

Intercultural Hermeneutics Contextualized

A Prolegomena to Future Architectural Theories

Yu-Xin Vincent Qiu

McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, CA

Abstract

This study draws on Bernard Stiegler's philosophy of technology to develop Paul Ricoeur's nascent intercultural hermeneutics and contextualize it in the discipline of architecture. The horizon of experience—considered as the boundary of human existence—never fully uncovers itself, yet always partially externalizes and objectifies into artifacts. A parallel reading of Ricoeur's proposition "texts as the fixation of discourse" and Stiegler's "technical objects as prostheses" helps illustrate this externalization process. The transmission, aggregation, and interconnection of meaningful artifacts constitute a cultural milieu that features a certain autonomy and internal coherence. Ricoeur's example is the intertextuality of Greek literature, while Stiegler identified the modern "technical milieu" composed of machine networks. Architecture can be understood as the artifacts relevant to the built environment within a cultural milieu. And architectural theory—unfolds according to Ricoeur's three-step figurations—is to explore a given cultural milieu and open up multiple horizons of experience for human existence.

Keywords: Horizon of experience; text; technical object; cultural milieu; architecture.

Résumé

Cette étude s'appuie sur la philosophie de la technique de Bernard Stiegler pour développer l'herméneutique interculturelle de Paul Ricoeur et la situer dans le domaine de l'architecture. L'horizon d'expérience – compris comme la limite de l'existence humaine – ne se dévoile jamais entièrement, mais s'extériorise partiellement dans des artefacts. Une lecture parallèle de l'idée ricoeurienne du texte comme « fixation du discours » et de l'analyse stieglerienne des objets techniques comme « prothèses de l'humain » élucide ce processus d'extériorisation. La transmission, l'accumulation et l'interconnexion des artefacts constituent un milieu culturel doté d'une certaine autonomie et cohérence interne. Ricoeur en offre un exemple dans l'intertextualité de la littérature grecque antique, tandis que Stiegler identifie le « milieu technique » moderne composé de réseaux de machines. L'architecture, considérée comme l'ensemble des artefacts relative à l'environnement bâti dans un milieu culturel, engendre la théorie – suivant les trois figurations de Ricoeur – qui vise à interpréter un milieu culturel donné et à ouvrir de multiples horizons d'expérience.

Mots-clés : Horizon d'expérience; texte; objet technique; milieu culturel; architecture.

Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies, Vol 16, No 2 (2025), pp. 194-212

ISSN 2155-1162 (online) DOI 10.5195/errs.2025.689

<http://ricœur.pitt.edu>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.

Pitt | Open
Library
Publishing

This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](http://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com).

Intercultural Hermeneutics Contextualized

A Prolegomena to Future Architectural Theories

Yuxin Vincent Qiu

McGill University: Montreal, Quebec, CA

Introduction

By contextualizing intercultural hermeneutics within the discipline of architecture, this essay presents a convergence of two aims. The first is to draw on the philosophy of technology—primarily through the work of Bernard Stiegler—to supplement the material dimension that is relatively underdeveloped in the textual hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. Previous scholars have suggested ways to think about technology by using elements of Ricoeur’s philosophy, and many have drawn on Stiegler.¹ An additional reason to relate the two figures is their heavy reliance on phenomenologists like Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl to ground their own philosophical inquiries. Perhaps most importantly, their philosophical investigation of the text and technical objects come together to evince significant relevance for the discipline of architecture, whose subject matter encompasses both physical buildings and the information about them found in paper-based documents. In the broader sense, the former can be conceived as technical objects while the latter belong to the text.

The essay’s second aim, immediately following the first, is to refine the nascent idea of intercultural hermeneutics in Ricoeur’s writing and develop its potential to inform architectural theory. There are indications in existing scholarship that hermeneutic inquiry can—and should—be extended to the field of architecture. Ricoeur himself reflected on architecture and urbanism, most notably in his essay “Architecture and Narrativity,” along with numerous suggestive and relevant discussions on art and space.² Correspondingly, architectural theorists have long engaged

¹ The standard study on Ricoeur and technology is Wessel Reijers, Alberto Romele, and Mark Coeckelbergh. eds., *Interpreting Technology: Ricoeur on Questions Concerning Ethics and Philosophy of Technology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021). This book includes a wide-range survey on Ricoeur and technology that is also published as: “Ricoeur’s philosophy of technology and its reception”. In: Burkhard Liebsch (ed.), *Grundfragen hermeneutischer Anthropologie. Paul Ricoeur’s Werk im historischen Kontext: Existenz, Interpretation, Praxis, Geschichte. Volume III. Praxis* (Baden-Baden: Karl Alber, 2024), 2035-2066. Ricoeur has also been increasingly used to discuss recent developments of digital and computational technology. For example: Fernando Nascimento, “Technologies, Narratives, and Practical Wisdom,” *Études Ricoeuriennes/ Ricoeur Studies* vol.10 no.2 (2019): 21-35; Alberto Romele, “Digital Traceability and the Right to be Forgotten. Ricoeurian Perspectives,” *Tropos. Journal of Hermeneutics and Philosophical Criticism*, Paul Ricoeur: Human, Antihuman, Posthuman, vol.2 no.8 (2016), 1-12.

² Ricoeur’s thought in relation to the study of arts and aesthetics is explored in the special issue *Études Ricoeuriennes/ Ricoeur Studies* vol.7, no.2 (2016). This issue includes the seminal text: Paul Ricoeur, “Architecture and Narrativity,” *Études Ricoeuriennes/ Ricoeur Studies* vol.7, no.2 (2016): 31-42. This text is also grouped with Ricoeur’s other essays concerning architecture and urbanism, published in an Italian collection: *Paul Ricoeur, Leggere la città: Quattro testi di Paul Ricoeur*, eds. Francesco Garofalo and Giuseppina Scavuzzo (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2010). A detailed examination of Ricoeur and the question of space can be found in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies* vol.12, no.2 (2021).

in phenomenology, and have explicitly proposed hermeneutics as a guideline for architectural theory.

Combining the above two aims, the contribution of this essay lies at the intersection of architectural theory and Ricoeur's philosophy. On the one hand, revisiting Ricoeur's preliminary reflections on architecture offers a unique opportunity to extend his text-based hermeneutics into the domain of material artifacts. On the other hand, within architectural theory, hermeneutics has already been integrated into phenomenological approaches to architecture, notably by the Essex School.³ With an emphasis on the symbolic, communicative dimension of design, it opens the way for intercultural concerns⁴ within architectural discourse. Taken together, these two lines of inquiry suggest the central proposition of the present essay: intercultural hermeneutics as architectural theory. As this proposition makes it clear, the present essay aims to contribute to architectural theory by adapting the perspective of intercultural hermeneutics from Ricoeur's thought.

The discussion in this essay unfolds through an exploration of two key concepts: the horizon of experience and cultural milieu. The notion of the horizon, especially within existential phenomenology, adopts the meaning of life world or world-horizon. This essay coins the term "horizon of experience" to describe the holistic networks of relational significance that frame the conceptual limit of human experience and give meanings to entities in the world. Although the horizon of experience can never fully reveal or expose, it can always become partially tangible through the production of meaningful artifacts. The aggregation of these artifacts constitutes a milieu in which they associate with one another to obtain a certain autonomy and internal coherence, hence the idea of a cultural milieu. A parallel reading of Ricoeur's notion of texts and Stiegler's technical objects will help expound the above ideas.

Architecture refers to the meaningful artifacts that constitute the built environment within a cultural milieu. In the present essay, intercultural hermeneutics offers a guideline to examine and make intelligible the architecture of an alternative cultural milieu, leading towards the understanding of diverse horizons of experience that ultimately enrich the self-understanding of human beings. The operation of such architectural discourse follows Ricoeur's three figurations and evinces a twofold efficacy: it configures architectural history in order to enlarge our "space of

³ The present essay mainly draws on the Essex school of architectural phenomenology active around the 1970-80s. A specific theme of this school is stressing the cultural, symbolic, and communicative dimension of design, against functionalist modern architecture. Two representative texts will be used in the following discussion: Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question Concerning Creativity in the Shadow of Production* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014) and Alberto Perez-Gomez, "Hermeneutics as Architectural Theory," in *Timely Meditations: Selected Essays on Architecture vol.2 Architectural Philosophy and Hermeneutics* (Montreal: Right Angle International, 2016), 22-36.

⁴ In contemporary scholarship, intercultural hermeneutics is frequently employed as a framework to address methodological challenges in comparative philosophy, particularly concerning non-Western traditions such as Asian, African, and indigenous thought. Ricoeur's hermeneutics has been central to many of these discussions, especially in relation to the issue of translatability, the ethics of intercultural dialogue, and the negotiation of difference. One collection of essays that reflects interdisciplinary research on this theme: *The Agon of Interpretations: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics*. eds. Ming Xie (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 2014); See also Fred Dallmayr, *Critical Phenomenology, Cross-cultural Theory, Cosmopolitanism*. eds. Farah Godrej (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

experience” while it refigures the actual world through creative design actions empowered by our enlarged “horizon of expectation.”

From the horizon of experience to meaningful artifacts

This section traces the idea of the horizon along the lines drawn by Husserl and his followers in order to characterize some of its central features. Existential phenomenology from Heidegger onwards tends to relate the idea of “horizon” with the life-world or world-horizon, thus prompting the present essay to adopt the term “horizon of experience.” A primary feature of the horizon of experience is the alternation between concealment and disclosure, which means that the horizon is inexhaustible. The second feature immediately follows the first one: Although the horizon of experience never fully uncovers itself, it is partially externalized and objectified in artifacts produced by human beings. The horizon’s second feature will be elaborated through Ricoeur’s notion of “texts as fixation of discourse” and Stiegler’s “technical objects as prostheses of human beings.”

The notion of the horizon is already present in Husserl’s early writings such as *Ideas I*, though at that moment mostly as the endeavors to discover the horizon of the transcendental subject. In Husserl’s later work, he tended to relate the idea of horizon with life-world or world-horizon, which is widely adopted by his followers from Heidegger onwards.⁵ In Husserl’s late writings such as the *Crisis*, the horizon became the ground of human experience, the ultimate origin that makes possible all sense formation and production. Speaking about “the community as a horizon,”⁶ Husserl also used this idea to signify the broadened framework of interrelated and shared experiences that implicitly guide perception and action beyond the bounds of individual consciousness.

In his *Being and Time*, Heidegger described the horizon as the unsurpassable and inclusive boundary that grants meaning to human existence. This horizon can be interpreted as networks of interrelated meanings connecting humans with surroundings. Human beings are active centers for the genesis and renewal of these relations, which are mediated through both physical tools and referential signs. Together, these networks of signification are the foundation within which everyday practical actions are embedded. Heidegger described this structure as a “totality of equipment” or “referential totalities.”⁷ Humans’ embeddedness in these relational networks has ontological significance: it is through this totality of involvement that entities within the world

⁵ See Saulius Geniusas. *The Origins of Horizons in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (New York: Springer, 2012).

In this comprehensive study of the notion of horizon, Geniusas argues that *Ideas I* is where Husserl firstly posed the horizon as a question. The author provides a detailed analysis of the world-horizon and life-world in Part III “The World-Horizon as the Wherefrom, Wherein, and the Whereto of Experience,” 177-224.

⁶ For example, see Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 150. Here the editor tried to expand on the notion of the horizon, describing it as “the framework in which experience occurs, conditioning that experience and supplying the diverse aspects of objectivity that are not directly intended in any one act of consciousness.”

⁷ For example, Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie, and Edward S. Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), 97, 99, 106.

enter the sphere of human concerns and find their meanings.⁸ The horizon can be conceived as the realm of possibility where such networks of significance can emerge to form the “world.”⁹ Thanks to this horizon, the world can unfold in renewed ways and worldly entities can appear as diverse and changing meanings. As Heidegger wrote, Dasein “has the inclination to take up a ‘relationship’ towards the world (...) Being-there [Da-sein], something like the world is already revealed to it so that from out of that world another entity can manifest itself in touching, and thus become accessible in its Being-present-at-hand (...) Such an entity can meet up with Dasein only in so far as it can, of its own accord, show itself within a world.”¹⁰

Hans-Georg Gadamer has a similar definition of the horizon. As he wrote, we define the concept of horizon “by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision (...) Horizon is the range of vision that includes everything can be seen from a particular vantage point.”¹¹ For Gadamer, the horizon is not only the conceptual limit of individual existence but also the historical condition of such existence, a specific circumstance in which individuals find their sense of belonging. Gadamer added to the horizon a layer of meaning that is historical, cultural, and social, extending the horizon beyond the confines of individual perspective and situating it within a shared tradition.

At the end of his *Time and Narrative 3*, Ricoeur used the term the “space of experience” that has a similar meaning to the horizon. The space of experience is made up of past events that converge into the present circumstance. The space of experience evokes “a stratified structure assembled like a pile of sheets of paper, an idea that gets away from the idea of the past so assembled as a simple chronology.”¹² Corresponding to the “space of experience” is the notion of the “horizon of expectation,” both borrowed from Reinhart Koselleck.¹³ The horizon of expectation is relative to the future, it is the future on the way of becoming present, or, the present turning towards the not-yet. In Ricoeur’s description, one senses that the horizon is constantly unfolding and transforming, this implicit and all-inclusive background of human experience is fundamentally dynamic.

The present essay adopts the term “horizon of experience” to encompass the connotations of the horizon presented above. This is a synthetic term, coined based on the above discussion starting with Husserl and Heidegger, passing through Gadamer and arriving at Ricoeur. The

⁸ The notion of equipment was deployed by Heidegger in a broad sense to describe something used to attain some purpose in a practical context. It’s crucial that for anything to function as equipment, there must be a nexus of other equipment in which this thing functions, hence «a totality of equipment.» Moreover, the actual relation of using equipment can be replaced by referential relations, for example, linguistic signs, hence the «referential totalities.» See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 53-90.

⁹ The term horizon appears occasionally as Heidegger discussed the idea of the world and worldhood. Heidegger thus described worldhood: “‘worldhood’ is an ontological concept, and stands for the structure of one of the constitutive items of Being-in-the-world.” See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 91-122.

¹⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 81-84.

¹¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd, eds., trans. Joel Weinsheimer, and Donald G. Marshall, (London: Continuum, 2004), 269.

¹² Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative vol.3*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), 208.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 208-216. Here Reinhart Koselleck’s two terms were used to help introducing Ricoeur’s ideas on the dynamics of the human experiences in relation to their inherited traditions.

following paragraphs revisit these thinkers in order to highlight a primary feature of the horizon of experience: that it never fully reveals itself, but continually oscillates between concealment and disclosure.

We can start from Heidegger to shed light on how this primary feature of the horizon of experience is articulated. Heidegger's example is a hammer. When such instrument functions smoothly, the horizon is silently at work in human beings' practical involvements with the world. The hammer blends in with the "horizon of average everydayness"¹⁴ or a familiar world we already understand. This is the status in which the hammer is "ready-to-hand." However, once the hammer malfunctions, the horizon of experience is brought into presence in relation to an individual's interaction with the world. One realizes that the hammer is an instrument to drive nails into wood. As the hammer turns into a broken equipment that is "present-at-hand," our relation to it is brought into awareness as a conscious issue—an explicit object of intellectual reflection and analysis.¹⁵ This distinction between present-at-hand and ready-to-hand implies that we can never attend to all aspects of experience simultaneously. As a consequence, the horizon of experience is always half-concealed, half-revealed: revealed in relation to our designated attention, yet its totality is always just out of reach.

Gadamer inherited the idea from Heidegger that the horizon can never fully reveal itself but is always in dialectic movements. He rejected any possibility of a transparent overview or final synthesis of the horizon, especially in the manner of Hegelian totality. As Gadamer said, it is impossible to obtain "the complete limitlessness of our historical horizons, or the abolition of our finiteness in the infinity of knowledge, in short, the omnipresent of the historical knowing spirit."¹⁶

In Ricoeur's philosophy, the inexhaustible feature of the horizon is expressed mainly through the emphasis on the radical finitude of consciousness. Ricoeur's philosophy emphasizes that we exist within a historical horizon of language whose meanings precede our own subjective creations, a condition which determines how consciousness is situated within a dynamic relation of belonging—both to past sedimentation and future projections of meaning.¹⁷ Subjectivity is found within a world whose significations encompass it and escape it on every side, hence one can only discover, explore, and understand the horizon through the interplay of distantiation and belonging in relation to one's given historical situation: "consciousness, even before its awakening as such, belongs to and depends on that which affects it."¹⁸

Having explored the inexhaustible feature of the horizon, we now turn to its second feature: although the horizon of experience can never be fully uncovered, it can always be partially

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 94.

¹⁵ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie, and Edward S. Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008). Heidegger explored the example of the hammer in "Analysis of Environmentality and Worldhood in General," 95-122.

¹⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd, eds., trans. Joel Weinsheimer, and Donald G. Marshall, (London: Continuum, 2004), 337.

¹⁷ Richard Kearney provides a thoughtful commentary on the theme of the finitude of consciousness at the core of Ricoeur's philosophy. See Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 16.

¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and Critique of Ideology" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, eds., trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 34.

materialized through the production of artifacts. This idea can be explored following two paths, in Ricoeur and Stiegler's philosophy respectively. The first path is found in Ricoeur's proposition "text is the fixation of discourse." Ricoeur highlighted the dialectical relationship between the written text and spoken discourse. While discourses are in-situ events realized here and now, the text detaches itself from the spatial-temporal circumstance from which it emerges. The text is a structured system of messages and codes that represents a fixed form of spontaneous discourse, the latter being produced through speech acts and rooted in the immediate context of its occurrence. Written words can be understood as a specific form of artifact, while the text, as its product of writing activity, objectifies the author's horizon of experience. Accordingly, Ricoeur spoke of the "semantic autonomy of a text."¹⁹ As he explained, "To say that discourse is an event is to say, first, that discourse is realized temporally and, in the present, whereas the system of language [fixed by texts] is virtual and outside of time."²⁰ This is what he referred to as "the exteriorization of discourse in writing and in the work."²¹

The second path from the horizon of experience to meaningful artifacts is based on a similar description of technical objects in Stiegler's *Technics and Time 1*. Stiegler posited that technical objects can be considered as a particular form of artificial memories, the so-called technical exteriorization of memory. He reworked André Leroi-Gourhan's ideas, arguing that humans are animals that evolve with the fabrication of tools. According to Stiegler, the act of fabrication allows interior human experiences to be externalized into the material world through the production of tools. In Stiegler's terminologies, this process marks the transformation of "epigenetic" memory into "phylogentic" memory. While epigenetic memory is formed through individual, lived experience and encoded as neuron traces in cerebral cortex, phylogentic memory is preserved in technical objects.²² Unlike inert physical objects or living organisms, technical objects occupy an intermediary position: they are the matter that carry the trace of human experience across spatial-temporal constraints. In this sense, human technics are primarily memo-technics and the history of technical productions is inseparable from the emergence of human beings. In Leroi-Gourhan's words, "the whole of our evolution has been oriented towards placing outside ourselves what in the rest of the animal world is achieved inside by species adaptation. The most striking material facts is certainly the 'freeing' of tools, but the most fundamental fact is really the freeing of the word and our unique ability to transfer our memory."²³

Up to this stage of analysis, we arrive at a significant intersection between the thought of Ricoeur and Stiegler: both the text and technical object point toward a broader category of meaningful artifacts—creations that externalize aspects of the horizon of experience and make

¹⁹ "The semantic autonomy of the text" is discussed in detail in Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), especially "2 Speaking and Writing," 25-44.

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distantiation" in *Hermeneutics and Social Science: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, eds., trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 95.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

²² In his book, Stiegler explained the term epigenetic and phylogentic memory mainly in "§3 Who? What? The Invention of the Human." See Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time* vol. 1 *The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. George Collins and Richard Bredsworth (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 134-179.

²³ André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 235.

them materially present in the world. For Ricoeur, the technics of writing, which underlies the production of the text, represents one of the most significant technological inventions throughout human history. Similarly, for Stiegler, the invention of words and languages by pre-historic humans accounts for their vital tools of existence, without which collective memory, communication and coordinated action would have been impossible. The shared origin of writing as a form of technics, and the technicity inherent in the formation of language itself, mark a convergence: both the text and technical object are meaningful artifacts contributing to human existence by inscribing and transmitting experiences across temporal and cultural boundaries.

From meaningful artifacts to the cultural milieu

This section continues the parallel reading of Ricoeur and Stiegler: meaningful artifacts transmit and survive beyond the limit of individuals' life, and they become a matrix of interdependent and associative relations. The interconnected artifacts form a milieu, and this milieu takes on recognizable features revealing the collective experiences of a community, hence emerges the notion of the cultural milieu. This idea will be elucidated through two examples: Ricoeur's notion of the Greek world constituted by literary works, and Stiegler's concept of the technical milieu, composed of evolving networks of machines and technological systems. This section will end by highlighting the paradoxical implications of the cultural milieu for human existence, a tension that is evident in both Ricoeur and Stiegler's philosophies.

First of all, the text can be transmitted from original to secondary contexts while maintaining their relevance and intelligibility. This is what Ricoeur called "the autonomy of the text."²⁴ The text detaches from its original world, drifts across space and time, and arrives at a distinct context where it integrates into readers' world through their interpretation. Hence, the text possesses the capacity to break the bounds of its original world and be received by different audiences. According to Ricoeur, great literature endures because it speaks beyond its particular time and place, resonating across different historical and cultural contexts to offer a profound understanding of the human condition relevant to diverse readers: "within a reading community, which, under certain favorable conditions, develops the sort of normativity and canonical status that we acknowledge in great works, those that never cease decontextualizing and recontextualizing themselves in the most diverse cultural circumstances."²⁵

Moreover, texts that emerge from similar cultural origins often refer to one another, conveying shared characteristics of their world to readers situated in different contexts. Ricoeur used the term "intertextuality" to describe this interplay of texts—how they cross reference, enrich, and complete themselves when brought into relations with one another. Each text does more than recount particular characters, events, or actions; it also carries the imprints of the world from which it emerged—languages, lifestyles, customs, and social norms—all these elements correct and supplement one another, forming chains and matrix of reference. The ensemble of such interrelated

²⁴ One example where Ricoeur used and elaborated on this term is: Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, eds., trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 93-106.

²⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, vol.3*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellaeur (Chicago, II: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 179.

texts weaves together a literary world, or, “the world of the text,” displaying some immanent orders referring back to the vanished cultural milieu to which their authors once belonged.²⁶ Ricoeur’s example is the literature about the Greek world. When speaking about this ancient world, we are largely referring to a second-order reference constituted by literature.

The quasi-world of texts can be so complete that, in a civilization of writing, the world itself is no longer what can be shown in speaking but is reduced to a kind of ‘aura’ which written works unfold.” We speak of the Greek world or the Byzantine world, “this world can be called ‘imaginary,’ in the sense that it is represented by writing in lieu of the world (...) this imaginary world is itself a creation of literature.²⁷

Let’s now turn to Stiegler’s work: We find that, similarly, technical objects can aggregate to form an interconnected network that possesses a certain immanent order capable of representing collective experience. Drawing on Leroi-Gourhan, Stiegler argued that human beings are distinguished by their capacity to create instruments, a trait that differs humans from animals by way of cultural evolution. This capacity orients humans to cross the threshold from biological to cultural beings, allowing human evolution to transgress the limit of genetic inheritances, extending along the temporal durations and social scales. This is because tools and symbols, deemed as externalized memory, allow living experiences to be transmitted across generations and throughout societies. Since meaningful artifacts outlast the lifespan of their creators, the wisdom of past lives does not vanish with individual death but becomes accessible to upcoming generations and other communities, serving to sustain and protect human life in a continuous and collective way. Expanding on Leroi-Gourhan’s anthropological insights, Stiegler introduced the concept of “epiphylogenesis” to describe how the fabrication of technical objects is also the “constitution of an apparatus of social memory.”²⁸ Unlike biological evolution, which passes traits through genetic inheritance, epiphylogenesis refers to the externalization of memory in technical artifacts, allowing knowledge, skills, and experiences to be transmitted socially and historically across generations.

Moreover, as human technical capacities advance, simple tools evolve into increasingly specialized and sophisticated devices that interconnect to form complex technical systems. In developing this line of thought, Stiegler drew heavily on Gilbert Simondon, who expanded Leroi-Gourhan’s paleo-anthropological insights into the context of modern technological society. Simondon described a vast, web-like network composed of electrical grids, transportation infrastructures, information systems, and mechanical devices, all of them function in coordination

²⁶ A concise analysis of the notion of “intertextuality” and “the world of the text” can be found in Paul Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation,” in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*. eds. Mario J. Valdés (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 137-158. Ricoeur’s argument is nuanced here. The world of the text is both similar and different from the reader’s world. On the one hand, the world of the text can integrate with and so remake the reader’s world. On the other hand, the world of the text retains the capacity to refer back to the original world from which it was born. In this sense, the reader’s appropriation of meaning reanimates the vanished world across historical and cultural distances. Ricoeur’s example of the Greco-Roman literature used here serves mostly to illustrate the second half of the argument.

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “What is A Text? Explanation and Understanding,” in *Hermeneutics and Social Science: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* eds., trans., John B. Thompson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 111.

²⁸ André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, 229. C.f. Stiegler, *Technics and Time vol. 1*, 173.

rather than in isolation. The aggregation of these artifacts give rise to a reticular structure, a technological system that acquires a degree of autonomy, operating almost as a semi-independent entity increasingly decoupled from human control. This system not only exceeds the grasp of any single individual but also becomes a membrane evolving together with human life. Stiegler described this ensemble as “associate milieu,” “exterior milieu,” or “technical milieu,” adapting terms from Simondon and Leroi-Gourhan.²⁹ Importantly, the technical milieu solidifies a general image of the human existential condition within a given historical and cultural circumstance. To use Simondon’s words, “at the industrial level, the object has acquired its coherence (...) which in this way acquires the power to fashion a civilization.”³⁰

From the preceding discussion of Ricoeur and Stiegler’s thoughts, the concept of the cultural milieu begins to take shape. Both thinkers traced a trajectory in which externalized artifacts—whether texts or technical objects—exceed the temporal limits of their creators’ life, extending their influences from individual experience to broader social scales and across long-time spans. As meaningful artifacts accumulate over time and interconnect across space, they form a coherent internal structure. This evolving process resembles an envelope that consolidates itself, embodying the cultural features tied to the locality and historicity of a specific human community; this structure presents a particular image of the human condition—rooted in a given context, yet still communicable and intelligible to others across cultural boundaries.

To advance the notion of the cultural milieu, it’s crucial to recognize that Ricoeur and Stiegler, despite focusing on two distinct types of artifacts—textual and technical—converge in their recognition of the cultural milieu’s ambivalent impacts on human existence. For both philosophers, the cultural milieu is an active medium: it can enhance but also impoverish human experiences. Both Ricoeur and Stiegler employed the metaphor of pharmakon³¹—something that functions both as remedy and poison—to characterize their subject matter. The text and technical objects have a shared feature: they both empower and constrain human life. This shared feature unites them as parallel cornerstones in the constitution of the cultural milieu. The two thinkers also developed their respective ethical and political agenda to grapple with the dual effects of the cultural milieu on human life. Although it’s not the task of this essay to present those agendas, it’s necessary to conclude this section by outlining the ambivalence of the cultural milieu as reflected in Ricoeur and Stiegler’s accounts.

Throughout Stiegler’s work the ambivalence of the cultural milieu emerges as a tension between the emancipating and alienating effects of technology: Since pre-historical times, technology has served as a supplement to human life, compensating for the limitations of biological organs. This prosthetic function extends from early tools to contemporary technologies. As a constitutive dimension of human existence, technology completes the human by liberating them from natural constraints. However, technology is also interpreted as a fault or default—a sign of human incompleteness—and often regarded as an obstacle to the full realization of human

²⁹ These terms are used and elaborated in Stiegler, *Technics and Time vol.1*, 58-63.

³⁰ Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques* (Paris : Éditions Aubier, 1989), 24.

³¹ One example of Stiegler’s use of pharmakon to characterize the ambivalent effect of technology can be found in Stiegler, *Technics and Time vol.1*, 116-118. Ricoeur also used pharmakon to describe the ambivalent effects of the text, specifically in the context of written history. See Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 141-145.

potential as active and creative beings.³² When addressing the negative impact of technology, Stiegler undoubtedly absorbed the common post-World War II philosophical critiques, which denounce industrial technology for its dehumanizing effects driven by instrumental rationality. Simondon's words concisely recapitulate this critique—the dizzying scale of 20th-century technological systems “hardened itself into a form of mechanism that has now become a new attachment of the individual to an industrial world that exceeds the dimension and possibility of thinking the individual (...) The technics of the 20th-century is beyond the powers of the individual, and constitutes a compact and resistant, but alienated human reality within the industrial world.”³³

Like Stiegler, Ricoeur remained attentive to the ambivalent power of the text, recognizing both its healing and poisonous effects. In *Memory, History, and Forgetting*, Ricoeur emphasized that written texts, especially written history, can preserve memory from fading, allowing us to re-actualize and relive the past, thus sustaining the human capacity to remember. More broadly, the text significantly extends human potential by opening new perspectives and possibilities of perceiving, understanding, and acting in the world. However, this invention also gives rise to the dangerous illusion of having something certain and clear, unambiguous and permanently inscribed. Ricoeur cautioned against the toxic effects of history when it becomes reified in written form. As a textualized object, history may “set itself up as absolute knowledge.”³⁴ When severing connections to lived, affective, and first person experience, history presents itself as final and incontestable. It no longer serves as a living dialogue with the past but becomes a burden—what Ricoeur described as dwelling in the “house of the dead.”³⁵ Ricoeur also discussed how written history, in its more dangerous forms, can be used to manipulate or distort memory, leading to selective forgetting. One example he offered is the controversial history of the Vichy regime. Through selective narration, the trauma and crimes committed against the Jewish people were repressed or denied.³⁶

Although both Ricoeur's concept of the text and Stiegler's notion of the technical object share an ambivalent impact on human existence, they develop along slightly divergent trajectories. This divergence, briefly outlined here, serves to conclude our comparative reading. Technical objects, as Stiegler emphasized in *Technics and Time 1*, emerged from manual labor and material fabrication; they are closely linked to bodily practices and externalize memory through physical tools and systems. Ricoeur's text is the product of linguistic inscription—an artifact of discourse that externalizes meaning through the fixation of speech acts. While both stabilize aspects of human experience, they do so in complementary ways: Technical objects retain practical skills while texts codify shared human consciousness. Once becoming tangible structures, they also operate in complementary ways within a cultural milieu: Technical objects primarily through embodied interactions, and texts through symbolic and cognitive structures. Together, texts and technical objects illustrate two related pathways through which human experiences are materialized in artifacts and preserved within a cultural milieu.

³² See Stiegler, *Technics and Time vol.1*, 114-133.

³³ Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 102-103.

³⁴ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 293.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 300.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 448-451.

Intercultural hermeneutics as architectural theory

Thus far, the analysis has proceeded in two stages: first, examining the transition from the horizon of experience to its externalization as meaningful artifacts; and second, exploring how the aggregation and interrelation of these artifacts give rise to a cohesive cultural milieu. Both stages carry significant implications for architectural theory. This section situates the preceding analysis within the disciplinary framework of architecture, aiming to elucidate how intercultural hermeneutics may contribute to architectural theory. To do so, we will first outline the foundational concepts of architecture and architectural theory, and then articulate the procedural dynamics of intercultural hermeneutics in relation to the understanding of built environments.

To establish the foundation for the discussion, it is helpful to first clarify the prevailing scholarly ideas of architecture and architectural theory. The subject matter of architectural studies can be understood as the meaningful artifacts related to the built environment within a cultural milieu. This encompasses a wide range of physical forms—from small-scale interior elements to large-scale urban infrastructure—whether historical or contemporary; what is of equal importance is their representations, namely the paper-based documents of these physical objects.³⁷ These meaningful artifacts aggregate and interrelate to provide material support for human lives. Taken as a whole, they account for a crucial constituent of a cultural milieu, making architecture the material manifestation of a particular culture.

When it comes to architectural theory, contemporary scholarship has the following consensus: Following World War II, the modern architectural movement that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century—characterized by stylistic simplicity as the direct demonstration of architectural functions—came under intense scrutiny and questioning. Scholars have increasingly recognized the univocal and progressive assumptions underlying the classical discourse of modern architecture. In response to the crisis concerning “the meaning of architecture and the definition of its essence and limits,” there has been growing impetus of “theorizing a new agenda for architecture.”³⁸ There are also initiatives to embrace multiple perspectives and narratives within our post-modern, or even anti-modern, historical condition.³⁹

More specifically, contemporary architectural theory unfolds within an intellectual space framed by two poles: the intrinsic and external dimensions of the discipline. On the one hand, architectural theory engages questions related to aesthetics, form, and style. These concerns reside within the proper disciplinary domain, seeking to uncover invariable formal principles and

³⁷ The work of Dalibor Vesely’s work helps frame the idea of architectural representation. Drawing on phenomenological traditions, he noted that architectural representation extends beyond the functional dimensions of the visual and textual materials that explain construction processes. Instead, what these materials encompass is a broader illumination of the cultural context and lived experience embedded in them. Architectural representations, therefore, are not limited to technical drawings as we know them today, they include a wealth of historical treatises replete with visual and textual elements that architectural historians have long considered essential to the discipline. See Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

³⁸ Kate Nesbitt, ed., *Theorizing A New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965-1995* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 19, 16.

³⁹ See Sebastiann Loosen, Rajesh Heynickx, Hilde Heynen, ed., *The Figure of Knowledge: Conditioning Architectural Theory, 1960s-1990s* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020), 9-30.

compositional laws that manifest consistently throughout architectural history. In the name of establishing an autonomous and immutable core for the discipline, such discourse is ostensibly independent of any contingent practical concerns.⁴⁰ On the other hand, contemporary architectural theory positions various forms of architecture within a broader cultural context, viewing them as material interventions in real historical worlds that inevitably generate socio-political implications. By engaging with pragmatic and political-economic realities, these architectural theories overlap significantly with broader disciplinary fields of human sciences.⁴¹ In sum, architectural theories tend to develop along the spectrum between these two poles—on one end, architecture as an autonomous, self-referential system of immutable forms; on the other, architecture as the transformative forces embedded within, and shaped by, its historical contexts.

Through the lens of Ricoeur's philosophy, the internal and external poles of architectural theory correspond to the dialectical approaches of explanation and understanding, converging within a hermeneutic framework to explore the architecture of a particular cultural milieu. Explanation involves a distanced reflection on specific traditions, aiming to establish well-structured, communicable knowledge that transcends singular contexts. It articulates universal principles and general rules, providing univocal and uniform knowledge intended to transcend the boundaries of any one tradition. In contrast, understanding emphasizes participation and a sense of belonging to a particular historical or cultural circumstance. This approach engages with the meanings of phenomena that resonate with broader existential and cultural contexts, fostering practical knowledge and the understanding of particular ways of life.⁴² In sum, by combining the explanation of formal principles and the understanding of architecture's deeper significances, contemporary architectural theory bridges historical specificity and universal validity, fulfilling the task of intercultural hermeneutics.

The term "intercultural" deserves emphasis, as the central contribution of hermeneutics to architectural theory lies in tracing an arc that departs from the architecture of a specific cultural milieu and extends towards diverse horizons of experience that frame human existence. Theory can either reconstitute a past moment, shedding light on fading historical circumstances at the risk of being forgotten, or it can recover a regional situation that remains remote, unfamiliar and otherwise inaccessible to contemporary audiences.⁴³ These different theories share a common purpose: through engagements with the material manifestations within a cultural milieu, they penetrate diverse horizons of experience to illuminate pluralistic modalities of life, ultimately

⁴⁰ This trajectory of architectural theories, typically presented figures such as Colin Rowe and Peter Eisenman, is discussed in Harry Francis Mallgrave and David Goodman, *An Introduction to Architectural Theory: 1968 to the Present* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), particularly Chapter 2 "The Crisis of Meaning," 37–52 and Chapter 9 "Wake of the Storm," 161–176.

⁴¹ Neil Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). This is a notable compendium of text from human sciences influential to contemporary architectural theory, leading the editors to conceptualize the so-called "architectural culture."

⁴² A concise summary of "explanation and understanding" is found in Paul Ricoeur, "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 107–126.

⁴³ C. Creig Cryslar, Stephen Cairns, and Hilde Heynen, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2012). This anthology emphasizes architectural theory's mission to transcend European traditions and incorporate global cultural of diverse regional perspectives.

enriching the self-understanding of human existence. As Perez-Gomez observes, while “the reality of architecture and its significance is complex, both changing with history and culture,” the fundamental question of architecture is “remaining the same: analogous to the human condition,” theory reveals how architecture helps human beings reconcile with morality and finitude of existence, seeking possible transcendence through the culture of a specific spatial-temporal circumstance; it untangles the enigma of human existence by offering “diverse answers appropriate to specific times and places.”⁴⁴

With the above discussion, we have clarified the basis of architecture and architectural theory, assisted by Ricoeur’s idea of explanation and understanding as well as the notions of horizon and cultural milieu we articulated.⁴⁵ Ricoeur himself, in several writings, demonstrated his interest in architectural and its related urban questions. For him, the city can be conceived as the agglomeration of the human and artificial environment in pre-arranged spaces. It’s the space in which people’s mobility and exchange are more or less organized and present a certain order.⁴⁶ Forming a composite milieu with a multiplicity of socio-political realities, urban environment is like cross-referenced texts or interweaving technical objects, and in this sense, they are subject to hermeneutic reading. The following revisits Ricoeur’s three figurations to articulate how architectural theory operates when informed by intercultural hermeneutics.⁴⁷ This approach offers a twofold contribution to Ricoeur’s triadic model: first, it re-synthesizes Ricoeur’s dispersed discussion into an integral framework, slightly adapted for the discipline of architecture so as to provide an architectonic reading of built space and events that unfold within it. Second, it emphasizes the dialectical movement between distanciation and appropriation underlying the processes of configuration and refiguration—an aspect only implicitly developed in Ricoeur’s work.

⁴⁴ Alberto Perez-Gomez, “Hermeneutics as Architectural Theory,” in *Timely Meditations: Selected Essays on Architecture vol.2 Architectural Philosophy and Hermeneutics* (Montreal: Right Angle International, 2016), 22-36.

⁴⁵ As resume, for general and scholarly audiences outside the architectural disciplines, one can consider architecture as the artifacts that constitute the built environment in various spatial-temporal circumstances—either close or far from us. Architecture not only includes physical structures such as buildings, but also their representational materials (drawings, textual records and other documents). Correspondingly, architectural theory is the discourse about these artifacts, shedding light to how they participate and mediate diversified human living experiences.

⁴⁶ See Paul Ricoeur, “Urbanisation and sécularisation,” *Autre temps: Cahiers d’éthique sociale et politique*, vol. 76-77 (2003), 133-126; also see Paul Ricoeur, “La cité est fondamentalement périssable,” *Les grands entretiens du « Monde »* (Paris: Le Monde, 1994), t. II, 10-12. Both texts are translated into Italian and included in the collection Paul Ricoeur, *Leggere la città: Quattro testi di Paul Ricoeur*, eds. Francesco Garofalo and Giuseppina Scavuzzo (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2010).

⁴⁷ The threefold figuration appears in Ricoeur’s discussion of architecture. See Paul Ricoeur, “Architecture and Narrativity” in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies* 7, No 2 (2016): 31-42. Elsewhere, Ricoeur referred to the same triadic structure as the “threefold mimesis,” primarily introduced as a framework for understanding narrative temporality. See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative vol.1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), especially “Time and Narrative: Threefold Mimesis,” 52-87; Paul Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation” in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, eds. Mario J. Valdés (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 137-158.

In the prefiguration stage of the intercultural hermeneutics, one approaches architecture with initial anticipations, seeking to decipher its meaning as a trace of an alternative mode of dwelling. One's own practical knowledge of life experience serves as the basis for recognizing other ways of inhabiting the world embedded in the architectural artifacts. This preliminary stage of architectural theory recalls Ricoeur's idea of prefiguration, which describes how one's own lived experience provides the foundation for engaging with a literary work.⁴⁸ As Ricoeur said, prefiguration "is the pre-understanding of what human action is, of its semantics, its symbolism, its temporality (...) [which] would never be understandable if it did not configure what is already figured in human action."⁴⁹

The configuration stage follows, in which existing architectural artifacts are reorganized into a coherent structure, representing an alternative mode of dwelling while shedding light to the meaning of one's own life. This stage entails a dialectical movement between distanciation and appropriation,⁵⁰ the first of two key dialectics to be examined here.

On the one hand, one engages the architecture of a given cultural milieu, appropriating an alternative way of life by arranging disparate artifacts into an intelligible whole. A quasi-world emerges from the raw materials as one gradually becomes embedded into the alternative world they open up. This procedure corresponds to what Ricoeur called "emplotment."⁵¹ Drawing on Aristotle's concept of *muthos* (plot), he described it as the act that grasps and "brings together factors as heterogenous as agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, and unexpected results," it is a "synthesis of what is heterogeneous" into the unified order or a meaningful sequence.⁵²

On the other hand, a critical distance emerges, enabling the reflective possibility that enhances the self-understanding. One's initial presuppositions, default judgments, and habitual ways of perceiving the world are brought into relief. Intellectual commitments that are previously absorbed into familiar traditions now also become open to examination. Through interpreting the work, one's own horizon of experience is exposed and made accessible. Ricoeur's emblematic

⁴⁸ The term "literary work" is used here is used in order to set aside the difference between fiction and history; according to Ricoeur, the latter possesses truth claims while the former did not. See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol.3, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁴⁹ Paul Ricoeur, "Mimesis and Representation," in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, eds. Mario J. Valdés (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 142-143.

⁵⁰ Ricoeur described movements towards the text to make its meaning one's own as appropriation; correspondingly, moving away from the text and recognize the objective value it contains is distanciation. "Appropriation" is a concept borrowed from Gadamer while distanciation has to do with Habermas and the critique of ideology. Two concise and relevant texts in this regard are "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," and "Appropriation" in Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 93-106, 144-156.

⁵¹ Ricoeur's used the term "emplotment" (*mise en intrigue*) to describe the central operation of narrative configuration, namely the act of weaving heterogenous elements into a unified narrative structure. Emplotment is a key idea widely appear in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, especially Chapter 2 "Emplotment: A Reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*." 31-51.

⁵² Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative vol.1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, and David Pellauer (Chicago, CA: Chicago University Press, 1984), 65-66.

expression in this regard is: “we understand ourselves only by the long detour of the signs of humanity deposited in cultural works.”⁵³ In other words, “self-understanding passes through the detour of understanding the cultural signs in which the self documents and forms itself.”⁵⁴

In the third stage, namely refiguration, one steps out of the meaningful artifacts and returns to the actual world that bears one’s own life. With the meanings received and accepted from architectural artifacts, one integrates back into the world and discovers new ways to interact with it. This stage entails the second key dialectics of distancing and appropriation, which can be laid out as the following.

On the one hand, this process initiates a distanced reexamination of one’s actual world and everyday life. Through such reflection, default habits and deeply held convictions can be reinterpreted and transformed. The taken-for-granted worldview no longer remains the sole or primary point of reference; instead, one obtains an additional perspective that allows for the attribution of new meanings and the perception of previously unseen connections within one’s original life world. Ricoeur summarized this idea by the expression “iconic augmentation of reality” or “imaginative variations of the world”: “Fiction and poetry augment reality, not by being a flight from it, but by opening up dimensions of it that were hitherto concealed.”⁵⁵ In other words, “we receive a new way of being in the world, of orienting ourselves in this world (...) metaphor shatters (...) the previous structure of what we call reality (...) the strategy of metaphor is heuristic fiction for the sake of redescribing reality.”⁵⁶

On the other hand, the above reflection and redescription of the world comes together with the capacity to reappropriate the world. One becomes able to engage with the actual world through creative actions. At the far end of the hermeneutic circle, one enhances the freedom of action and exerts new capacity of world-making. Yet such creativity never arises from nowhere; it always involves reconfiguring what is already given—hence the use of the term reappropriation to describe this process. As Ricoeur said, the “symbolic system contributes to the making of a world ... works of literature ceaselessly make and remake our world of action ... I shall say that poetic making re-signifies the world to the extent that recounting or narrating remakes action.”⁵⁷

Conclusive Remark

The above three figuration process of intercultural hermeneutics unfolds as a continuous circle, with each stage preparing the ground for the next. This dynamic can be illustrated through

⁵³ Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 105.

⁵⁴ Paul Ricoeur. “What Is a Text? Explanation and Understanding,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 120.

⁵⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative vol.1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 80.

⁵⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “World, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language,” in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed., Mario J. Valdés (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 85.

⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation” in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed., Mario J. Valdés (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press), 150-153.

the example of the Greek temple, a case favored by Heidegger. In the prefiguration stage, one approaches the temple and draws upon familiar knowledge related to the Greek world. These experiences form the background against which the configuration stage unfolds. In the configuration stage, one engages with the temple to understand how this architectural work becomes the site where mortals bid for divinities, and how the temple gathers meanings within the bounds of sky and earth.⁵⁸ At the same time, one becomes aware of the historical distance: the bare ruins visible today, maintained for tourism, are not the colorful edifice that marked the culmination of pilgrimage. Finally, in the refiguration stage, the meanings drawn from this encounter are reintegrated into the actual world. One can not only reflect upon the preservation of the meaning of the site but also extend such spatial experience to other settings through creative design actions.

To conclude the discussion, we return to the discipline of architecture to emphasize the twofold efficacy of intercultural hermeneutics when applied as theoretical framework. Pérez-Gomez summarizes this dual efficacy by drawing on Ricoeur's work: "This is what Ricoeur in his late formulation of hermeneutics in *Time and Narrative* describes as our negotiation between the *space of experience* and the *horizon of expectation* (...) Historical narratives (our theory) will constantly open up our *space of experience*, while fictional narratives (our practice) allow the imagination to engage the *horizon of expectation*."⁵⁹ Pérez-Gomez's words can be understood in close relation to the figuration model discussed above. In the configuration stage, historical narratives of architecture from diverse cultures are produced. Thus, we expand our "space of experience" by deepening practical knowledge on different modes of dwelling. The refiguration stage instead fosters new possibilities for architectural practice. We enhance our "horizons of expectation" by cultivating imaginative powers in creative design actions. In this sense, architectural theory can be conceived as the discourses that allow for a prudent reconciliation with the historical past, while enabling responsive design interventions in the future.

⁵⁸ Heidegger's discussion of the temple's role in revealing the world, and its gathering of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities, appears in his analysis of the "fourfold." See Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 17-85.

⁵⁹ Alberto Perez-Gomez, "Hermeneutics as Architecture Theory," in *Timely Meditations: Selected Essays on Architecture vol.2* (Montreal: RightAngle International, 2016), 32.

References

- Crysler, C. Creig. Stephen Cairns, and Hilde Heynen. Edited. *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory*. (London: SAGE Publications, 2012).
- Dallmayr, Fred. *Critical Phenomenology, Cross-cultural Theory, Cosmopolitanism*. eds. Farah Godrej (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).
- Geniusas, Saulius. *The Origins of Horizons in Husserl's Phenomenology* (New York: Springer, 2012).
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*, 2nd, eds., Translated by Joel Weinsheimer, and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004).
- Hays, K. Michael. "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form," *Perspecta* vol.21 (1984), 14-29.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Haper & Row, 1971).
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008).
- Husserl, Edmund. *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*. Translated by Quentin Lauer (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1965).
- Kaplan, David M. *Ricoeur's Critical Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003).
- Kearney, Richard. *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).
- Leach, Neil. Edited. *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).
- Leroi-Gourhan, André. *Gesture and Speech* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).
- Mallgrave, Harry Francis. and David Goodman. *An Introduction to Architectural Theory: 1968 to the Present* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
- Ming, Xie. Edited. *The Agon of Interpretations: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics*. eds. Ming Xie (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 2014).
- Nascimento, Fernando. "Technologies, Narratives, and Practical Wisdom," *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies* vol.10 no.2 (2019): 21-35.
- Nesbitt, Kate. Edited. *Theorizing A New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965-1995* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).
- Perez-Gomez, Alberto. "Hermeneutics as Architecture Theory." *Timely Meditations: Essays in Architecture* vol. 2 (Montréal, CA: Rightangle International, 2016, 22-36).
- Reijers Wessel, Alberto Romele, and Mark Coeckelbergh. Edited. *Interpreting Technology: Ricoeur on Questions Concerning Ethics and Philosophy of Technology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Architecture and Narrativity." *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies* vol.7, no.2 (2016): 31-42.

- Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rules of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*. (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 1993).
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, eds., Translated by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976).
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Leggere la città: Quattro testi di Paul Ricoeur*. Edited by Francesco Garofalo and Giuseppina Scavuzzo (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2010).
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. vol. 1. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. vol. 3. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- Ricoeur, Paul. *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*. Edited by Mario J. Valdés. (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
- Romele, Alberto. "Digital Traceability and the Right to be Forgotten. Ricoeurian Perspectives," *Tropos. Journal of Hermeneutics and Philosophical Criticism*, Paul Ricoeur: Human, Antihuman, Posthuman, vol.2 no.8 (2016), 1-12.
- Stiegler, Bernard. *Technics and Time* vol. 1 *The Fault of Epimetheus*. Translated by George Collins and Richard Braidsworth (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- Simondon, Gilbert. *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Éditions Aubier, 1989).
- Vesely, Dalibor. *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).