
Summary: This essay addresses questions of feeling and experience in design using Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) as a theoretical foundation. Starting with a close reading of the Prologue and the sections on "the social realm" and "action" in Arendt's book, I raise questions about the hegemony of science and technology in design discourses today. Pointing to the recent work of the architecture firm Diller, Scofidio + Renfro, I explore the desire today for ever more transparent, thin, and weightless buildings and interiors, which approximate or replicate in architectural form and volumetric space the multitudinous "interfaces" we navigate on a daily basis. Pointing again to Arendt, I ask if there are alternative models. In overviews of the architecture and the philosophies of Louis Kahn and Paul Rudolph, I align them with Arendt, and argue that they engaged her concepts of natality, plurality, and action in various ways, and further, that in their work they aspire to create a "durable" rather than a virtual world. In approaching Rudolph, I offer a close reading of a seminal 1970 essay on his work by the architectural critic and historian Sybil Moholy-Nagy, who I argue, similarly employs Arendtian ideals in her analysis of Rudolph's work.

Key words: Hannah Arendt - Louis Kahn - Paul Rudolph - Sybil Moholy-Nagy - Architecture - technology.

[Summaries in spanish and portuguese at pages 241-242]

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In 1958, Hannah Arendt published *The Human Condition*, her disquieting phenomenological study of the central dilemmas facing modern man. Framed as a response to the national hysteria unleashed by the launch of the Soviet Sputnik satellites in the fall of 1957, the book is ultimately a searing critique of social, cultural, economic, and political discourses that had been on the rise for a decade or more. In the Prologue, pointing specifically to the uses new scientific and technical knowledge were being put, as well as to the rise of slogans, catchphrases of the zeitgeist, scripted by corporate PR flacks and pseudo-scientific theorists praising the glories of modern technology, she wrote:

“This, obviously, is a matter of thought and thoughtlessness, the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of ‘truths’ which have become trivial and empty—seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time” (Arendt, 1958, p. 6). I want to ask: do her words ring just as true today as they did in her time?

For Arendt (1958), “science’s great triumphs”, such as space exploration and advances in biotechnology, had created nothing less than a crisis “within the natural sciences themselves” and in the way people viewed the world (p. 3). It was a crisis in truth and politics, faith and philosophy; it was a crisis in the tradition of Western Civilization, as it had been understood since ancient times. The meaning of life was no longer to be found in a shared cultural or philosophical tradition, but rather in the “truths” of modern science, encompassing “a theoretical glorification of labor”, which, Arendt (1958) argued, while demonstrable through “mathematical formulas”, defied “normal expression in speech and thought” (p. 3). In a line of thinking that still seems remarkably provocative today (but has also been criticized by scholars as retrograde and romantic), she doubted that there was “truth beyond speech,” that is beyond the political speech that people create amongst themselves in a public realm, such as the *Polis*, inasmuch as people “can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves” (Arendt, 1958, p. 4). Invoking the genre of science-fiction fantasy, she presciently envisioned a technocratic future, “a world where speech has lost its power,” in which people are rendered “thoughtless creatures at the mercy of every gadget which is technically possible, no matter how murderous it is” (Arendt, 1958, p. 4). This passage vividly brings to mind new technologies of surveillance, and the use of drones, but even more pointedly, our dependence on handheld devices and tablets, with their endless series of new models and software upgrades, which are not merely utilities but the subject (if not the center) of almost all cultural, economic, political, and social discourse, and international news, trumping even war itself. We no longer talk with each other in the sense Arendt describes, rather we text, tweet, and leave comments; we have an entirely new technological lexicon developed by and for these devices, consisting of acronyms and #hashtags, metadata markers, for almost every human feeling and experience.

One of the things that Arendt (1958) singles out in *The Human Condition* as especially troubling is the disappearance of “the distinction between a private and a public sphere of life... which have existed as distinct, separate entities at least since the rise of the ancient city-state,” and the emergence in their place, “of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, a relatively new phenomenon” (p. 35). In the social realm, predictable or proscribed behaviors, codified rules of behavior, replace action, a concept Arendt (1958) repeatedly invokes as the highest ideal in life (p. 39). For Arendt (1958), this amounted to nothing less than a new form of dictatorship, the dictatorship of “the social,” which she felt smothered the essential and most productive element of human life, namely, “the possibility of action... spontaneous action and outstanding achievement” (p. 37, 38). Today, we have “social media,” a further development of the phenomenon Arendt described, which we have accepted as a *fait accompli*, and which is viewed with reverence, similar to the new scientific and technical phenomena Arendt was surveying at mid-century. Social media, with its catchphrases, its promises of greater democracy and interconnectedness, is our “truth” today. The genesis of these social networks, whether in

backwoods garages or Harvard dorm rooms or corporate offices containing only folding tables and computer screens, have become the subject of our myths, legends, and heroic narratives.

Arendt (1958) viewed artificial processes that allowed man to act into nature, such as “the splitting of the atom”, as a second turning away—if the first turning away had been spiritual, then this second turning away was “an even more fateful repudiation” of the earth itself, “the very quintessence of the human condition” (p. 1, 2, 3). Increasing arrogance toward the physical world, and the glorification of both labor and technology, was leading, in her view, toward an unfavorable reckoning. It was with all this in mind that she posed the simple question, “what are we doing?” and proposed reviewing “the various constellations within the hierarchy of activities as we know them from Western history,” namely labor, work, and action, in order to understand and make sense of the transformation of these age-old concepts in the modern technological world (Arendt, 1958, p. 6).

In my work I have been interested to bring Arendt’s study of these dilemmas, as she calls them, to bear on the history of modern architecture. I believe that in her analysis of the rise of the social realm, the weakening of the concepts of durability and permanence as they relate to the work of art, and the transformation of the concept of action as it relates to freedom and speech, she had in mind the ideology of corporate liberalism, which emerged triumphant from the Second World War, and which was embodied in architecture of the 1950 and ‘60s in the style that has come to be called Corporate Modernism.

In Arendtian terms, corporate modernism represented the desert of modern life. In a 1955 lecture entitled “The History of Political Theory”, whose ideas would later find their way into *The Human Condition*, Arendt said, “The modern growth of worldlessness, the withering away of everything *between* us, can also be described as the spread of the desert” (Arendt, 2005, p. 201). This was her way of describing modern alienation, isolation, and the effects of technology on politics and human interaction, which she felt atomized communities and people. She was keen to the means people developed to endure life in this new modern landscape. This was how she accounted for the new importance accorded to the behavioral sciences, the rise of advertising and marketing, and the study of consumer patterns, consumer psychology. In the realm of architecture, we could point to shelter magazines, which were newly ascendant in the post-WWII period with the rise of the consumer’s society, and which instructed people on how to achieve or to conform to a preset, standardized environment, and a specific social ideal. Summing up the overall effects of these things, Arendt wrote, “it helps us ‘adjust’ to those conditions, taking away our only hope, namely that we, who are not of the desert though we live in it, are able to transform it into a human world” through “the conjoined faculties of passion and action” (Arendt, 2005, p. 201, 202). Passion and action are not traits we would usually associate with the architecture of corporate modernism, of the American 1950s and ‘60s, which worked on the psyche through fixed images, advertisements, promises of convenience and an easy and longer life.

Architects and designers who came out of the crucibles of modernism, the European avant-garde movements of the 1920s, who began their artistic lives charged with radical passion and reformist ideals, often became the perfect purveyors of post-WWII corporate modernism. The German émigrés, notably, anxiously revised their pasts in their attempts

at assimilation. Marcel Breuer, for example, the Bauhaus master who transformed himself into an American architect, became a great success by translating Bauhaus ideals into a lifestyle philosophy for middle-class suburban consumers in the pages of magazines such as *House & Home*, a Time-Life publication. In *Architectural Record* he was profiled as an architect “who built for himself”, a figure with which the postwar American executive everyman could easily identify himself (*Architectural Record*, October 1948, 92-98). In his 1957 monograph on Breuer, the Italian Marxist art historian Giulio Carlo Argan similarly concluded, “his architecture is portraiture” (Argan, 1957, p. 22). As described by his clients in letters to the editor of the shelter magazines, the primary characteristic of Breuer’s architecture was compromise, and the feeling his houses most often inspired was self-satisfaction in the mirroring of money, taste, and leisure (Driller, 2000, p. 152).

Modern corporate campuses, such as Connecticut General Life Insurance Company in Bloomfield Hills, Connecticut, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, from 1954-57, created worlds within themselves, different from “the human artifice” or “the human world” envisioned by Arendt. In *Architectural Forum* (1957), Connecticut General was described as being “pervasively complete,” the emphasis on the ideal of pervasiveness suggesting a totally designed environment in which everything was of a piece, in which the “human resources” were totally in synch with the architecture and the furniture (p. 127). Fairy tale narratives of eternal youth and beauty and physical and emotional wellbeing were scripted for Connecticut General by public relations executives and published in magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post*. There was complicity all around in the creation of these narratives; in the magazine *Industrial Design*, Florence Knoll, who headed the Knoll Planning Unit, which designed the furniture and interiors, spoke about how in moving from the cramped quarters of an old nineteenth-century building in Hartford to the bucolic Bloomfield campus all the young career girls “suddenly all seemed much younger, better dressed, brightly colored” (Lange, 2005 p. 42). Bunshaft said, “I dreamt it would be a mirror building, and that if you could afford it...hire a great photographer to spend a year and photograph it under wintertime and sunsets and sorts of things to get the reflections” (Lange, 2005, p. 62). I take this to mean that it was designed to be magazine-ready architecture, picture perfect from any angle, and in fact, Connecticut General’s employees, pictured in publicity materials in various states of beatitude in the corporate landscape, became advertisements for both the company’s life insurance policies and the new managed “way of life” that was at the heart of the ideology of corporate liberalism.

Is this always the way with architecture and the built environment, which is so often the product of a design process involving many hands, and a political process expressive of a worldview at a specific time and in a specific place –as much as, if not more than, the product of a single architect’s artistic vision?

Today, as in the 1950s and ‘60s, we can clearly see a desire for buildings that embody the dominant aesthetic and ideology of technology. Architects and designers aspire to ever more transparent, thin, and weightless architecture and interiors, replicating in architectural form and volumetric space the multitudinous “interfaces” we navigate on a daily basis. Significantly, monuments, entire urban complexes, that no longer register within the dominant regime are either demolished or restored or re-imagined to suit

prevailing trends. This has certainly been the case in New York in celebrated projects such as The High Line and the renovation of Lincoln Center, both designed by the architecture firm Diller, Scofidio + Renfro, which has become the Skidmore, Owning, and Merrill of our time. Lincoln Center was a late modernist cultural citadel set up on a slight bluff in the middle of the west side of Manhattan, designed to symbolize the cultural Renaissance the United States experienced as it solidified its power on the world stage in the post-WWII period. Unabashedly representative of “Democratic Imperium,” the design of the buildings and the plaza was derived from the history of Western architecture, notably the Campodoglio in Rome, and envisioned the United States as an heir to and guardian of civilization. From today’s vantage point, not only did the complex seem to close itself off from the flow of the contemporary city, the ideals of civilization and civic space it embodied were not in sync with the changed, globalized world in which we live. The goal was to make it more inviting, more user friendly, more welcoming. This included, among others things, incorporating glass walkways from the street into the plaza, and telegraphic text on the plaza stair, strips of LED messages that scroll across the stairs welcoming visitors in all the languages of the world. The goal was to forge a compromise between the integrity of the original mid-twentieth century design and early-twentieth-first century cultural, political, and social ideals as well as consumer demands.

Similar thinking informs Diller, Scofidio’s controversial plan for a proposed redesign of The Museum of Modern Art, where a similar discourse is being employed to make a case for the opening up of the museum’s garden, originally designed by Philip Johnson in 1954. In the proposal for the MoMA expansion project, posted on the firm’s website, the architects write, “the new exhibition spaces will allow the Museum to break from the limitations of its current medium specific galleries and bring together works across disciplines, in keeping with contemporary artistic practices and new curatorial objects”, and further on, “In addition, we want to create a better interface for MoMA with the city, bringing art closer to the street, allowing art to be more spontaneous, and improving visitor flow. This has led us to reconsider most of the ground floor as a continuous, artfilled public amenity, free and open for all” (Diller, Scofidio, + Renfro, 2014, <http://www.dsrny.com/#/projects/moma-expansion>). I would argue that this is the language of current technology; it is the language of social media. Is there a design philosophy here beyond today’s popular slogans and catchphrases? - The “complacent repetition of ‘truths’ which have become trivial and empty”, to use Arendt’s terms.

I choose Diller, Scofidio as just one example of many; one could just as easily point to other prestige architects, such as Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, or Norman Foster, whose recent work bespeaks a spectacularization of both venture capital and technology.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1958) provides analysis, not answers: “This book does not offer an answer”, she writes (p. 5). Rather, in her reconsideration of the human condition, she identifies concepts and traits worth revisiting. She fixes especially upon the concepts of natality, plurality, and action. Against a backdrop of what she characterized as a stale political discourse and the atrophying of common sense, she looked toward the possibility of new beginnings. In the essay on Action, she writes, men are beginners “by virtue of birth,” and she evokes “the character of startling unexpectedness inherent in all beginnings and in all origins” –notably, “the ability of men to begin something new on

their own initiative” (Arendt, 1958, 157). There are an infinite number of ways to interpret a general statement such as this –it is the kind of phrase that could easily be put to service in advertising new products, new technologies– but significantly, Arendt (1958) qualifies it in the conclusion of the book, where she clarifies that she is speaking not about scientists and “so-called statesmen”, or even artists, but rather about “the privileged few”, by which she seems to mean philosophers and storytellers, those who engage in thought as what she calls “a living experience” (p. 296, 297). Tellingly, she offers a quote from the modern mystic storyteller Isak Dinesen as an epigram for the essay on Action: “All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story of tell a story about them” (Arendt, 1958, p. 155). The final paragraph of the book is a defense of thought as the most active of all the activities within the *vita activa*. For Arendt, in the end, thought alone, thought that has “the ability to produce stories and become historical, which together form the very source from which meaningfulness springs into and illuminates human existence” –is the ultimate action (Arendt, 1958, p. 297); it is this kind of thought that possess what she calls “the revelatory character of action” (Arendt, 1958, p. 296). Despite her misgivings about the direction the world was heading, she still envisioned a politics of glory and revelation wherein “men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world” through word and deed (Arendt, 1958, p. 159).

What would that look like today? And is it possible in architecture?

I similarly do not have the answers for today’s dilemmas, but I would like to point to a few examples from the past that, to my mind at least, get at the core of what it means to design for what Arendt calls “the human artifice”, examples that engage with the concepts of natality, plurality, and action, as well as the natural world, examples that embody what I would call a “durable” rather than a virtual world.

The first is Louis Kahn.

In my view, the talk Kahn gave at CIAM in 1959 aligns him with Arendt as a philosopher of origins. Similar to Arendt, Kahn (2003) said, “the spirit of the start is the most marvelous moment at any time for anything... A thing is unable to start unless it can contain all that ever can come from it. That is the characteristic of a beginning” (p. 42). Kahn’s talk was significant in that it was not only the concluding lecture at CIAM ‘59, but also of CIAM itself, which disbanded soon after. At the end of the strain of functionalist modernism that CIAM was founded to advance, Kahn focused on the obligation of the architect to realize new beginnings.

From his lectures it seems clear that for Kahn the architect was a citizen of the world through his calling to art. He began his CIAM address by observing that in the projects he had seen at the conference “almost everyone started with the solution of the problem” rather than with the “sense of realization of the problem”, which is to say that they began from a proscribed theory, rather than with a problem that may not be able to be solved (Kahn, 2003, p. 37). It was this sense of realization that most aligned him with Arendt’s writings on birth and beginnings: “I believe that man must realize something before he has the stimulation within himself to design something” (Kahn, 2003, p. 38). He defined realization as the coming together of thought and feeling in “a sense of order” (Kahn, 2003, p. 38). He was speaking in general terms about intangible things. This sense of order is, he said, “a state of comprehension about existence”, a sense of “the existence-

will of something”, or in other words, “what the building wants to be”, perhaps his most famous formulation (Kahn, 2003, 39). I see in Kahn’s CIAM lecture an image an architect-philosopher, an architect-thinker, an architect-storyteller, one of “the privileged few” whom Arendt invokes in her concluding paragraphs on thought in *The Human Condition*. For Kahn (2003), the architect, like the musician, or like the philosopher, possessed an unusually developed sense of the order of things, a sense of harmony, which allowed him to draw his realizations from “the very nature of things” (p. 39).

For Kahn, architectural programs derived from a politico-economic ideology of any stripe were irreconcilable and even anathema to architecture. They represented what he called a “false beginning” (Kahn, 2003, p. 42). Preset programs “will give you many things which will help the practitioner make a pretty good profit out of his commission by following the rule of rules. But this is not an architect at work”, he said, in what seems to me to be a criticism of his contemporaries such as Breuer and Bunshaft (Kahn, 2003, p. 41). He thought that every city was made up of institutions: schools, city halls, chapels, houses, streets, garages, each a specific kind of place, with its own “existence-will”. For Arendt, a polis was not defined by its walls or any specific preset image of an architectural enclosure but rather by the citizens gathered together in common life. Similarly, for Kahn (2003), the definition of a school was not a building with uniform classrooms, but any “realm of space” where students congregated around a teacher and discussion took place, a view that finds further parallels in Arendt’s thoughts on the nature of speech (p. 42).

The language used to discuss Kahn’s architecture in the 1950s and 1960s was different than the language used to describe the work of his contemporaries, such as Breuer and Bunshaft. It had much less to do with new technologies and timeliness, addressing instead the larger categories of order and design. Kahn’s rough, tactical, and poetic relationship with form and his sense of the universal potentials of design differed from Bunshaft’s and Breuer’s sleek modular organizational systems and magazine-ready surface-level effects. Though he labored to win major corporate commissions, his architectural language lacked the powerful commercial symbolism that made their architecture attractive to CEOs and government bureaucrats. His work would never be able to be adapted to the mainstream political culture in the way their works could.

In his monograph on Kahn, published in 1962, Vincent Scully, said that with the design for the bathhouse at the *Trenton Jewish Community Center*, Kahn had worked himself back to the beginning (p. 24). In Kahn’s work of the 1950s, Scully (1962) said, architecture began anew (p. 24). What he meant was that in his work Kahn was reducing form to its most basic or archaic elements, to what Kahn himself would call its “pre-form”. At the bathhouse of the *Trenton Jewish Community Center* (1955), he used cheap concrete cinderblocks in their natural state to recreate on a modern, suburban scale the bathhouses of ancient Rome. In terms of aesthetics, the bathhouse, like the later *Richards Medical Center* at the University of Pennsylvania, was visually unappealing, maybe even ugly, but it was innovative in its treatment of form and space. Kahn was reducing forms to their essence and then building them back up –just like the Enlightenment architect and Grand Tour cicerone Piranesi, who in his prints broke up and multiplied forms, spaces, and structures. Like Piranesi, Kahn became more of an academic architect, publishing his unrealized designs in academic journals such as Yale’s *Perspecta*.

Neither Kahn's design for the *US Consulate and Chancellery* in Luanda, Angola (1959-1962), or the language he used to describe it in a 1961 interview reflected official American ambitions and intentions, or the architectural priorities outlined by the Foreign Building Office. In their high-profile embassies of the 1950s and 1960s, architects such as Breuer and Bunshaft, following Foreign Building Office directives, emphasized American technological supremacy and political might while offering token references to local customs and traditions (Robin, 1992, p. 137-38). Kahn, on the other hand, envisioned a truly regional architecture. In the African equatorial context, with its hot, blinding light, he spoke of "developing a warm architecture...which somehow tells the story of the problems of glare" (Kahn, 2003, p. 98). I think Kahn saw architecture as a vehicle for telling stories about man's relationship to climate, landscape, and the natural world, in the way Arendt invokes storytelling as a form of action in *The Human Condition*. In this project, he devised a system of layered walls to modulate sunlight, with long vertical and semi-circular openings. Kahn (2003) said: "I thought of wrapping ruins around buildings; you might say encasing a building in a ruin so that you look through the wall which had its apertures by accident" (p. 99). In this way, he expressed "desire for light, but still an active fighting of the glare" (Kahn, 2003, p. 99). He devised a similar system for the top: twin roofs six feet apart, one for sun and one for rain:

I feel that in bringing the rain roof and the sunroof away from each other I was telling the man on the street his way of life. I was explaining the atmospheric conditions of wind, the conditions of light, the conditions of sun and glare to him. If I used a device—a clever kind of design device—would only seem like a design to him—something pretty... I did not want anything pretty; I wanted to have a clear statement of a way of life. And those two devices I feel very proud of as being strong architectural statements from which other men can make infinitely better statements. These are really crude statements... They're actually done with almost the feeling that they should be primitively stated first rather than in a high degree of taste. (Kahn, 2003, p. 102-103)

This was a rather extraordinary statement for an American architect to make in 1961, the year of the apotheosis of style and taste as symbolized in the public reception of the Kennedys. Light, glare, sun, rain—it was an architecture of the elements, interested in how the past informed the present, without projecting into an imagined future, shaped by the human mind without acting into nature, or overpowering nature with technology, or creating a spectacular display representative of what could be achieved using technology. Remarkably, the point was not to foreground the design—or design itself as a discipline—or to make the inhabitant self-consciously aware that they were in a designed space—but rather, to have the design recede, to serve as a ground for the interior life of the inhabitants as they made their way through the space while carrying on their daily lives. Kahn was an architect who lived partly in what Arendt (2005) called "the oasis in the desert", "those fields of life which exist independently, or largely so, from political conditions":

What went wrong is politics, our plural existence –and not what we can do and create insofar as we exist in the singular: in the isolation of the artist, in the solitude of the philosopher, in the inherently worldless relationship between human beings as it exists in love and sometimes in friendship—when one heart reaches out directly to the other, as in friendship, or when the in-between, the world, goes up in flames, as in love. Without the intactness of these oases we would not know how to breathe... The oases... are not places of ‘relaxation’ but life-giving sources that let us live in the desert without becoming reconciled to it. (p. 202-03)

Again, she was talking about the desert of modern life in a technocratic society. Kahn achieved this in his architecture. In his monograph on Kahn, Scully (1962) acknowledges Kahn’s ability to move people in this way when he writes, “the American architects who revere him from a roster of diversity and distinction... The beginning of a special comradeship can be sensed among them, not, I think, a local school, but a more general movement, magnetized by Kahn” (p. 44). He further echoes Arendt’s belief in man’s ability to reveal himself through his actions and his words, to inspire through the quality and expression of thought, when he concludes his monograph with the maxim: “One recognizes a man” (Scully, 1962, p. 44).

The second architect I want to discuss briefly is Paul Rudolph.

When Rudolph left the chairmanship of Yale’s School of Architecture in 1965, which he had taken up in 1957, he said, “I suppose the Yale chairmanship made me a member of the Establishment, being accepted or something. I now understand that I can never belong to these things and that I’ll always be attacked as an outsider” (Moholy-Nagy, 1970, p. 16). It was this outsider mentality that set Rudolph apart from his contemporaries and led him to develop a unique architectural vision.

In her monograph on Rudolph, the architectural critic and historian Sybil Moholy-Nagy depicts him as an iconoclast, as one of the few American architects who was able to break away from the model of Bauhaus Functionalism that fueled so much of mid-twentieth century modern design. From the start, she casts him as an epic figure, whose birth in 1918, “a key date in world history”, set him up to become a kind of world-historical figure, one whose “tendency toward nonattachment and cool pragmatism”, as she says, gave him a steady footing on “the collision course of many emerging new worlds” (Moholy-Nagy, 1970, p. 8). She contrasts his Southern provincial upbringing, and his early architectural training at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute in Auburn with the more cosmopolitan milieu he entered when he enrolled in the masters program at the School of Architecture at Harvard, then under the leadership of Walter Gropius. In the trajectory Moholy-Nagy lays out, Rudolph’s few years at Harvard become a kind of errant pit stop; for instance, she sees his time in the Navy during the Second World War, which interrupted his studies, as much more significant than his Harvard education in his synthesis of a uniquely American sense of derring-do and practical know-how with fundamental architectural principles. Importantly, in 1947, Rudolph left the northeast, bastion of corporate liberal ideology, and returned to the south, where he set up a joint office with Ralph Twitchell in Sarasota, Florida, a small coastal town on the Gulf of Mexico. In Sarasota, Rudolph designed small

beach cottages and summer homes. In these projects, literally working on the outskirts, on the periphery, on the boundary between land and sea, he experimented with form, material, space, and structure on what Moholy-Nagy calls “the suprapersonal level”, meaning that he was released from the proscribed political and social ideals that informed so much of suburban residential building in the late 1940s and 1950s, as visualized in the pages of the glossy shelter magazines. He took what he learned in these experimental beach cottages and put it to use in the two high schools he designed in Sarasota in the mid-1950s: Riverview High School and Sarasota High School. In these projects, with their exposed steel frames and undulating planar canopies, modernist functionalism of the Mies variety seems to be disintegrating before our very eyes, morphing into something entirely new, but not yet distinct; to use Kahn’s terminology, it seems to visualize the process of emergence, the sense of realization before form itself sets in. There are tensile structures; you can see the tension between Rudolph’s use of the functionalist vocabulary and his yearning for a new formal language of his own making.

Moholy-Nagy (1970) points to a remark Rudolph made in the late 1950s, soon after he assumed the leadership of Yale’s architecture school, as illustrating what she rather beautifully calls his “existential liberation from the restrictions of his professional education” (p. 17). It is also a remark that, in my view, fully aligns him with Arendt and the Arendtian view of action. Rudolph said: “Action has outstripped theory. The last decade has thrown a glaring light on the omissions, thinness, paucity of ideas, naïveté with regard to symbols, lack of creativeness, and expressiveness of architectural philosophy as it developed in the twenties” (Moholy-Nagy, 1970, p. 17). This was a dismissal (a “total repudiation” according to Moholy-Nagy) of both modernist functionalism of the 1920s as well as its progeny, corporate modernism of the 1950s. For Moholy-Nagy this short remark explodes with the full power of a manifesto; and she sees that power concretized in what many regard as Rudolph’s architectural declaration of independence: the Yale Art and Architecture Building in New Haven from 1963. For Moholy-Nagy (1970), this building is literally explosive –she calls it “a most spectacular form explosion”– in that blows up existing architectural theory along with the existing New Haven cityscape, and “creates a new one” (p. 19). This theory, which Rudolph would later describe as megastructuralism, became the foundation for all his later work.

At the same time that the Yale Art and Architecture Building was going up, Rudolph designed a campus for the Southern Massachusetts Technological Institute. In a passage that strongly recalls Arendt’s critique of the “the distinction between a private and a public sphere of life... which have existed as distinct, separate entities at least since the rise of the ancient city-state” and the rise in their place of “the social realm”, Moholy-Nagy (1970) describes one of the most striking spatial forms in Rudolph’s design for these buildings in this way: “The startling ‘sky lobbies’ of the academic buildings reestablish an ancient dichotomy between anonymous and public scale, so often forgotten in America and so essential to the understanding of personal and communal goals” (p. 19). I am tempted to say that she had read Arendt and that this is a direct reference to *The Human Condition*. In this and later projects, such as the Orange County Courthouse, and most notably the Graphic Arts Center project that was part of Rudolph’s much larger Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Scheme, Rudolph not only provides an alternative to the earlier model he

had now outright rejected, but also offers a corrective to the ideological-spatial damage that model may have caused by designing new environments. Moholy-Nagy (1970) calls them “focused environments” (p. 20). It is significant in that regard that many of Rudolph’s realized projects are for schools or college campuses. These spaces, new environments, were linked to new aspirations and to the education of a young generation, suggesting, in the Arendtian sense, the possibility of a new beginning.

In fact, like Scully’s monograph on Kahn, Moholy-Nagy’s (1970) monograph on Rudolph concludes with humanist aplomb: “If he achieves a new link in the long chain that binds urban past to urban future by welding industrialization to design without submitting to the fascist dictatorship of technological systems control, he will be the genius of a new human environment” (p. 29). This was a veritable Arendtian call to arms! - But alas, Rudolph, like Kahn, was not an architectural Messiah.

Kahn, Rudolph –one could also point to the post-WWII work of Hans Scharoun in West Germany, his schools, apartment complexes, and the Berlin Philharmonie– they remained outsiders, and although they are all recognized as geniuses today, their philosophies, and their work, have not made as great an impact as critics at the time had hoped; as Scully understood, there are no schools around these figures, much less movements. In the realm of architecture, as well as in the realm of design, “technological systems control” is now omniscient and omnipresent and we are ever more frantically searching for “the oasis in the desert”.

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Resumen: Este ensayo se ocupa de temáticas vinculadas al sentimiento y a la experiencia en el diseño utilizando como base teórica el libro de Hannah Arendt, *La condición humana*

(1958). A partir de una lectura atenta del prólogo del libro de Arendt y de las secciones dedicadas a “lo social” y a la “acción”, planteo preguntas sobre la hegemonía de la ciencia y la tecnología en los discursos actuales del diseño. Tomando como referencia la reciente obra del estudio de arquitectura *Diller, Scofidio + Renfro*, exploro el deseo actual de edificios e interiores cada vez más transparentes, delgados y sin peso, que se aproximan o replican en la forma arquitectónica y el espacio volumétrico las múltiples “interfaces” en las que navegamos diariamente. Haciendo referencia nuevamente a Arendt, pregunto si hay modelos alternativos. En una visión general de la arquitectura y la filosofía de Louis Kahn y Paul Rudolph, yo los alinee con Arendt, y sostengo que se ellos toman sus conceptos de natalidad, pluralidad, y acción de diversas maneras, y además, que en su trabajo aspiran a crear un mundo “duradero” más que un mundo virtual. Al abordar a Rudolph, ofrezco una lectura atenta de un influyente ensayo de 1970 del crítico e historiador de arquitectura Sybil Moholy-Nagy, quien sostengo, emplea de manera similar los ideales arendtianos en su análisis de la obra de Rudolph.

Palabras clave: Hannah Arendt - Louis Kahn - Paul Rudolph - Sybil Moholy - Nagy - Arquitectura - tecnología.

Resumo: Este ensaio ocupa-se de temáticas vinculadas ao sentimento e à experiência no design utilizando como base teórica o livro de Hannah Arendt, *A condição humana* (1958). A partir de uma leitura atenta do prólogo do livro de Arendt e das seções dedicadas ao social e à ação, faço perguntas sobre a hegemonia da ciência e a tecnologia nos discursos atuais do design. Tomando como referencia a recente obra do estudo de arquitetura *Diller, Scofidio + Renfro*, exploro o desejo atual de edifícios e interiores cada vez mais transparentes, finos e sem peso, que se aproximam ou replicam na forma arquitetônica e o espaço volumétrico as múltiplas “interfaces” nas que navegamos diariamente. Fazendo referencia novamente a Arendt, pergunto se há modelos alternativos. Numa visão geral da arquitetura e a filosofia de Louis Kahn e Paul Rudolph, os alinho com Arendt, e afirmo que eles tomam seus conceitos de natalidade, pluralidade e ação de diversas maneiras, e além, que em seu trabalho aspira a criar um mundo duradouro, mais que um mundo virtual. Ao abordar a Rudolph, ofereço uma leitura atenta de um influente ensaio de 1970 do crítico e historiador de arquitetura Sybil Moholy-Nagy, quem, afirmo, utiliza de maneira similar os ideais arendtianos na sua análise da obra de Rudolph.

Palavras chave: Hannah Arendt - Louis Kahn - Paul Rudolph - Sybil Moholy-Nagy - arquitetura - tecnologia.
