



The Dissolution of our Bodies in the City, Coop Himmelblau, 1988.
(Coop Himmelblau, *Coop Himmelblau: Die Faszination der Stadt/The Power of the City*, eds. Oliver Gruenberg, Robert Hahn and Doris Knecht)

ARCHITECTURE AND THE EVIL EYE: COOP HIMMELBLAU AND THE APOTROPAIC *OCULUS INVIDIOSUS*

Michael J. Ostwald

*Yes, the people that you mentioned, I know them, they're quite lame.
I have to rearrange their faces and give them all another name.*

—Bob Dylan

Facing Fear

A textual fragment of Bob Dylan's "Desolation Row" provides a cryptic and evocative preface to Coop Himmelblau's 1993 polemic "The Tower of Babel Revisited."¹ Dylan's lyrics conjure up images of faces twisted, blurred and spliced together, of the loss of identity associated with this violence, and of the lack of remorse the narrator feels for his actions. In counterpoint to this enigmatic verse is a stark black and white photograph of a torn and dissected cardboard model. The surface of the model is raked with random lines and its long shadows trace faintly unsettling patterns on the page. The dark folds in the cardboard are like eyes or caves; they encourage the viewer to transform the model from architecture into chimerical organism or landscape and back again. Together the image and the lyrics set the tone for Coop Himmelblau's vitriolic and unsettling manifesto and its discussion of the relationship between architecture and fear.

In "The Tower of Babel Revisited," which has also been published under the titles, "The Holocaust of Ideas" and "The End of Architecture,"² Coop Himmelblau bitterly lament that widespread fear has prevented their most recent project, the Ronacher Theatre in Vienna, from being completed. Paradoxically Coop Himmelblau accept fear as a natural reaction to their architecture but are perplexed that this sense of unease has become so pervasive that their client is unwilling to construct the design. Instead of explaining why they accept fear as a natural response to their architecture, they simply recount the advice of their client, the Mayor of Vienna, who admitted to them that "if he were to continue to support" their approach to architecture "he would run the risk of losing votes since the residents of Vienna are not particularly fond of modern architecture. In fact, nothing terrifies Vienna's citizens more than the sight of modern buildings."³ Coop Himmelblau use this explanation as a catalyst for their proposition that architecture is dead, and that its passing represents the ultimate "holocaust of every spatial concept."⁴ For Coop Himmelblau, the extermination of architecture leads inexorably to the stagnation of society. Without architecture, which both threatens and protects society, spaces become neutral, bland and meaningless and civilisation soon follows.

Yet for all of this proselytising, the central issue of the relationship between fear and the architecture of Coop Himmelblau is left peculiarly unresolved. The possibly apocryphal suggestion that modern architecture is innately unsettling to the Viennese is the only solution offered and it remains unconvincing. In an earlier article Coop Himmelblau recall, with pride, that the sense of anxiety their architecture evokes is not limited to the Viennese. "Many people say" to Coop Himmelblau that their "architecture is so aggressive" or "unsettling."⁵ This strongly suggests that the fear evoked by their buildings is not limited to the Viennese. Another clue to understanding the relationship between fear and architecture is provided in a contemporaneous interview about the Ronacher Theatre. In this interview Coop Himmelblau recall that while many

1. In referencing the work of Coop Himmelblau the authorship of texts is not always clear. Various sources cite either of the main partners (Wolf Prix or Helmut Swiczinsky) as the author or occasionally just the firm's name. A third partner, Rainer Michael Holzer, was active in the firm from 1968 to 1971 although modern texts rarely cite his name with projects of that period. A fourth partner, Frank Stepper joined the firm in 1991, although he is almost never mentioned in their publications. Furthermore, the firm appears to have belatedly changed its name from Coop Himmelblau to Coop Himmelb(l)au in the mid-nineties and then back again more recently. Within this paper, unless otherwise noted, the referencing of Coop Himmelblau's work is by the title of the firm regardless of which partner wrote, presented or edited the work.
2. Coop Himmelblau, "The End of Architecture," in *The End of Architecture*, ed. Peter Noever (Munich: Prestel, 1993), 16–23.
3. Coop Himmelblau, "The Tower of Babel Revisited," *ANY* No. 0 (May/June 1993): 28.
4. Coop Himmelblau, "The End of Architecture," 17.
5. Coop Himmelblau, "On the Edge," in *Deconstruction III*, ed. Andreas Papadakis (London: Academy, 1990), 65.

Viennese love their design those who have seen their proposal in detail do feel “threatened” by it.⁶ If this is true, then there is something in the architecture of Coop Himmelblau that is superficially harmless but can resolve itself into an unsettling or uncanny vision if it is viewed too closely, or for a longer period of time. The exact nature of this object and transformation is never fully explained in their manifesto but countless complex and diffuse themes in their designs, drawings and texts allude to its presence.

Coop Himmelblau maintain that it is nonsensical for them to suppress all meaning and emotion and thus their projects, drawings and texts are replete with additional layers of signification which they regard as being equally as important as their designs. Being Viennese Coop Himmelblau maintain that they have a “close connection to Freud who taught [them] that suppression requires a tremendous amount of energy.”⁷ Rather than suppressing the multiple layers of meaning that influence their design method, they prefer to use this energy to suffuse their designs with an excess of related themes, readings, clues and traces. The excess of signification is an invitation to the reader to uncover those unexplained dimensions in their designs, drawings and texts. For this reason a close analysis and interpretation of the themes connecting space and fear, society and protection and faces and found objects should uncover the hidden element in their architecture that causes such an unsettling reaction. Yet as many writers and critics have discovered, this issue of interpretation is fraught with difficulty.

A Matter of Interpretation

Few twentieth century architects’ works resist interpretation so strongly as those of Coop Himmelblau. For more than thirty years the Coop Himmelblau partnership of Wolf Prix and Helmut Swiczinsky have eschewed popular styles and trends to produce a series of enigmatic and poetic buildings, projects and texts. From their earliest experiments with exploding spaces and kinaesthetic clothing to their most recent completed buildings, Coop Himmelblau have pursued their anti-Modernist and anti-historicist agenda with an intensity bordering on obsession. Their controversial and frequently hermetic projects have aroused both great public support and condemnation, and their manifestos have become mantras for the next generation of architects. Yet there is much in their work that has never been explained, and theorists and critics are divided over how to interpret their oeuvre.

Conventionally Coop Himmelblau are regarded as being complicit in attempts to undermine or subvert the dominant ideologies and methodologies of architecture. Coop Himmelblau express the coincidence of order and chaos, and the heterogeneity of urban space, through an iterative design method that incorporates both graphical and philosophical operations. They describe themselves as seeking an architecture which “will mirror the complexity of our intellectual and cultural life, as the expression of our urban culture.”⁸ They argue that “in a world that is becoming daily more and more fragmented”⁹ a new model of architecture is required that can respond to the spatial and social needs of the populace. Despite such statements they are strangely reticent about describing just how their architecture achieves these goals, and much that is known about their methods is contradictory. For this reason critics and theorists have tended to focus on

6. Peter Noever, Elisabeth Schweeger and Coop Himmelblau in Coop Himmelblau, “Interview With Coop Himmelblau,” in *Deconstruction: A Student Guide*, Geoffrey Broadbent (London: Academy, 1991), 82.

7. Coop Himmelblau, “On the Edge,” in *Deconstruction III*, 65.

8. Coop Himmelblau, “Campus de Jussieu, Library: Paris, France, 1992,” *Architecture + Urbanism* No. 283 Is. 4 (April 1994): 8.

9. Coop Himmelblau, “On the Edge,” in *Architecture in Transition: Between Deconstruction and New Modernism*, ed. Peter Noever (Munich: Prestel, 1991), 18.

the visual characteristics of Coop Himmelblau's work rather than the more complex thematic ones.

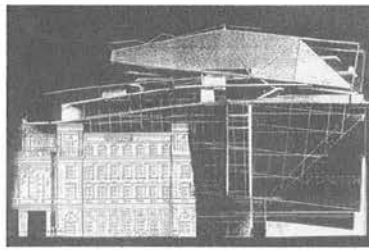
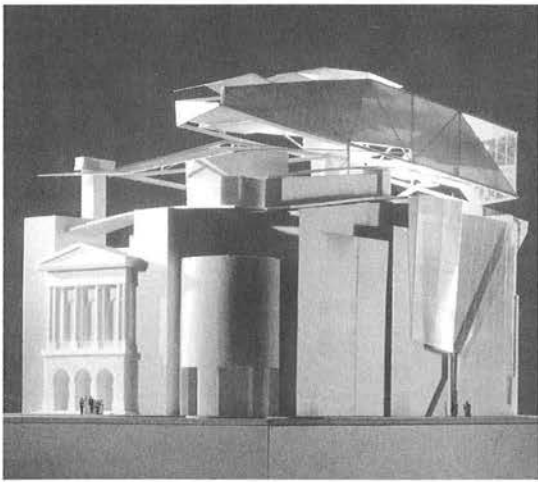
Most writers have accepted that the architecture of Coop Himmelblau is essentially illustrative of their theoretical agenda. For example, Otto Kapfinger's exegesis of Coop Himmelblau's theoretical position is that they seek to "*illustrate* the permanent decomposition, contraction, fracturing and chaos of the urban dynamic."¹⁰ For Cook and Llewellyn-Jones, Coop Himmelblau's ideas are manifest in the "twisted," "spiky" and "frenzied" forms they design.¹¹ Similarly, Charles Jencks describes their architecture as a purely visual exercise: a "frenzied cacophony" of "zig-zag" lines that trace a "scratchy filigree" on the building's surface.¹² Jencks characterises another of their projects as a "riotous melange of twisted and warped shapes which resembles a dead pterodactyl!"¹³ Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley provide similar, although less sanguine descriptions of Coop Himmelblau's architecture in support of their thesis that Pritz and Swiczinsky are deconstructivists.¹⁴ Aaron Betsky accepts the majority of these readings, maintaining that their designs simply give "form to the contradictions and pace of the modern city."¹⁵ This last view resonates with Michael Sorkin's proposition that the architecture of Coop Himmelblau is a physical evocation of concepts derived from chaos theory and fractal geometry.¹⁶

Anthony Vidler provides a second interpretation of Coop Himmelblau's architecture derived primarily from their writings. For Vidler, Coop Himmelblau's manifestos portray a clear preoccupation with predation, violence and the desire to create an organic or visceral architecture.¹⁷ He argues that Coop Himmelblau are primarily concerned with reinscribing the body into their work "as referent and figurative inspiration."¹⁸ However, this is not the traditional symbolic body of the Renaissance but rather a "body in pieces, fragmented, if not deliberately torn apart and mutilated almost beyond recognition."¹⁹ Vidler observes the uncanny or unsettling feelings evoked by Coop Himmelblau's buildings and suggests that these result from the use of "tumultuous" bodies, not ideal ones, to generate architecture. This implies that the relationship between fear and architecture uncovered in "The Tower of Babel Revisited" may be the result of the fragmentation of the bodily referent. That is, unlike classical architecture, much of which is symbolically generated from the Vitruvian mimetic tradition centred on the relationship between geometry and the ideal body, the architecture of Coop Himmelblau is generated by a body which has been rearranged and reconstructed. Moreover, in the case of "The Tower of Babel Revisited" it is not the body which is torn apart but the face. This suggests that a third reading, which draws on both the illustrative and the de-anthropomorphic arguments, may be useful in analysing the work of Coop Himmelblau and the fear it evokes. This third reading, which provides the basis for the present paper, is focussed on the face and on the capacity of the eye (or eye-like markings) to generate unease.

Re-reading the Face

The thematic focus on the face and its features in the work of Coop Himmelblau is evident at the outset in both the lyrics of "Desolation Row" and in the associated photograph of their model. In each case the text and model conjure up images of faces that have been dissected and rearr-

10. Otto Kapfinger, "Utopia and Image," *Architectural Review* Vol. 184 No. 1102 (December 1988): 46. (My italics.)
11. Peter Cook and Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *New Spirit in Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 36.
12. Charles Jencks, *The New Moderns: From Late to Neo-Modernism* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 277.
13. Jencks, *The New Moderns*, 277.
14. Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley, eds., *Deconstructivist Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988).
15. Aaron Betsky, *Violated Perfection: Architecture and the Fragmentation of the Modern* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 114.
16. Michael Sorkin, *Exquisite Corpse: Writings on Buildings* (New York: Verso, 1991), 339–350.
17. This idea is elaborated in Michael J. Ostwald and R. John Moore, *Disjecta Membra: Architecture and the Loss of the Body* (Sydney: Archadia Press, 1998).
18. Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), 69.
19. Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 69.



Ronacher Theatre, Coop Himmelblau, Vienna, 1989.
(Andreas Papadakis, Catherine Cooke and Andrew Benjamin, eds. *Deconstruction Omnibus Volume*)

anged, like some identikit picture, to create a new, incomplete visage. This reading becomes even more cogent in the conclusion to “The Tower of Babel Revisited” when Coop Himmelblau present their project “The Dissolution of our Bodies in the City.”²⁰ According to the architects the aim of their approach to urban design is to encourage the city to live and breathe again. In order to do this they resort to the process of scaling parts of their own bodies into the urban fabric of the city. They record that as they commenced analysis of the city they began to trace the “lines and surfaces of the city on top of a team photo of Coop Himmelblau. Our eyes became towers, our foreheads bridges, our faces landscapes, and our bodies the plan.”²¹ A series of black and white photographs display the faces of Coop Himmelblau partially obliterated by angry pen strokes—nails pierce their eyes, their mouths are distorted by beams and blades divide the image, separating eye from eye, splitting the nose, the mouth and the face. At the final stage of this process fragments of the architects’ features stare lifelessly out of the page, recalling the nameless faces in “Desolation Row.” The viewer is inevitably reminded that just as the narrator of Dylan’s song treats the human body as a found object, able to be disassembled and reassembled at will, so too Coop Himmelblau treat their own features as found objects and violently distort and fragment them.

Coop Himmelblau’s obliteration of the face is instantly disturbing because the human mind expects to recognise a face by its proportion, symmetry and visual cues (eyes, mouth, nose, ears). If the face is somehow fragmented or partially hidden the mind unconsciously fills in the remainder of the features based on what is known or expected. The more fragmented the face, or the less noble the viewer’s agenda, the more extreme the imagined creature behind the face becomes.²² Anthropologists recognise this as a common characteristic of society throughout the ages. Many superstitions may be traced directly to this half-seen and therefore half-imagined face. While the half-seen body may promote an imaginary extension, it is the face that most efficiently evokes fear and a sense of the uncanny. Moreover, anthropologists have uncovered more superstitions associated with the eyes than any other part of the face. Perhaps the best known and most widely researched of these superstitions is the *oculus invidiosus* or the evil eye.²³

In recent times and in Western cultures the evil eye is widely regarded as a childish and irrational belief. The rise of the empirical sciences stripped the evil eye of its unsettling power in much the same way that the transcendental dimension of architecture was denied.²⁴ Yet the evil eye is more than a specious superstition: it is a cross-cultural expression of fear generated by half-seen and half-imagined faces.²⁵ While there is no logical or scientific connection between

20. Also published in an earlier form in 1988 as “The Dissipation of our Bodies in the City.”

21. Coop Himmelblau, “The Tower of Babel Revisited,” 29.

22. See the discussion of envy and desire in relation to the reconstructed face/eye in Clarence Maloney, “Introduction,” in *The Evil Eye*, ed. Clarence Maloney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), v–xvi.

23. Alan Dundes, ed., *The Evil Eye: A Folklore Casebook* (New York: Garland, 1981).

24. Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992).

25. Maloney, *The Evil Eye*.

fear and the disembodied eye, such relationships persist in many cultures and in most parts of the world.²⁶ A significant characteristic of evil eye is that from a distance it is harmless but when viewed more closely, or too carefully (the evil eye is often associated with envy), it incites unease. This is remarkably similar to Coop Himmelblau's Ronacher Theatre that is well liked by those Viennese who are only superficially aware of the design, but for those who know the project well, the considered reaction is consternation. Could then a form of evil eye exist in the architecture of Coop Himmelblau? Certainly architecture can generate fear, but this is not the same thing. Certain building types, like the Panopticon, are designed in such a way that they control or subjugate the human body and many institutional structures evoke fear as well as awe.²⁷ Such buildings evoke fear through spatial inscription and domination, however, while Coop Himmelblau's designs rely on a variety of themes derived from faces and eyes to produce a different kind of anxiety. In the same sense that Colin Rowe argues that pre-nineteenth century buildings possess a "face" (and that this face was stripped away by the Modernist impulse to display the structural purity of its skull—its columns and slabs), could the architecture of Coop Himmelblau possess the fragments of a face or an eye?²⁸ Perhaps the presence of such an *oculus* could even explain the otherwise hermetic relationship between divers and diverse themes including fear, faces, found objects, mimicry and insects in the architecture of Coop Himmelblau.

Society, Space and the Mask

Ostensibly the central proposition in Coop Himmelblau's "The Tower of Babel Revisited" is concerned with the close connection between society and space, usually by way of found objects. Coop Himmelblau articulate a vision of the world wherein architecture simultaneously threatens and protects society. The act of tracing their faces (found objects) onto the city is both familiar and disturbing, which is why it elicits such a range of responses: at first glance it is fun, even exciting, yet upon closer inspection it generates unease. Despite the manner in which Coop Himmelblau present their ideas, this is not a new relationship. The close connection between society and space, by way of found objects that provoke fear and provide protection, is common in primitive tribes. Perhaps the best examples of this relationship are found in the native communities of the Mato Grosso in South America.

European visitors to the Brazilian rainforests in the nineteenth century were frequently amazed by the colour and variety of the local species of flora and fauna they observed. Amateur naturalists of the era recorded and classified hundreds of different species of plants, insects and animals, as well as the ways in which the remains of these species were used for both personal and architectural ornamentation. They noted that in many primitive communities animal skins could equally function as ceremonial clothing or as a door to a village hut and that feathers were woven into both headdresses and walls. Particularly valuable animal skins or insect carcasses were recycled from clothing to building and back again, depending on the needs of the tribe. Such observations led nineteenth century anthropologists to believe that these systems of ornamentation were both socially and spatially significant. For example, James Fraser's *Golden Bough*, a veritable compendium of nineteenth century anthropology, tacitly assumes that the use

26. Geza Roheim, "The Evil Eye," in Dundes, *The Evil Eye*, 211–222.

27. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1991); and Nan Ellin, ed., *Architecture of Fear* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997).

28. Colin Rowe, "James Stirling: A Highly Personal and Very Disjointed Memoir," in *James Stirling: Buildings and Projects*, eds. Peter Arnell and Ted Bickford (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), 22–23.

29. James George Fraser, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, (London: Pan Macmillan, 1987 [1922]).

of feathers in clothing and in walls implies that similar symbolic, metaphoric or typological operations are in operation regardless of whether the decoration is personal or architectural.²⁹

In the twentieth century the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss re-visited the primitive tribes of the Amazon Basin and observed that not only is there a clear correlation between social and spatial forms of decoration, but that a close relationship exists between the way in which village buildings are sited and decorated (spatial signifiers) and the way in which people use them and discuss them (social signifiers).³⁰ Moreover, he argued that for primitive tribes the spatial and social are intrinsically interconnected by way of found objects or trophies.³¹

The French anthropologist and philosopher Roger Caillois explains that rare objects that are randomly discovered (“found”) and those that are won through the hunt, through stealth or through warfare (“trophies”) are valued by primitive tribes for their capacity to act as masks.³² Here the term *mask* not only refers to objects which simulate the face or head of other creatures, but also to any object which has some capacity to evoke, through either ritual or play, another creature or object.³³ Caillois maintains that in Dionysian societies the aim of decorating a building or person with a mask is to “reincarnate [...] powers and spirits, special energies and gods. It covers a primitive type of culture founded [...] on the powerful association of pantomime with ecstasy.”³⁴ In primitive societies found or trophy items are traditionally feathers, bones or skins although “cargo cult” style appropriation of anything from mirrors to glass bottles began to occur in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The close relationship between the spatial and the social by way of the found or trophy object (the mask) is most clearly seen in the manner in which the Bororo tribe of the Brazilian Mato Grosso constructed, sited and decorated structures. When Salesian missionaries persuaded the Bororo tribe to leave behind their villages and live in modern rectangular huts (evenly spaced in parallel rows), the entire social structure of the tribe was undermined.³⁵ Joseph Rykwert records that not only were the Bororo tribe physically disorientated but they were also spatially bereft, having lost the connection between the body (including the soul) and the spirit (their cosmology) provided by the orientation and decoration of their houses.³⁶ The physical dislocation experienced by the Bororo people (and other tribes including the Nambikwara) resulted in an instant loss of spatial distinction between bodies, buildings and beliefs, rendering the tribe susceptible to external disruptions.³⁷ Thus, while the modern buildings provided the equivalent physical protection of the traditional huts, they could not provide commensurate spiritual or symbolic protection.³⁸ Essentially the Salesian missionaries failed to understand the importance of cultural iconography for protection and defence not just of the physical bodies of the tribe’s members but also of their collective identities.³⁹ While many determinants influenced this destruction of identity and culture, the loss of symbolic protection afforded by the found or trophy object cannot be ignored as a contributing factor.

In “The Tower of Babel Revisited” Coop Himmelblau describe a similar relationship between architecture and society by way of found objects. For Coop Himmelblau, if architecture becomes neutral, bland or repetitive it fails to provide a connection between space and society. Like the Salesian mission, the streets of Vienna not only lack critical connection between social and spatial realms but they also result (or so Coop Himmelblau maintain) in the stagnation and

30. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1973).

31. The significance of trophy items is also relevant to the Western architectural tradition and the orders. See George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988).

32. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

33. Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood, 1959).

34. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 99.

35. The close connection between the real world and the imaginary in Bororo society is also discussed in Fraser, *The Golden Bough*, 180–182.

36. Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), 171.

37. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 228–232.

38. This relationship between the physical and the symbolic functions of the primitive hut is analysed in Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989).

39. See the discussion of the growth and loss of identity in John Jaynes, *The Origin Of Consciousness In The Break-Down Of The Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982).



African Monarch Butterfly.



Nigerian *Acraea* Butterfly.

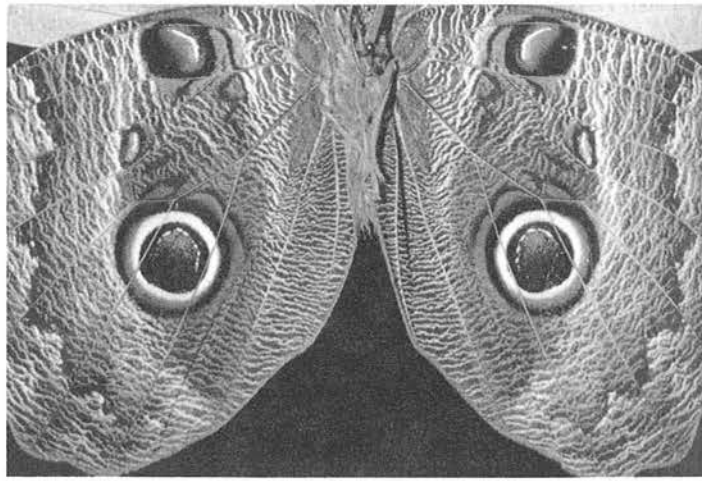
(Both figures: Michael Fogden and Patricia Fogden, *Animals and their Colors: Camouflage, Warning Coloration, Courtship and Territorial Display, Mimicry*)

death of culture. Yet Coop Himmelblau also propose that architecture, by way of the found object, provides protection and provokes fear. In the Bororo society the mask (the found object *par excellence*) allows architecture both of these characteristics. Moreover in many primitive cultures, including the Bororo, the mask is largely synonymous with the evil eye. The fundamental duty that the mask or evil eye performs in primitive cultures is that of protection through the creation of fear in others. Appositely one of the best known examples of the evil eye is a found object that is woven into the walls of the same primitive tribal huts of Brazil. However while the Salesian missionaries failed to understand its significance an English naturalist spent many years of his life attempting to determine why it existed at all.

In 1862 the English naturalist Henry Bates published a short but highly influential study of lepidoptera in the British Journal of the Linnean Society. In this article Bates describes the studies he undertook between 1849 and 1860 in the jungles of Brazil. During this eleven year period Bates indulged his fascination with butterflies and moths, capturing ninety-four species. When Bates went to classify his ninety-four species he began in the accepted manner by using colouration to differentiate each, but soon noticed that this method produced a number of serious inconsistencies. For example, Bates discovered that it was almost impossible to tell a certain species of butterfly (the *White* species of the family Pierodae) from another (the *Heliconiids* species of the family Heliconiidae). Bates attempted to explain this anomaly through the time-honoured scientific tradition of systematic observation and soon discovered that many butterflies of the *Heliconiids* species were unpalatable to native Brazilian birds while most other butterfly species were not. Bates noticed that while the *White* species were palatable their resemblance of the *Heliconiids* species meant that insectivorous birds were unlikely to eat them. Consequently Bates proposed that certain species adopt the colouration and characteristics of other species in order to survive. This extension of the Darwinian “survival of the fittest” truism is today known as Batesian mimicry.⁴⁰

One of the best known examples of Batesian mimicry is the *Caligo* butterfly, which is also found in the jungles of Brazil. In 1904 the etymologist Vignon described the *Caligo*'s wings as

40. Wolfgang Wickler, *Mimicry in Plants and Animals* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 13–18.

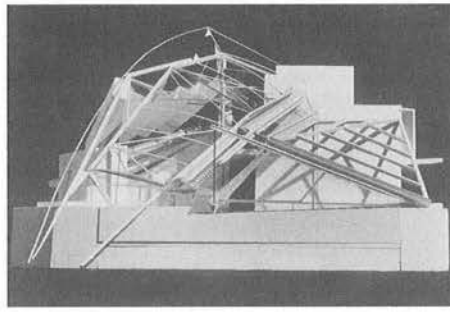


displaying “a bright spot surrounded by a palpebral circle, then by a circular and overlapping rows of small radial feathery strokes of variegated appearance.”⁴¹ Instead of mimicking another butterfly to avoid predation, the *Caligo*'s spread wings resemble the eyes and face of an owl and its body resembles the owl's beak. In this way it was supposed the *Caligo*'s metamorphosis into a large bird of prey would cause predatory avians to slow or stop their attacks.⁴² As Caillois records, the resemblance between the *Caligo* and the owl is so striking that “the natives of Brazil affix it to the doors of their barns as a replacement for the creature it imitates.”⁴³ Thus for Caillois the “behavior of the Brazilian natives” confirms that the *Caligo* “should probably be compared to the apotropaic *oculus invidiosus*, the evil eye that can not only harm but protect.”⁴⁴

The *Caligo* butterfly is one of many species that display a false eye and thus infer the existence of another animal. The behavioural psychologist Wolfgang Wickler proposes that because “of their tendency to fix the attention of human beings, the so-called eye-spots found on various animals such as butterflies, caterpillars, peacock's feathers and so on are a very well known phenomenon.”⁴⁵ However, despite their frequency scientists do “not know very much about the part they play”⁴⁶ in deception. Certainly such creatures were prized by primitive tribes for their ability to conjure up images of other, seemingly uncanny creatures. The *Caligo*'s preternatural resemblance of the owl made it both an ideal found object and a perfect evil eye. When woven into walls the *Caligo* becomes the archetypal *apotropaion*; it protects the inhabitants of the building by intimidating their enemies.⁴⁷

Curiously insects in general, and butterflies in particular, are recurring motifs in Coop Himmelblau's architecture. Geoffrey Broadbent notes the prevalence of the insect analogy in Coop Himmelblau's work, describing their roof-top remodelling in Vienna as “a light, airy and rather joyous thing; as if an insect has settled on a roof made of leaves, eaten all but the stalks and the veins leaving gossamer spiders' webs between them!”⁴⁸ This is the same building Jencks claims resembles the skeleton of a vast flying creature.⁴⁹ In like manner Paul-Alan Johnson describes Coop Himmelblau's buildings as “architectural insectivores parasitizing rooftops.”⁵⁰ Michael Sorkin uses occasional references to butterflies in Coop Himmelblau's presentations to derive an entire thesis involving the Butterfly Effect and sensitive dependence on starting conditions.⁵¹ All of these entomological associations are derived from Coop Himmelblau's portrayal of their designs as “insects,” as living “organisms” or as having “wings.”⁵² One project, “The Open House,” they describe as being “infected by an unstable biomorphic structure, a skeletal winged organism which distorts the form that houses it.”⁵³ Significantly the house is not only formed of an insect wing, suggesting “a means of flight” or “a source of lift,” but the wing is also

41. P. Vignon, “Sur le Matérialisme Scientifique ou Mécanisme Anti-Téléologique,” *Revue de Philosophie*, (1904): 562.
42. See Adolf Portmann, *Animal Camouflage* (Michigan: The University of Michigan, 1959); Lincoln P. Brower, ed., *Mimicry and the Evolutionary Process*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Michael Fogden and Patricia Fogden, *Animals and their Colors: Camouflage, Warning Coloration, Courtship and Territorial Display, Mimicry* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1974).
43. Roger Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” *October* No. 31 (Winter, 1984): 19.
44. Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” 19.
45. Wickler, *Mimicry in Plants and Animals*, 64.
46. Wickler, *Mimicry in Plants and Animals*, 64.
47. Roheim, “The Evil Eye,” 211–222.
48. Broadbent, *Deconstruction*, 87.
49. Jencks, *The New Moderns*, 277.
50. Paul-Alan Johnson, *The Theory of Architecture: Concepts, Themes and Practices* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1994), 244.
51. A detailed analysis of this connection is contained in Michael J. Ostwald, *Multi-Directional Appropriations of Theory Between Architecture and the Sciences Of Complexity: An Analysis of Motives and Efficacy* (Ph.D. diss., Newcastle University, 1998).
52. Coop Himmelblau, “On the Edge,” in *Architecture in Transition*, 24.
53. Coop Himmelblau, “Coop Himmelblau,” in Johnson and Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture*, 81.



Roof-top remodelling, Coop Himmelblau, Vienna, 1988. (Andreas Papadakis, Catherine Cooke and Andrew Benjamin, eds., *Deconstruction Omnibus Volume*)

“a cutting edge, a blade—which slices through the corner and springs outside.”⁵⁴ Here the insect wing is strongly reminiscent of the *Caligo* butterfly as it both protects (through the capacity to fly and shelter) and threatens (through its ability to slice). However, while the insect analogy in Coop Himmelblau’s architecture provides a palpable connection to the evil eye even stronger parallels exist.

Coop Himmelblau and the Evil Eye

The psychologist Richard Coss proposes that the origins of belief in the evil eye may be “attributed to the ancient Greek theory of visual perception where the eyes were thought to emanate rays that struck objects and people with sufficient power to produce physical harm or even death.”⁵⁵ The anthropologist Alan Dundes disagrees, claiming that the evil eye is far older than Greek and Roman civilisations; texts mentioning it are known to have “existed in the third or fourth millennium B.C.”⁵⁶ In twentieth century anthropology the evil eye is commonly attributed to either “folk rationalisations”⁵⁷ or “an original tendency of the human mind.”⁵⁸ The latter category is a function of both the mind’s capacity to auto-generate a face from an abstract eye-like object, as well as from the paranoia of being watched. Anthropologists identify five related characteristics of the evil eye: it is a found or trophy object (sometimes called a “prop” by psychologists); it displays an “eye-spot;” it is fragmentary or half-seen; its powers are bestowed upon the wearer (person or building); and it operates by reflecting the motives of the beholder.

Firstly, the evil eye is rarely innate to a body or a building, but rather it is a found or trophy object that masks the body or building. Coss argues that primitive societies employ such “props to accentuate the provocative aspects” of the evil eye.⁵⁹ Usually the mask possesses one or two circular markings which suggest eyes (or possibly one eye and another element or marking which might resemble a mouth or nose).⁶⁰ Thirdly, and most importantly, the mask is usually a fragmentary or temporal representation of a face. A fully visible face is complete and is therefore benign or at peace. A fragment of a mask suggests the presence of a disembodied, malformed, or tortured spirit. The mask may also be rendered a fragment by virtue of being hidden or half-seen. For this reason Garrison and Arensberg assert that the evil eye is associated with “dissemination of assets and hiding of displays.”⁶¹ A mask may also be temporal or context sensitive; this implies that the eye spots only become apparent when the object is viewed from certain angles or at certain times of the day or night. Regardless of whether the mask is fragmentary or temporal, it represents the aftermath of violence (because it is incomplete or broken) and is suggestive of an angry spirit waiting for revenge. Fourthly, the mask bestows its powers upon the person or building it is attached to. As Caillois records, the mask represents the mimetic impulse in primitive societies, it acts “to change the wearer’s appearance and to inspire fear in others.”⁶² Finally, anthropologists believe that the evil eye operates by reflecting the emotions of the viewer—most commonly envy or violent desires—back at the viewer. The viewer’s reac-

54. Coop Himmelblau, “Coop Himmelblau,” in Johnson and Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture*, 81.

55. Richard G. Coss, “Reflections on the Evil Eye,” in Dundes, *The Evil Eye*, 182.

56. Dundes, *The Evil Eye*, 39.

57. Brian Spooner, “Anthropology and the Evil Eye,” in Maloney, *The Evil Eye*, 281.

58. Robert Craig MacLagan, *Evil Eye in the Western Highlands* (Wakefield: E.P. Publishing, 1972 [1902]), 1.

59. Coss, “Reflections on the Evil Eye,” 182.

60. Natacha Stewart, *Evil Eye and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1973).

61. Vivian Garrison and Conrad M. Arensberg, “The Evil Eye: Envy or Risk of Seizure? Paranoia of Patronal Dependency?” in Maloney, *The Evil Eye*, 296.

62. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 20.



Face Space/Soul Flipper, Coop Himmelblau, 1969.
(Peter Noever, ed., *The End of Architecture*)

63. See Helmut Schoeck, "The Evil Eye: Forms and Dynamics of a Universal Superstition" in Dundes, *The Evil Eye*, 192–200.

64. "Architect James Lennon developed a series of large vertically hung transparent panels displaying a single column of abstracted frowning eyes. These panels, which appeared to the casual observer as 'super graphics,' were placed perpendicular to the entrances of several stores in an attempt to reduce shoplifting. According to Lennon, potential shoppers were observed to walk briskly into the interior of the test store without loitering near the merchandise adjacent to the panels. Shoplifting dropped markedly during the test period when the panels were hung, while the volume of merchandise sold remained constant." Coss, "Reflections on the Evil Eye," 189.

65. Coop Himmelblau, "On the Edge," in *Deconstruction III*, 66.

66. Coop Himmelblau, "On the Edge," in *Architecture in Transition*, 21.

67. Coop Himmelblau, *Architecture is Now: Projects, (Un)Buildings, Actions, Statements, Sketches, Commentaries, 1968–1983* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 176.

68. Coop Himmelblau, "On the Edge," in *Deconstruction III*, 66.

69. Coop Himmelblau, "On the Edge," in *Architecture in Transition*, 18.

70. Coop Himmelblau, "On the Edge," in *Deconstruction III*, 67.

71. Coop Himmelblau, "On the Edge," in *Architecture in Transition*, 25.

72. Coop Himmelblau, "Skyline, 1985. Silhouette for a City like Hamburg," in *Deconstruction Omnibus Volume*, eds. Andreas Papadakis, Catherine Cooke and Andrew Benjamin (London: Academy, 1989), 229.

73. See Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966).

74. Coop Himmelblau, "On the Edge," in *Deconstruction III*, 66.

75. Coop Himmelblau, "The Tower of Babel Revisited," 29.

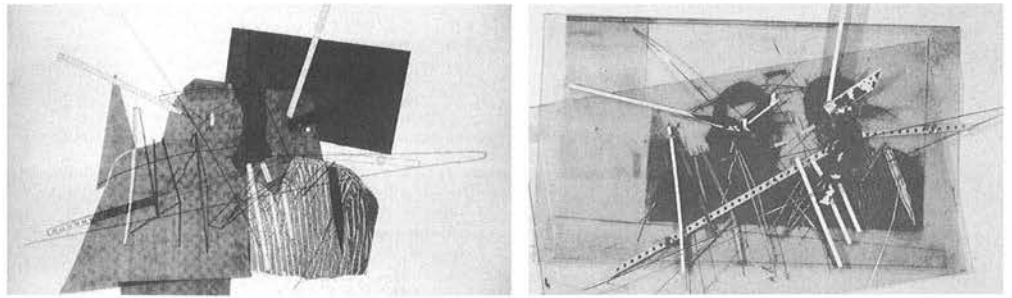
76. Coop Himmelblau, *Coop Himmelblau: Die Faszination der Stadt/The Power of the City*, eds. Oliver Gruenberg, Robert Hahn and Doris Knecht (Austria: Georg Büchner, 1988), 16.

tion to the evil eye is therefore either fear or shame, and thus the mask or *oculus* affords a form of protection.⁶³ For example, in the primitive villages of the Amazon rainforest the evil eye was fixed to the walls of certain houses to ward off danger, thereby serving an apotropaic function. In the 1970s architects working with psychologists experimented with the use of *oculi* in buildings in an attempt to reduce crime: a similarly apotropaic objective.⁶⁴

Each of these five characteristics of the evil eye is also found in the architecture of Coop Himmelblau. First and foremost, the architectural method of Coop Himmelblau is replete with *oculi*. As early as 1969 Coop Himmelblau were experimenting with ways of transforming their faces and eyes into architecture. Their project the "Face Space" involves a device that "translates facial movement [...] into colour and sound."⁶⁵ For Coop Himmelblau the "movements of the face" are the "natural façade of the emotions."⁶⁶ A smiling mouth "is translated into bright, happy colours, and a sad expression"⁶⁷ bathes the architecture in a blue light. The eyes like the mouth in this project mask the architecture through shifts in colour and sound. In this and other early projects Coop Himmelblau use facial expressions to manipulate or mask existing spaces. In more recent years Coop Himmelblau's approach to architecture has shifted and now they use their eyes as either part of their design method or as found objects to generate the design.

Coop Himmelblau regularly admit that they draw with their "eyes closed,"⁶⁸ perhaps because they know "[a]s practiced Viennese" that "turning a blind eye to something costs an enormous amount of energy and imagination."⁶⁹ Moreover, they describe how "in order not [to] be distracted" from their beliefs, the first drawing is frequently made with eyes closed. Sometimes, as in their "Open House" project, the senior partner of Coop Himmelblau, Wolf Prix, closes his eyes and uses his hands to graph "the feelings that arose."⁷⁰ Despite this, Coop Himmelblau "do not always make the first drawing for a project with [...] eyes closed"⁷¹—sometimes they work with their eyes barely open. For the "Skyline" project in Hamburg they viewed the city from a distance through "half closed eyes."⁷² In the use of this method they are following in the footsteps of the famous humanist Heinrich Wölfflin, who advocated viewing buildings through half-closed eyes in order to detect their underlying patterns.⁷³ In addition to this use of sight and seeing in creativity, Coop Himmelblau also use eyes as found objects.

In an urban design for Paris, Coop Himmelblau utilised photographs of their own faces and traced the "energy lines of the head"⁷⁴ and translated these lines into a model for the city. This is similar to the design method they espouse in "The Dissolution of our Bodies in the City" where their "eyes became towers" and their "faces landscapes."⁷⁵ In another project they commenced the process of design in a similar way with a photograph of their own faces, but they then fragmented this image through a series of successive enlargements. Coop Himmelblau enlarged the photograph "step by step, until just the pupils of the eyes are visible. They are the plan of a tall building, and," Coop Himmelblau admit, they "intend to build it."⁷⁶ In this final project the entire building becomes the evil eye generating fear for the city and security for its inhabitants.



This project seems to perfectly fulfil their claim that the “safe and sound world of architecture no longer exists.”⁷⁷ In these and other projects the eye is not only present as a design tool but it is also a found object, with visible *oculi*, which can be read as a generator for a new face and which simultaneously protects its users and causes fear in others. Here all five characteristics of the evil eye in the architecture of Coop Himmelblau are unveiled.

Once the *oculus invidiosus* is uncovered in the architecture of Coop Himmelblau the final question that remains to be asked is why? Certainly there is evidence to suggest that Coop Himmelblau wish to protect their designs. They also freely admit to desiring to upset the Viennese populace and almost anyone else who stands in their way. Perhaps in the seventies and eighties Coop Himmelblau began to incorporate the apotropaic *oculus invidiosus* into their architecture for the purpose of protecting their designs and the enlightened clients who supported the construction of their buildings. While the evidence for this position remains circumstantial there are strong parallels between this position and the use of the evil eye in any culture. But this answer assumes that the apotropaic *oculus invidiosus* in the architecture of Coop Himmelblau is a conscious creation. Anthropologists argue that the evil eye is rarely a conscious creation, and is almost always an accidental occurrence. Generally the found object just happens to resemble a face or eye from a certain angle, even if the object has no relationship to humanity or one that was never intended. A more compelling answer to this question of “why” is suggested in the research of the anthropologist Brian Spooner.

According to Spooner, the evil eye spontaneously generates in society at times of greatest cultural stress. The mythology of the evil eye is not restricted to primitive societies: it has been prevalent in all cultures at some point in time. What is important is that “life in a complex society,”⁷⁸ regardless of the era or technological level, places new stresses on the community. At such times ordinary objects, which have hitherto been ignored, suddenly develop the potential to act as masks. For the primitive tribes of the Amazon the *Caligo* butterfly was transformed from simple insect into a sign of protection when they were confronted with an unexplained famine and the need to store crops. In recent times the butterfly has again been transformed from a simple creature into metaphor for the power and unpredictability of natural systems. Humanity has entered a new, more complex era where tiny events are signposts to greater meaning. Perhaps the fearful response Coop Himmelblau’s architecture generates is as much accidental as it is planned.

Coop Himmelblau describe their architecture as a direct response to the growing complexity in society. If Spooner’s thesis is correct then the fearful response to the *oculus invidiosus* in the architecture of Coop Himmelblau is completely adventitious. Coop Himmelblau’s design method simply produces buildings which are shaped by their own fragmented features and people are sufficiently sensitive to such objects that they automatically generate the remainder of the face and thereby sense their own fears about the world reflected back to them.

Both figures:
The Dissolution of our Bodies in the City, Coop Himmelblau, 1988.
(Coop Himmelblau, *Coop Himmelblau: Die Faszination der Stadt/The Power of the City*, eds. Oliver Gruenberg, Robert Hahn and Doris Knecht)

77. Coop Himmelblau, “On the Edge,” in *Deconstruction III*, 65.

78. Spooner, “Anthropology and the Evil Eye,” 283.