

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ORIENTATIONS



ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURE

ASSEMBLING ARCHAEOLOGY, ATMOSPHERE AND
THE PERFORMANCE OF BUILDING SPACES

EDITED BY MIKKEL BILLE AND
TIM FLOHR SØRENSEN



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'This new collection significantly furthers our understanding of how to assess meaning in the built environment. *Elements of Architecture* offers thoughts from an excellent collection of noted scholars, breaking new ground in its multifaceted application of methods that place people back into the architectural frame. The inclusion of chapters on architecture and performance, and especially studies on architectural disintegration and reemergence, will be unique and fascinating additions to the field.' – Sharon Steadman, *SUNY Cortland, USA*

Elements of Architecture explores new ways of engaging architecture in archaeology. It conceives of architecture both as the physical evidence of past societies and as existing beyond the physical environment. The book engages with the meeting point between these two perspectives, for although archaeologists must deal with the presence and absence of physicality as a discipline that studies humans through things, to understand humans they must also address the performances, as well as temporal and affective impacts, of these material remains. The contributions in this volume investigate the way time, performance and movement, both physically and emotionally, are central aspects of understanding architectural assemblages. It is a book about the constellations of people, places and things that emerge and dissolve as affective, mobile, performative and temporal engagements.

This volume juxtaposes archaeological research with perspectives from anthropology, architecture, cultural geography and philosophy in order to explore the kaleidoscopic intersections of elements coming together in architecture. Documenting the ephemeral, relational and emotional meeting points with a category of material objects that have defined much research into what it means to be human, *Elements of Architecture* elucidates and expands upon a crucial body of evidence that allows us to explore the lives and interactions of past societies.

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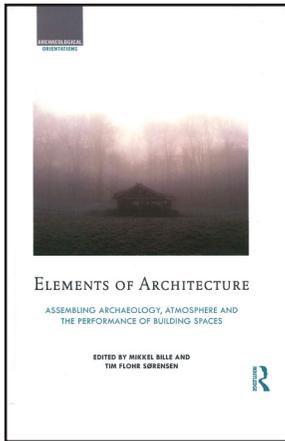
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Elements of Architecture: Assembling Archaeology, Atmosphere and the Performance of Building Spaces

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Reviewed by Dr. Corin C.O. Pursell, Gardener.

Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen have tried to assemble (as per the title) elements of the academic disciplines of architecture and archaeology with ontological and phenomenological philosophy. It is, curiously, simultaneously a work of ethnographic collection with ample contemporary perspectives on human architectural engagement as well as a performative artwork itself. In its seemingly erratic range of assembled, interrelated material topics, its blurring of disciplinary and conceptual lines, and its eschewing of dichotomies, the volume seems to enact the exact body of thought with which it treats.

There are twenty-seven chapters in four parts. After two initial introductory chapters, each of the four parts has its own introductory chapter, each a brief helpful review of the section material. The intended audience is clearly theory-minded academic professionals in archaeology, architecture, geography, urban design, and related disciplines. For that audience the work has material of interest. For others, only the highly specific individual topical chapters are likely to be appealing, if those. The writing throughout is by turns evocative, passingly lovely, and ponderously jargonistic, and the volume tacks rapidly between the extremes. The introductory chapter by the editors begins with a description of a conceptual building “Blur,” a shifting mist in the form of a structure, while the cover art is a ruined structure in a mist—this and a photo essay in the first of four sections as well as many high quality architectural images and maps add to the feeling of a body of art.

Part One (Chapters 3–9) approaches the relations between architectural form and time, including the relationship of architectural materials and time, both in the sense of durability of structures and in the sense of the intended (or unintended) duration of use. This is likely the least coherent section and almost none of the chapters have anything to do with one another beyond buildings and time. McFadyen (Chapter 4) takes us to the Neolithic of the United Kingdom to “dissolve” architecture, pointing out our totalizing grasp of a long barrow’s static final form misrepresents and falsifies the intention(s) and experience of its construction. Murawski (Chapter 5) finds that in post-socialist Warsaw, a great phallic skyscraper built by the Soviets exerts a sublime energy over much experience in the city, causing a diversity of scale-based oddities of experience, its bulk inspiring a “macrophilic” response. Hill (Chapter 6) explores the relation of three architects across four centuries with the ruins and monuments of Rome, with special attention to Louis Kahn’s famous late modernist monumentality and ruination therein. Lucas (Chapter 7) shows us that one

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17th century autonomous room of a manor and seminary in Iceland can be considered with multiple approaches to tempo beyond the typical archaeological sequence, and the movement or circulation of “stuff” and people at these different tempos gives a deeper understanding of the site. Kohn and Dawdy (Chapter 8) address contemporary Andean cities and the relationship of informal urban development to its own past and its aspiring future, as expressed in changing house forms and aesthetics. Minkjan and Vaikla (Chapter 9) present the volume’s only photo essay, illustrating Brussels’ patch-work of modernization and self-disruption as it emerges into a confusing and thus indistinct multicultural identity at the very heart of Europe’s new self.

Part Two (Chapters 10–14) concerns itself with affect and place, approaching the relatively intangible power of “atmosphere.” This section is concerned with both philosophical thought about the subject and applied architectural or archaeological uses of sensuous experience, and there is a new and growing literature on both sides of that story. I particularly like all four chapters in this section. Ingold’s chapter (11) emphasizes the way air movement and light affect the experience of a structure, in fact arguing for an inversion of perception in which structures are merely the framework that contains and conveys the experience of an atmosphere. Hasse (Chapter 12) addresses the surprising affective impact of infrastructural places like tunnels, petrol stations, and bridges. Harris (Chapter 13) explores the ways affect and architecture are assembled at multiple scales in Ardnamurchan, Scotland from the Neolithic to the 19th century. Of particular interest to me, Love’s chapter (14) is a broader consideration of the senses in the past, as approached through architecture, although it approaches it through a sensory ethnographic study of contemporary building practice.

Part Three (Chapters 15–21) emphasizes performance and motion, variously approached through movement and mobility, and with the operating rule that architecture is a process to be studied rather than a static object to be discovered. Notable here is that these chapters are not fundamentally the same as “performance archaeology” perspectives elsewhere. Yaneva’s chapter (Chapter 16) is an Actor Network paper about the way the city of Birmingham emerges from many intricate relationships. Zimmerman (Chapter 17) uses archaeology and ethnography to create a counter-narrative about homelessness, understanding the spatial movement and location choices that affect homeless lifeways. Nielsen (Chapter 18) re-centers agency in a relational way, especially in how housing can become interwoven with one’s ability to act in Mozambique. Ramsey (Chapter 19) finds that a statue of the Virgin with thickly “sedimented” local meaning has become a pivotal nexus for a social and architectural struggle over heritage development in the Yucatán. Kaye (Chapter 20) links the works of artist and architect Vito Acconci to performance architecture and our phenomenological engagement therein. McMahon (Chapter 21) presents a visual analysis of Mesopotamian ziggurats in terms of how they might have been viewed and how viewing could be done from atop them.

Part Four (Chapters 22–27) works from the opposite direction to address collapse, ruination, failure, disconnection, incompleteness, and other such concepts

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that seem antithetical to the project at first glance. Instead, these are necessarily part of the “life” cycle of buildings. Architecture ceases in just as complex and socially engaged ways as it begins. Edensor (Chapter 23) traces the ways ruination becomes incipient and then may or may not prevail in the contemporary industrial UK depending on material characteristics or agency and economic realities of the structures and their communi-ties. Pétursdóttir (Chapter 24) shows us that affective impact of unruly ruins and love of place are still important in a ruined Icelandic herring station, and thus in emerging critical heritage studies such things should never be dismissed as trivial or superficial. Ulfstjerne (Chapter 25) takes us to the boom cities of Inner Mongolia in which presti-gious urban projects remain unfinished but diversely repurposed, evidently as part of a capital investment strategy manipulating an economy of appearances to seize con-trol of land. Bærenholdt (Chapter 26) finds dysfunction of design and redesign to be essential in understanding two tourist locales in Norway, while trying to simultaneously show the creative assemblage of spaces and people: what experiences the locale affords to visitors, and how visitors performing within those affordances and also online affect the experience. Finally, Joyce (Chapter 27) gives us another assemblage study, bring-ing together the architecture of nuclear waste disposal with human choices regarding kitty litter (among other things) to show us that the material assemblage may very well accomplish things that have little to do with human intentions, which in turn has impli-cations in other archaeological practice.

The volume is good for its intended audience and I expect I will cite and return to it more than once. That audience, however, is a small one. The editors achieve their goal of a conceptual blur, an assembled yet formless rethinking of previously firm lines of our disciplines and our long-held material assumptions about architecture, in the past or present. Yet I do not recommend this volume to the majority of readers in archae-ology as it contains little archaeology. What could be praised as the volume’s diversity and density of analysis could equally be described as erratic and superficial. Each chapter is so distinct, so divergent from all the others that they must each establish their own body of theory and subject material from scratch, and few agree on much.

That critique said, the concepts worked with here are crucial to emerging ideas about atmosphere, the senses, movement, and assemblage in archaeology. If you are the kind of person looking for site-specific data or methodological innovations, move on. But if you are looking for new ways to think about the discipline and how we come to know things, this pretty, curious, and deliberately vague volume will be useful.