everyday wear, and mundane details of the original buildings. They projected a perfected version that never truly existed—a phantomatic architectural mirage.

By only partially satisfying Aristotle's four fundamental "causes" (*aitia*) that are essential for explaining an object's complete nature—form, matter, origin, and purpose—the two reconstructed masterpieces become something even more elusive: double "doubles."

In Haitian folklore, a zombie is a corpse reanimated through Vodou rituals—a soulless, undead, corporeal revenant. In the name of the modern cult of preservation, the Barcelona Pavilion and the Umbrella House have been exhumed from the sacred vault of architectural memory, resurrected as something eerily familiar yet fundamentally changed: architectural zombies—stripped of their original magic, animated but no longer truly alive.

Clairvius Narcisse

Fictional zombies may remain undead, but in the real world, at least one "zombie" claimed to have returned to life.

Clairvius Narcisse, a Haitian man, was pronounced dead in 1962 and buried, only to reappear 18 years later. He claimed that a Voudou sorcerer, or *bokor*, had exhumed and turned him into a zombie slave. After the *bokor*'s death, Narcisse

regained his “soul” and returned to his family in 1980. The prosaic scientific explanation suggests that Narcisse was paralyzed by a sham sorcerer with a neurotoxin, inducing a death-like coma. Aware but immobile, he was buried alive, later dug up, drugged into a zombie-like state, and enslaved. He regained his sanity once the *bokor*’s drugs were no longer administered.

“Architectural zombies” can also be temporarily revived. Since 1996, the Fundació Mies van der Rohe has invited artists and architects to stage full-scale immersive *Art Interventions* in the Barcelona Pavilion, treating it as a ready-made to be reframed in unfamiliar ways. Among other temporary acts, artist Ai Weiwei replaced the water in the ponds with milk and coffee, architect Andrés Jaque unearthed and exhibited objects from the pavilion’s hidden basement, and photographer Jordi Bernadó removed its glass doors.

In 2008, SANAA introduced a spiralling, full-height transparent acrylic wall that resembled an “invisible curtain.” While the Mies Pavilion already plays with reflections, SANAA’s addition caused new reflections to multiply progressively along its undulating, seamless surface, irreverently bending and distorting our perception of the pavilion’s iconic interior.

In 2017, Anna & Eugeni Bach enveloped the Mies van der Rohe Pavilion in a uniform layer of white vinyl, stripping it of its materiality. This “homogenising whiteness” transformed the Pavilion into a mere representation of itself, like a full-scale white architectural model or a walk-in perspective, reminiscent of Mies’ laconic photo-collages.

Only by “magically” doubling the already doubled “doubles” (a true philosophical vortex!) can zombified architectural masterpieces be truly brought back to life.

PS: Clairvius Narcisse died for real in 1994, at the age of 72

Artificial Stupidity

AI creations are never truly “new”—they are merely recombinations, or “doubles,” of the images, sounds, and texts stored in the vast databases on which AI is trained. Some might mistake AI-generated work for original simply because no human could possibly trace the countless fragments of existing data that AI reshuffles into something seemingly novel. But does this lack of originality make AI stupid? Or is AI stupid precisely because it learns from the flawed, mediocre, and outright terrible human production that dominates its datasets? And if 99% of all architecture ever built is “bad,” how can we possibly amass a large enough training database of “great” architecture for AI to generate good, even if unoriginal, designs?

Showers Which Smelled as Bad as the Inside of the Pyramids

The possibilities of fictional (utopic, atopic, dystopic) spaces or hypothetical (uchronic) timelines allow for a distorted mirroring (doubling) of real-world conditions.

For example, amid the endless and often overly serious debates on reconstructing the Barcelona Pavilion, OMA offered a humorous counterpoint with an irreverent *uchronia*—an alternate history of the pavilion’s fate.

In this fictional tale, the pavilion—initially left as a temporary gift to Spain—was soon forgotten in the midst of political turmoil and war. It briefly served as Republican headquarters before being abandoned and damaged in battle. The new regime dismantled it, packed it into crates, and sent it back to Germany by train. There, it was used as a set for propaganda films before its stone was repurposed as flooring in a government ministry’s service entrance. After the war, the marble was salvaged, and the remaining pavilion materials were eventually unpacked and used to build a locker room for a GDR sports complex.

Decades later, a researcher discovered fragments of the pavilion in the shower room, sparking negotiations that led to its return to Barcelona in exchange for "one medium-sized computer and the secret design of a machine gun."

This uchronic double took physical form in *Casa Palestra*, OMA's reinterpretation of the Barcelona Pavilion as a space for the celebration of physical culture, exhibited inside the Triennale di Milano Palace. Embodying Rem Koolhaas's paradoxical stance, "I don't respect Mies. I love Mies," OMA's version of the Barcelona Pavilion was bent to fit the horseshoe-shaped curvature of the Triennale building.

Reality Check in Tirana

Architectural visualizations are powerful persuasion tools, used to win competitions, secure planning approvals, convince developers to build, and entice buyers. As marketing instruments, their purpose is not to provide an accurate preview of a future building but to sell a seductive, idealized narrative—one where architecture never ages, users are always smiling, the skies are perpetually bright, and greenery is forever lush. However, in many cases, the relationship between a building and its rendering mirrors that of Dorian Gray and his portrait but inverted: the unsightly reality becomes the hideous double of the beautiful image.

Some projects are constructed so poorly that no amount of careful photography or retouching can salvage their image, leaving only the renderings as the sole pictorial evidence of their existence. In extreme cases, architects even hide the fact that a building was ever completed, preferring to indulge in the fantasy of the rendering over the disappointment of reality. One such example is the Ardia Palace residential tower by Valerio Olgiati in Tirana. Completed with significant deviations from the original design, it has been circulated exclusively through its renderings, as if the built version doesn't exist at all.

The degree of realism in a visualization also plays a key role in this dynamic. The less photorealistic the image, the more it becomes an autonomous expression of the architects' overall intentions, rather than a literal representation of the final structure. This is why Baukuh's apartment building in Tirana's Xhezmi Delli, despite also undergoing major changes during construction, could still be presented alongside its original collage visualization—the famous black-and-white one with the elephant—without feeling like a deception.

The lesson? The further your building is from Switzerland, the more you should avoid hyper-realistic renderings and temper any far-fetched authorial expectations of narcissistic, pristine, and eternal beauty. After all, we all know how Wilde's novel ends.

Lost to the Mirror World

Naomi Klein, a left-wing cultural theorist, was inspired to write *Doppelgänger: A Trip into the Mirror World* after the unsettling experience of being repeatedly mistaken online for right-wing influencer Naomi Wolf—and vice versa. Despite sharing the same first name, being public figures, writing extensively, and engaging in political activism, the two women hold entirely opposing views. Klein is a progressive and a staunch advocate for democracy and an open society, while Wolf is known for endorsing alt-right ideologies, promoting anti-vaccine rhetoric, and spreading conspiracy theories. This led Klein to ask a crucial question: How could she be mistaken for what she sees as her "double," the "other Naomi"?

To answer this, Klein delves into what she calls the "mirror world"—a parallel universe of conspiracy theories, disinformation, and media manipulation that mimics the real world but operates by an entirely different logic. In this space, facts are distorted, truth becomes relative, and fabricated narratives merge

seamlessly with reality. Klein argues that the mirror world thrives in echo chambers, where individuals reinforce each other's beliefs—no matter how extreme or unfounded—while dismissing or ridiculing opposing viewpoints.

The mirror world is fuelled by alternative media—social media platforms, YouTube channels, and podcasts—where fringe theories spread unchecked. These outlets bypass traditional journalism standards, allowing misinformation to flourish. At its core, the mirror world is built on conspiracy theories—alternative explanations for global events rooted in deep mistrust of mainstream institutions. Common themes include government cover-ups, shadowy elites manipulating world affairs, and hidden agendas shaping public life.

In this space, influencers gain prominence by offering simplistic, emotionally charged answers to complex issues. Their rhetoric provokes outrage, fear, and a sense of victimization, cultivating a loyal following resistant to criticism or opposing views. Emotional manipulation takes precedence over rational discourse, and challenges to their narratives are swiftly dismissed. This deep-seated tribalism replaces meaningful debate with ideological warfare, reducing politics to score-settling and escalating hostilities.

Klein warns that, while the mirror world may seem absurd or "too ridiculous to take seriously," its consequences are real and far-reaching. The disinformation it spreads shapes public opinion, influences elections, and destabilizes societies. For Klein, the mirror world is "too serious to be ridiculous" and demands careful study—if only because so many of us have witnessed the uncanny transformation of once-rational, familiar people—including trusted intellectuals, commentators, and even close friends—into unrecognizable figures, trapped in an alternate reality, lost to the mirror world.

One to One

In 1952, Carlo Scarpa designed a small sculpture garden for the central pavilion of the Venice Biennale, transforming an existing room by removing its roof. This opened up the space to the sky, which was reflected in serene ponds surrounding a free-standing reinforced concrete pergola, *La Pensilina*. The structure consisted of three eye-shaped pillars, each oriented in a different direction, supporting a cantilevered roof with a contour shaped by three curves of varying diameters. The roof appeared to float above visitors, almost defying gravity. This illusion was created by detaching the roof from its vertical supports, positioning each pillar halfway beneath the roof's edge, and resting the weight of the roof on small, barely visible steel spheres placed atop the pillars.

Half a century later, the structure had weathered and begun to deteriorate. For the 2003 Venice Biennale, Gabriel Orozco created the gigantic work *Shade Between Rings of Air*, a one-to-one, unpainted birchwood replica of Scarpa's *La Pensilina*. Orozco's piece was installed in a white gallery opening into Scarpa's sculpture garden. The two structures were aligned at a 90-degree angle to one another, allowing visitors to compare and contrast them. Orozco was particularly interested in the experience of walking between the weathered original and the pristine replica. This juxtaposition of the original and its double created a liminal space, blurring the boundaries between past and present, permanence and ephemerality.

By using wood instead of concrete, Orozco's work suggested that it could be interpreted as an architectural model, triggering an unexpected temporal relationship in which it followed the finished architecture, rather than preceding it. Yet, his piece also functioned as an idealized, Platonic model. This paradoxical temporality, where the model both precedes and follows the original, subverts conventional notions of linear time, making the past visible through the newly fabricated present.

Orozco's replica revitalized the overlooked and neglected original by

recontextualizing it, highlighting its sculptural qualities and challenging the boundaries between architecture, sculpture, and memory. Orozco described his work as a "ruin in reverse," where the reproduction reversed the decay of time, making the past newly present and relevant.

After the Biennale, Orozco's piece traveled to several other venues, including the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid and the Marian Goodman Gallery in Paris, before becoming part of the permanent collection at the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea. This evolution—from a site-specific intervention to an autonomous, freestanding sculptural object—raises important questions about site-specificity, cultural memory, authorship, and the act of replication. The work's mobility challenges the fixed nature of architecture in time and space, asking how architectural elements, originally designed to frame and contain space, could themselves become autonomous art objects. As Orozco put it, "It was still a roof, but a roof behaving like a sculpture, making sculpture out of architecture."

Political Covers

What are the greatest architectural political "covers"? By "greatest," we mean works as mind-blowing as Jimi Hendrix's 1969 Woodstock cover of the *Star Spangled Banner*, where he turned the U.S. national anthem into a "sonic portrait" of a country in crisis, using his guitar to evoke the chaos of the nation and the rebellion of a generation, mimicking the sounds of bombs, sirens, screams, and gunfire from the ongoing Vietnam War. Can architecture ever achieve something as powerful?

One and Three Shadows

Joseph Kosuth's signature conceptual artwork *One and Three Chairs* presents a chair in three distinct forms: a physical chair, a one-to-one photograph of said chair, and the dictionary definition of "chair." That's it. But this simple setup—part of his *Protoinvestigations* series, initiated in 1965—became a blueprint for exploring how objects, images, and words shape our understanding of reality.

Each piece in the series follows a strict formula: an object sits against the gallery wall, with a deadpan, black-and-white, life-size frontal photograph of itself positioned to its left. To the right, a blown-up copy of the object's dictionary definition is aligned with the photograph's upper edge. Kosuth insisted that "everything you saw when you looked at the object had to be the same as what you saw in the photograph," meaning each new installation required a new photo.

Kosuth didn't produce these works himself—he just provided the concept and instructions. He emphasized that the work wasn't just what you saw and that, despite changes in location, object, or photograph, the work remained the same. In this way, the artwork was the idea itself, rendering its physical components secondary.

Kosuth's *Protoinvestigations* are intellectual propositions disguised as art, prompting viewers to examine how different modes of representation—object, image, and text—shape our understanding of a referent "ideal of an object" (in the Platonic sense) and whether these distinctions matter. The three representational forms—three-dimensional, two-dimensional, and linguistic—each frame reality differently. Kosuth insists the work isn't complete until it's interpreted, meaning conceptual art only exists in dialogue with its audience, recreated each time it is engaged with it intellectually.

After *One and Three Chairs*, Kosuth continued the series using other everyday objects: stools, tables, lamps, tools, and even clothing. But the ideas got weirder. *One and Three Boxes* asked if an empty box was fundamentally different from a

full one. *One and Three Frames* presented an empty frame that framed nothing but itself. In *One and Three Photographs*, the referent and its photographic reproduction were nearly indistinguishable. By treating an exhibition label as the object, its photocopy, and its definition, *One and Three Labels* suggested the physical artwork might not even be necessary.

Other works twisted representation further. *One and Five Clocks* introduced three dictionary definitions: "clock," "time," and "object," implying that the terms used to describe an object are potentially limitless and ultimately arbitrary. *One and Five Walls* used the actual gallery wall as the object, with definitions for "wall," "plaster," and "white." In *One and Three Doors*, he incorporated the entry door of the gallery, forcing visitors to walk through the artwork itself. Kosuth even played with reflections—*One and Three Mirrors* and *One and Three Glasses* featured mirrors and glass panes reflecting not just the space but the people observing them, and even the photographers shooting the work.

Then came *One and Three Shadows*, the most philosophically complex work of the series, where the referent wasn't an object but its shadow. Here, Kosuth took things to an existential level: can a shadow be considered an object? The piece blurred the line between reality and representation, echoing Marcel Duchamp's concept of *infra-mince*—a term for things that exist conceptually but resist physical definition (like the thickness of a shadow).

In the end, Kosuth's *Protoinvestigations* leave us with an unsettling realization: what we think of as reality is just a web of representations—objects, images, words—looping back on each other. Or, as Jean-François Lyotard put it, "reality becomes the shadow cast by that which repeats it in images and/or words."

And if art is just an idea, then maybe everything else is too.

ZOB

"Cine ești, cine sunt, ce mai beau, ce mai cânt,
Ce mai fac, ce mai simt,
Oare mai pot să mint,
Cine sunt, cine ești, oare mă mai iubești,
Cine e, cine nu, care eu, care tu."

Asymmetric Power

As architecture took centre stage in museums and biennials, artists like Dan Graham began engaging directly with architectural space, challenging its conventions. His *Public Space/Two Audiences*, created for the 1976 Venice Biennale's *Ambiente/Arte* exhibition, blurred the line between art and architecture, exposing how exhibition spaces aren't as neutral as they pretend to be. Instead, they shape how we see, interact, and—intentionally or not—reinforce systems of power and control.

At first glance, the piece looked like a plain rectangular box with two doors. Step inside, though, and you become part of an eerie experiment in perception, surveillance, and social interaction. The interior was split into two nearly identical white rooms with dark floors, separated by a full-height, soundproof glass wall. The otherwise perfect symmetry was disrupted by one crucial difference: one room had a mirrored back wall, the other a blank one. Evenly spaced neon lights cast a stark, uniform glow, heightening the clinical atmosphere.

This seemingly simple setup created deep asymmetries in perception. From the blank-walled room, the space felt twice as big, its size exaggerated by the mirror's reflection. Meanwhile, the mirrored room was a visual overload—its occupants saw themselves, their own group, and the other audience at the same time. In

contrast, those in the blank-walled room could only observe the mirrored room's occupants. The result? A built-in hierarchy of vision. The mirrored room offered a broader view but also subjected its occupants to greater exposure, reinforcing the dynamics of surveillance and control.

Graham wasn't just playing optical tricks. His use of glass and mirrors called attention to how glass partitions dictate visibility, access, and authority in regulated spaces like airports, hospitals, prisons, and interrogation rooms. By making the act of looking explicit and unavoidable, Graham exposed the power relations inherent in seeing and being seen. *Public Space/Two Audiences* forced visitors to confront these dynamics rather than passively accept them. As art critic Hal Foster put it, the piece functioned as a laboratory where participants assumed simultaneously the roles of scientists and test subjects, observing while being observed, caught in an endless loop of surveillance.

Beyond vision, the installation messed with social and psychological dynamics. The mirrored room heightened self-awareness, while the glass divider created a constantly shifting interplay of perspectives. Even when visitors attempted to communicate—through gestures or nonverbal cues—the separation remained, reinforcing an inherent power imbalance. This dynamic echoed broader social structures, where visibility, knowledge, and agency are never equally distributed.

By immersing participants in a controlled environment with no possibility of detachment, Graham dismantled the illusion of the neutral "white cube" gallery. In conventional exhibitions, viewers engage with artworks while momentarily detaching from their social surroundings. *Public Space/Two Audiences*, however, disrupted this passive mode of engagement. Participants were forced to confront their own image and the presence of others, becoming both performers and spectators in a space where power dynamics unfolded organically, without external direction.

Ultimately, Graham's installation exposed the inextricable link between perception and power. Rather than offering a fixed viewpoint or resolution, it revealed how all participants—like individuals in any social system—are embedded in an architecture of control, where power is fluid but never symmetrically distributed.

Anarchitecture

Anarchitecture is architecture's doppelgänger. It is building without building, without program, without clients, without completion, without a purpose. Anarchitecture is not architecture as we know it; rather, it acts upon architecture. It needs architecture to exist, just as a shadow depends on an object to be cast, and a ghost needs a soul to haunt. Anarchitecture is architecture mirrored and subverted, exposed and destabilized. It is the "crack" in architecture, through which "the light gets in," making it fragile—uncertain, unclear, unstable, unfinished, impermanent, unoriented, unfixed, unintimidating, unauthoritarian.

So why do we, as architects, both praise and dismiss anarchitecture? We love it because it is far more interesting, intriguing, and inspiring than architecture itself—yet that is precisely why we fear it. We instinctively assume that if something is so incredibly interesting, it must not be architecture—it must be art. And that makes us fools. As Mark Wigley rightly put it, "There are a lot of ways to be an idiot in architecture. One of the easiest is to not pay attention to Gordon Matta-Clark."

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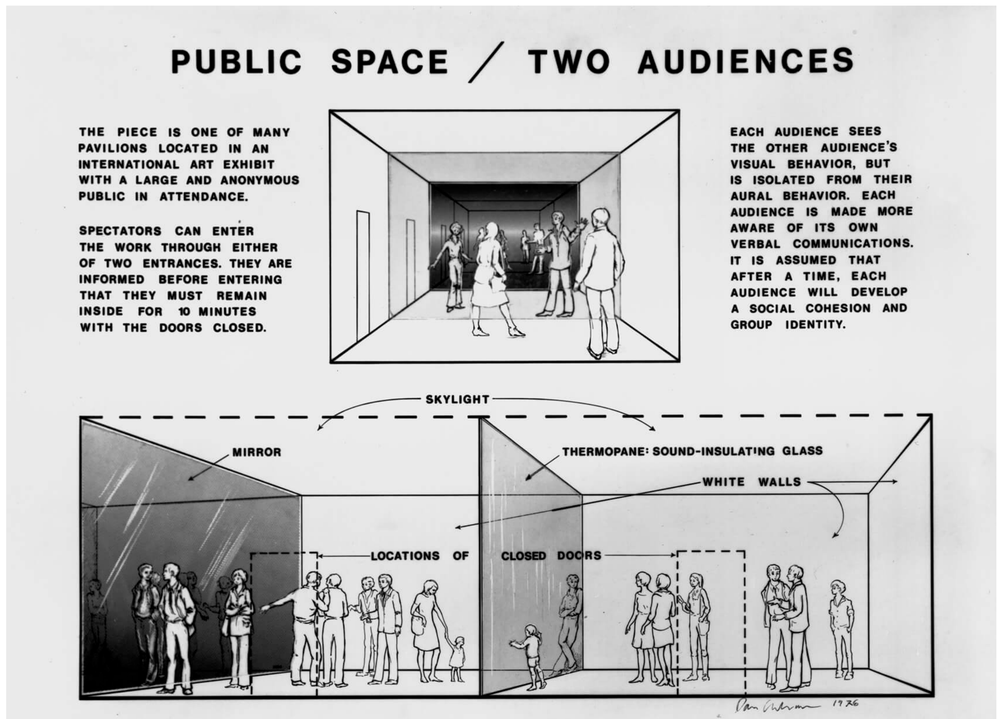

Dan Graham, *Public Space/ Two Audiences*, 1976. Courtesy of Herbert Foundation.

Guidelines for authors

The 2nd number of COTAA welcomes abstracts of papers, not exceeding **300 words**, including references, bibliography, and image descriptions (**black and white - in format .jpeg**), composed with minimal formatting within a single editable Microsoft Word file or a Microsoft Word-compatible document. All materials which are submitted to COTAA must be in **English – UK**.

All abstracts and reviews will be sent to the following email address: **office@cotaa.ro** until **the 7th of April 2024.**

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Calendar:
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Peer review results sent to authors: **14.07.2025**
Final paper submission: **25.08.2025**