

Gesture?

What is a gesture? What constitutes a gesture? How do we look at gestures?

A gesture usually describes a type of expression, to gesture is to gesticulate and therefore to articulate something in a symbolic form rather than or without the need of verbal language.

I label my work as gestures, because this is what I believe my work focuses on, the part gestures of the architectural body. Throughout the creation and realisation of this book I have questioned the notion of gesture and what a gesture can be or mean.

My interpretation of gesture, specifically when applied to architecture, rests in my understanding of object attachment and transition whereby the nature of placing oneself with-in objects, when perceiving them, allows one to better identify and understand them.

As I strove to understand this desire to relate the human condition with that of architecture, my research bent towards human psychology. In particular the theories of Winnicott and transitional objects struck a chord, allowing me to see how I and others could relate and embody an in-animate object with human form and human psychology. The very notion of a part object, one that is a piece of a whole object that we can attach to, resonates with my photographic practise. My photographic part objects of a fragmented focused view of architecture embody methods of relating and connecting with the whole object of the architectural building.

Photographically, the imagery I have produced here looks to in part fragment, but also focus, ones view of the subject; in this case architecture. The aim is not a narrated journey through or of the city or architecture, but a personal view point and the elaboration of my thoughts on the architectural body and how I relate and see the human form within it. I have come to realise that I have a psychological comfort in transferring myself onto these buildings and, that in doing so, it allows me to relate and truly know the place I am in.

The practise of seeing oneself within something else is what I label "positive" narcissism and is at play within this book. To truly understand the aim one has to see the human form and human layering that is represented by the architectural gesture herein.

Freud talked about the notion of narcissism when he labelled the house as the dream representation of the body. He believed that the house was the only true symbolic representation for the human body in the sub-conscious dream states, referencing various experimentations where part objects of a house would stand in for bodily parts in the dream state¹.

Anatomically, human bodies are made up of part objects, coming together to create the whole body. Psychologically the human self is also made up of parts², that come together to create the person/character/self/being. These parts are divisible of the whole, and indicate the whole within each part. The anatomy of architecture also has parts, usually manifest in its materials, which combine to create the whole body of the building. Equally Architecture has psychological parts, these are applied by individuals that view or use the building and, just as the human's psychological parts come together to form the self, so too do the architectural psychological parts come together within a humans sub-conscious and conscious to form the character, representation and

understanding of a building. I believe that we can split the building back into its constituting parts, and each would indicate and contain the whole within it³.

Gestures as a human bodily expression, can take the form of these part body objects; as an action or symbol they have a meaning or expression, but as an object they are part of the whole body and so allude to that body even if divided from it. Therefore, can a non-gesture, a divisible part, as object without statement, still be a gesture as its meaning is to indicate the whole to which it is attached?

This question which I have formed and constantly come back to with this body of work is examined even further within this book. I deconstruct my already labelled architectural gesture by cutting away and revealing the image underneath it; the purpose being to change non-imaginative and stereotypical views of architecture and to focus on the layers and part structures joined within the whole body of architecture. This interaction and removal of part of the image is my gesture on and with the architecture, encouraging the idea of "Gestures within Gestures".

The interaction between each image has been influenced by my research into psychology and the works of Deleuze⁴, in particular his theory of folding space which entails a folding of the outside to the inside, where events external to us affect and mould us internally. Deleuzes' concepts have regularly been applied to architecture and can be seen at work in contemporary buildings that encourage the externals and internals to merge together. In Deleuzes' teachings our body is the point where the dimensions of inside and outside meet and interact, architecture has this same condition as it's walls are the boundary where these dimensions meet. Through this book, and the cutting away of the imagery, I try to create two folds, one between each image and the other between the viewer and the folding occurring through the pages.

"unfolding then always accompanies the fold that, in turn, produces new folds whilst also opening us up to that which is yet to be folded" (O'sullivan, 2005:106)⁴

The folding space created is complemented by the fragmenting or removal of part of the image, which psychologically encourages a person to relate to and question more deeply what they are seeing. Additionally the more complex something is, visually, then the more cognitive the process becomes to decipher it; potentially leading one to relate to the object more fully before one can understand what it is one is looking at.

I have long had the view, through my various wanderings and journeys in the city, that those buildings inhabiting it are bodies with appendages, minds, which have metaphorical similarities to the human body and mind. I apply the process of re-looking and re-creating those urban objects familiar to many within cities, echoing the practises of Walter Benjamin's "*Flaneur*"⁵, Roland Barthes "*Structural man*"⁶ and the Situationist "*Derive & Psycho-geography*"⁷. My aim is to lead others in my view of the existential bodily form and metaphorical structures of architecture.

Each building, façade, window, step and detail portrayed here has been touched by the human hand in its creation. They are results of gestures. These fragmented parts of the architectural whole are gestural in form as well as function, in that they allude and represent the whole body within this partial view. Architectural gestures, gesture humans to a feeling or ask a person to interact with its architectural body; this can be seen in both contemporary and historic art and architectural practises. In Renaissance architecture the human body was used quite explicitly throughout the

façade of the building⁸. This served many purposes, one of which was to perceive and appreciate the beauty of the architectural body and the human body in a combined manner. Another interpretation is that the use and inclusion of the human form would gesture those around it towards the architecture as a whole.

In more contemporary architecture these gestures have become much more subtle but not diminished, in fact in the recent works of Antony Gormley, *3 X ANOTHER TIME (2017)*, he chose to realign the human body with the architectural body in a much more obvious and figural way, provoking a more traditional idea. Conversely, artists such as Heidi Brucher and Rachel Whiteread, whose various works on architecture and manmade structures choose to use the gesture as a creating tool to remove any figural form from their artwork, are more in line with my understanding of modern architecture and urban structures. These artists still gesture the human form and metaphorical similarities between architecture and the human body, but, unlike Gormley and Renaissance practises that choose to include the human form, Whiteread⁹ and Brucher¹⁰ utilise psychological methods to ask one to relate to these built forms.

Artists, such as these, can be described as producing gestures through their actions within their mediums. Where something is constructed it allows elements of the artist to be passed into the creation. In this respect the gesture has an alternative meaning and can be seen as the artist's style.

Thank you for reading this book and this short essay on my practise and thinking. I chose to include this text at the end of the book as an after-word, or after-thought to compliment my imagery. I have given you the opportunity to make your own mind up about my work unhindered by my or anyone else's interpretations. My research has led me on a wide photographic project, resulting in a new understanding of the relationship with my surroundings, especially that of cities and urban environments. The aim of this book is to ask you to reassess and re-evaluate your relationship with these spaces and structures too.

I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I have enjoyed making it.

Foot Notes

1. S. Freud, *Sigmund Freud: The interpretation of Dreams*, Translated by J Crick, New York, 1999, Oxford University Press, 72, 173, 259
2. F. Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology*, New York, 1966, Penguin Book – Here Fordham goes through Jung's Archetype theory, that of the conscious and sub-conscious splitting of the psyche into parts that control the personality of the individual i.e. the persona
3. D. H. Van der Laan, *Architectonic Space*, trans. by R, Padovan, Netherlands, 1983, Leiden – Within which Van der Laan talks about the brick, the wall, the cell, the court and the domain, all measurements of architecture that build and divide the structure.
- 4 S. O'Sullivan, 'Fold and Art and Tech', *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. A. Parr, Edinburgh, 2005, University Press. 104-106
5. R. Fulford, 'Walter Benjamin, the Flaneur, and the Confetti of History', thefreelibrary.com, 120, 2013
6. R. Barthes, *The Structuralist Activity*, trans. R, Howard, 1972
7. W. Self, *Psycho Geography*, London, 2007, Bloomsbury Publishers
8. A. Payne, 'Reclining Bodies: Figural Ornament in Renaissance Architecture', *Body and Building*, G. Dodds, Cambridge, 2001, MIT Press, 94-113
9. R. Whiteread, *Wall, Doors and floors Stairs*, ed. E, Schneider, Köln, 2005, Walther König
10. H. Bucher, *Heidi Bucher*, ed. H, Munder, Zurich, 2004, Migros Museum