

INTERNATIONAL LEXICON OF AESTHETICS

Autumn 2020 Edition, ISSN 2611-5166, ISBN 9788857570020, DOI 10.7413/18258630094

ARCHITECTURAL SPACE

By *Simona Chiodo*

(First published November 30, 2020)

It. *Spazio architettonico*; Fr. *Espace architectural*; Germ. *Architektonischer Raum*; Span. *Espacio arquitectónico*. The contemporary notion of architectural space is particularly complex due to its historical evolution. Architectural space means not only dividing an ordered artefactual space (*kosmos*) from a disordered natural space (*chaos*), as ancient Greek philosophers conceived it, but also adding to a material spatial dimension an equally important immaterial spatial dimension. Moreover, the contemporary notion of architectural space implies moving from a notion of space that is autonomous from the notion of time to a notion of space that necessarily means experiencing a given space in a given time (Einstein 2006. See especially the philosophical reading of Einstein's theory offered by Cassirer 1923: 385, 442: "the empirical object means nothing but a totality of relations according to law. [...] In this sense, we must conceive the pure space-time manifold as the logical *prius*; not as if it existed and were given in some sense outside of and before the empirical and physical, but because it constitutes a principle and a fundamental condition of all knowledge of empirical and physical relations". See also Husserl 1997 for a phenomenological approach). What finally results from Einstein's revolutionary work is that space and time are integrated also when it comes to understanding them in terms of aesthetic experience, which becomes a more and more complex notion, as Dewey argues (Dewey 2005: 36-37: "we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfilment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. [...] Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience"). Moreover, the notion of space has gradually moved from an ancient idea of discontinuity to a modern and contemporary idea of continuity, provided by the tools of geometry and mathematics, from scientific perspective to Cartesian plane, finally obtaining a greater control on any kind of architectural space, i.e. both empirical and virtual, which is exceedingly important from the designer's perspective (from a scientific perspective, see especially Panofsky 1991: 66: "The result was a translation of psychophysiological space into mathematical space"; on Cartesian plane, see especially Cassirer 1923). The ultimate result of the historical evolution of the

notion of architectural space is that, now, we cannot define architecture as the art of space *par excellence*, as Lessing paradigmatically used to do in the eighteenth century, also limiting architecture's power of representation (Lessing 1968). Now, we should rather refer to architectural space as an exceedingly complex notion integrating materiality, on the one hand, and void, immateriality (according to its various meanings specified in the following paragraphs) and moreover time, on the other hand.

Even though this approach especially characterises the contemporary debate on architectural space, it is not extraneous to the reflections of the last two centuries: from Schopenhauer, according to whom architectural space, in spite of its prevailing materiality, can disclose the nature of light (Schopenhauer 2018), to Riegl, who highlights that the historical evolution of the notion of architectural space leads to the acknowledgment of its infinite possibilities (Riegl 1984), to the analyses offered by Wölfflin (2015), Worringer (1953) and Schmarsow, whose the focus on both the bodily experience and the psychological experience of architectural space undoubtedly increases its complexity by making it irreducible to its materiality (see Vischer *et al.* 1994). Finally, Heidegger's reflection on architectural space further opens to an exceedingly complex notion of it: dwelling, which is not founded by building, being rather its condition of possibility, is conceived as a constitutive ontological quality of the human identity, ultimately meaning taking care of architectural space itself (Heidegger 1975).

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

If we take into account the last decades, then we realise that, paradoxically enough, spatiality becomes more and more questionable when it comes to defining architectural space, which needs to be thought of in terms of a variety of categories.

Augé uses the concept of 'non-place' to identify a typically contemporary way of designing architectural spaces, such as airports and shopping centres, as something without what we may call *genius loci*, i.e. unique characters, resulting from equally unique morphology, history and contextual relationships in general: "a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places" (Augé 1995: 77-78). On the contrary, actual places are "places of identity, of relations and of history. The layout of the house, the rules of residence, the zoning of the village, placement of altars, configuration of public open spaces, land distribution, correspond for every individual to a system of possibilities, prescriptions and interdicts whose content is both spatial and social. To be born is to be born in a place, to be 'assigned to residence'. In this sense the actual place of birth is a constituent of individual identity" (Augé 1995: 52-53).

Virilio thinks of a possible replacement of an aesthetics of space with an aesthetics of time, which means that, through the development of contemporary technology, we are progressively replacing the former with virtual experiences of places in general and architectures in particular, from landscapes to cities to buildings. According to Virilio, whose perspective is a partially critical analysis of our era, all we need is

some time to virtually experience spaces without travelling at all, replacing the real with the virtual, as well as the direct with the indirect (Virilio 2005).

In Italy, Cacciari starts from Heidegger's reflection to highlight that the human being can generate both architectural space and void, by making the former empty. According to him, emptying architectural space characterises our era, and it is likely to characterise our future. Yet, void may be also a new chance for architects to build something novel (Cacciari 1995).

What may be thought of as the major philosophical contribution to the contemporary debate on architectural space is offered by Böhme's notion of atmosphere, which, especially in his *Architektur und Atmosphäre* (2006), is developed through a reflection on architectural space itself. Böhme argues that the aesthetic experience of architectural space has to be understood also, and moreover, in atmospheric terms, in that it involves both a *stricto sensu* perceptive dimension and a *lato sensu* perceptive dimension, which is emotional, sentimental: "Atmosphere is the shared reality of the perceiver and the perceived. [...] At bottom, perceiving is the mode in which one is bodily present with something or someone or in one's surroundings. The primary *object* of perception is atmospheres [...] in front of which, by an analytical way of seeing, something like objects, forms, and colours, are then distinguished" (Böhme 2018: 23, 34-35). Objective architectural space is not denied, since we can identify objective architectural qualities, but what has the greatest power to define what an architectural space means to a human being is its more subjective, specifically atmospheric, aesthetic experience (which finally means experiencing oneself, i.e. both one's perceptive identity and one's emotional and sentimental identity). Thus, reading architectural space in atmospheric terms means conceiving the former in a more subjective way, on the one hand, and conceiving of the latter in a more objective way, ending up thinking of atmospheres as quasi-things, on the other hand (Griffero 2019).

More generally, speaking of the contemporary notion of architectural space from a philosophical perspective means speaking of a fairly precise move: from identifying it with an objective dimension given by concrete materiality to, first, adding a more subjective dimension given by the relationships between a variety of material objects and a variety of other kinds of elements and, second, adding an even more subjective dimension given by a kind of emotional dialogue between material objects and the subjects' feelings.

It is no coincidence that the recent debate on architectural space has also to do with a kind of ethical dimension of architectural space itself: as the current Coronavirus emergency has clearly showed, architectural space, starting from our homes, can definitely make the difference when it comes to increasing our quality of life, which finally means providing us with the condition of possibility for taking care of ourselves both as individuals and as a society. In this respect, the possible convergence between architectural space, on the one hand, and the philosophical notion of well-being (Fletcher 2016), on the other hand, may underpin a further promising development of the former.

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HOW TO QUOTE THIS ENTRY

S. Chiodo, *Architectural Space*, "International Lexicon of Aesthetics", Autumn 2020 Edition, URL = <https://lexicon.mimesisjournals.com/archive/2020/autumn/ArchitecturalSpace.pdf>, DOI: 10.7413/18258630094.

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S. Chiodo, *Architectural Space*, "International Lexicon of Aesthetics", Vol. 3, Milano, Mimesis, 2021.