

Counteroptical Aesthetics

Darkness, Breakage and Surplus in the work of Sigurd Lewerentz
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It is not that we are faced with perversity; what is at issue for Lewerentz is the search beneath conventional appearance for the shock of a renewed truth.

- Colin St John Wilson

According to Graham Harman the non - relational *surplus* in objects allows them to change. As Harman points out this surplus can never be drained dry. This is essential to understanding that the advancement of architecture is incommensurate with the pursuit of finite truth or absolute knowledge. Harman's philosophy offers a fresh start, and it has confronted us with a new set of questions about the *architectural object*.

It is no longer simply the privilege of science to address the hidden complexities of things. The possibility for architecture to address the hidden and withdrawn properties of objects has been reopened by Object Oriented Ontology. Harman's philosophy exposes the shortcomings of phenomenology that associated knowledge with the outward appearances of objects. By challenging the correlationist framework that we 'cannot think of the world without humans,' it is possible to see architecture from a new perspective and to give equal consideration to the particular interactions of objects themselves.

For a growing number of architects what is needed is an acceptance of the withdrawn and mysterious nature of architecture that is exacting in its ability to address the interiority of objects. To borrow Harman's term, what is needed in the arts is not rigor but *exactitude*. There is a unique opportunity for the arts, design and architecture to take a turn toward examining the interiority of objects, including questions regarding the core focus of our disciplines. How should this pursuit be maintained without co-opting a research framework from the sciences?

There are several concepts in Harman's work that are conspicuously part of architecture –in the northern tradition these are evident in the late work of Sigurd Lewerentz, most notably his church in Klippan and his Woodlawn cemetery chapel. The experience of these buildings offers a similar response - the work is both strangely captivating and poetic. Harman's concept of breakage, is alive in Lewerentz's austere, yet strange disposition of architectural elements, the surplus that permeates his use of common brick, and his turn from the purist white architecture of the 1930's to the dark interiors of his late brick churches. Harman's philosophy offers an alternative discourse to the anthropocentric tradition that has come to define this work.

Keywords: Architecture, Lewerentz, Aesthetics, Counterfactual, Object Oriented Ontology

Key references

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