

Architecture Caught in Metaphorical Reference

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Shortly before the 2025 Oscars, the popular design and architecture podcast 99% *Invisible* released an episode inspired by the film *The Brutalist*, which had been nominated for 10 awards that year. Rather than just providing a review of the film which follows the life of fictional architect László Toth, the episode also discusses a number of other fictional architects. “The job of architect has often been depicted in movies, even though the practice of architecture is not very cinematic,” the host Roman Mars muses. “It’s mostly meetings and such. But it is a romantic profession that lends itself to high drama and strained metaphors,” he adds.¹ Indeed, metaphors that draw on architecture in one way or another are both copious and ubiquitous. We speak about ‘foundations being established’, ‘walls being put up’, ‘facades people hide behind’, ‘pillars of society’ or ‘putting things under one roof’, among many other expressions. Equally common are references to the architecture of an organization when discussing its structure, or to people as ‘architects’ of plans, agreements, political decisions or events.

On account of their prevalence, such metaphors warrant a closer look. Considering the image of architecture that architectural metaphors conjure up and preserve, this essay asks whether and how architectural metaphors shape debates regarding the changing and expanding tasks, roles and responsibilities of architects and architecture as we understand and perceive them today. What reciprocal implications might they have for architectural

¹ Roman Mars and Martín Gonzalez, “The Brutalists,” 99% Invisible, February 2, 2025, 40min., 7 sec., <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/617-the-brutalists/>, accessed April 20, 2025.

practices and scholarship, and for a general understanding of architecture and architectural processes? Following a brief overview of metaphor more generally—and conventionalized metaphors specifically—I turn to the role of architectural metaphors and examples of how the figure of the architect is used metaphorically in contemporary culture. Thus connecting different strands of inquiry rather than pursuing a mere stock-take of the phenomenon, this essay aims to delineate and bring into perspective a nexus of questions and challenges that merit further attention: metaphors, the image of the architect, and the ongoing debate regarding the changing role and responsibility of architects and architecture today.

Thinking of Metaphors

According to Nelson Goodman, “[m]etaphor permeates all discourse, ordinary and special, and we should have a hard time finding a purely literal paragraph anywhere.”² Journalist and author James Geary even provides concrete numbers, claiming that we use metaphors “for every ten to twenty-five words, or about six times a minute.”³ Regardless of their exact frequency, metaphors are an integral part of our communication. Even though we rarely give them much thought in everyday life, or reflect on how exactly they work and to which effect, we have a general understanding of what a metaphor is. Until the twentieth century, metaphors were predominantly seen as a rhetorical trope or linguistic adornment employed to make an argument more convincing, or to convey spiritual thought. Particularly in the sciences and philosophy, they were criticized for being imprecise, and even potentially misleading, on account of diverting attention from or concealing actual facts.⁴ This view changed as the capacity of metaphors to express meaning which is impossible to communicate in literal terms was increasingly

2 Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis, New York, Kansas City: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1968), 80.

3 James Geary, *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World* (New York; London: Harper Perennial, 2012), 5.

4 Mark Johnson, “Introduction: Metaphor in the Philosophical Tradition,” in *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, ed. Mark Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 12.

acknowledged. Today, metaphors are considered a generative and important means through which we relate to and make sense of the world.⁵

Metaphors prompt us to draw on our existing knowledge about something—a source domain—to engage with something more abstract or unfamiliar to us—a target domain. The relationships they thereby establish do not make literal sense. Shakespeare's description of the world as a stage and its inhabitants as players is a well-known example. The resulting incongruity in a metaphor compels us, as Mark Johnson puts it, to take an "imaginative leap in which we see how two previously unassociated systems of implications fit together to reveal an underlying unity."⁶ In other words, metaphors have a generative quality. They instigate a process of interpretation that can facilitate understanding of what is novel, difficult to comprehend, or when literal terms are insufficient to convey what we mean. Metaphors can encourage us to explore something from a different, and perhaps not readily obvious, perspective. As metaphors thus shape our thinking, and help us engage with and situate ourselves in the world, they are epistemologically relevant.

Metaphors that work propose narratives we can comprehend and adopt. While they possess intersubjective validity and might appear more or less plausible, no metaphor can be more correct than another. Each remains but one of many possible ways of framing a situation or, as Meryl Altman puts it quite aptly, metaphors have only a "truth effect" not a "truth value."⁷ Metaphors work by referring to existing, shared knowledge and are hence embedded in specific socio-cultural frames of reference.⁸ As such they are inevitably shaped by the knowledge, opinions, prejudices, hierarchies, and structures of the particular context they originate in. Therefore, our ability to understand a metaphor is contingent on familiarity with this context. Metaphors are hence never universal and they are neither objective nor innocent either, as each metaphor organizes information and gives priority to some

5 Ibid., 17.

6 Ibid., 40.

7 Meryl Altman, "How Not to Do Things with Metaphors We Live By," *College English* 52, no. 5 (1990): 496.

8 Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan, "Introduction: Writing Worlds," in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Texts and Metaphors in the Representation of Landscape*, ed. Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan (London: Routledge, 1992), 12.

aspects or qualities while disregarding others.⁹ They therefore have perspectives, opinions, and structures inscribed in them that, even though they are not always obvious, are reconfirmed and consolidated whenever a metaphor is used. Metaphors hence play a role in promoting, naturalizing, preserving, and perpetuating perspectives on a wide range of topics, from social groups to objects and places.

This effect is particularly powerful and has broad implications in the case of conventionalized metaphors. These are metaphors that have turned into established figures of speech or concepts through repeated use and general acceptance. Metaphors of this kind are also referred to as 'dead', 'frozen' or 'historical' metaphors, as they no longer necessitate or encourage any interpretive activity when employed.¹⁰ Rather, they are commonly understood in a certain way so that their appropriate use can be learned without fully understanding or being aware of their metaphorical origins or the references they make. Conventionalized metaphors have thereby lost their generative quality. What may have begun "as an interesting analogy, spills over into a proposition about how something 'is.'"¹¹ Rather than provoking us to look at a situation from a new angle, they become "a conventional part of our conceptual systems" and can carry forward, normalize, and consolidate the historical views and opinions inscribed in them, without this 'ideological freight' being always apparent.¹² They hence continue to shape views and opinions even if the socio-historical context from which a metaphor once emerged has changed.

The far-reaching and lasting implications metaphors can have in respect to the consolidation of social, cultural, or disciplinary hierarchies, norms and practices have been highlighted particularly prominently in fields such as feminist, postcolonial, and social studies. However, they are also present and have been addressed—explicitly and implicitly—in architectural research. Jos Boys, for example, considers metaphors a key mechanism in

9 Dennis Hollier, "Architectural Metaphors," in *Architectural Theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 192.

10 George Lakoff discusses different types of conventionalized metaphors and the problematic implications of referring to them indiscriminately as 'dead.' See: George Lakoff, "The Death of Dead Metaphor," *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 2, no. 2 (1987).

11 Altman, "How Not to Do Things with Metaphors We Live By," 496.

12 Lakoff, "The Death of Dead Metaphor," 3.

perpetuating the assumption that social values or qualities can be “literally engraved into the physical arrangements and representational qualities of three-dimensional space.”¹³ Another example is the edited volume *Deserts Are Not Empty*, even though it is not actually focused on the matter of metaphor but the “anthropogenic processes of construction and destruction that have occurred in various deserts over the past century.”¹⁴ These processes are shown as being closely connected to the characterization of deserts as barren and uninhabitable places, which disregards the deserts’ existing inhabitants, and the various activities taking place there, while also concealing and legitimizing the occupation and exploitation of the lands as well as the obliteration of its people and nature. The common metaphorical use of the term ‘desert’ for spaces seen as lacking resources, amenities, or infrastructure in everyday speech reflects the notion of deserts as empty and therefore available to be appropriated, developed and civilized, yet thereby confirming and perpetuating a simplified, Western and colonial perspective of deserts. This example then illustrates vividly how examining the way metaphors are used in writing and everyday speech “can help us discern dominant and structured ways with which people conceive of aspects of reality.”¹⁵

Metaphors in Architecture—Architecture in Metaphorical Thinking

By now a considerable body of research confirms the relevance of metaphor to architectural thinking and explores the implications of the various metaphorical practices involved.¹⁶ Metaphors allow architectural professionals

13 Jos Boys, “Beyond Maps and Metaphors? Re-Thinking the Relationships between Architecture and Gender,” in *New Frontiers of Space, Bodies and Gender*, ed. Rosa Ainley (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 206.

14 Samia Henni, “Against the Regime of ‘Emptiness,’” in *Deserts Are Not Empty*, ed. Samia Henni (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 12.

15 Carl Jon Way Ng, “Metaphor,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*, ed. John Flowerdew and John E. Richardson (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2017), 215.

16 See, for example: Sarah Borree, Stephanie Knuth, and Moritz Röger, eds., *Metaphorical Practices in Architecture: Metaphors as Method and Subject in the Production of Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2023); Rosario Caballero, *Re-Viewing Space: Figu-*

to engage with other disciplines and incorporate knowledge from them into their work.¹⁷ They play a vital role in the discussion and evaluation of the built environment and have long informed both architectural and urban design processes.¹⁸ According to Andri Gerber, metaphors were also an important means for architecture, as a discipline lacking a clearly defined and stable identity, to consolidate and position itself historically.¹⁹ While references to language and music had dominated architectural discourse during the Renaissance, the early twentieth century saw a surge in comparisons with art and sculpture, which were followed by scientific and technological metaphors.

At the same time, architecture and architectural concepts have long been used metaphorically, both in everyday language and in more specialized fields like science and philosophy. Particularly the capacity of architectural metaphors to structure, but also to concretize and ground abstract thought, has been the subject of scholarly interest. Highlighting the vital role of architectural metaphors in this respect, architectural historian and theorist Mark Wigley, for example, claims that philosophy could in fact “only define a part of itself as nonmetaphorical by employing architectural metaphors.”²⁰ The status of architecture as metaphor, he continues, was different from that of others, since it was the “foundational metaphor” for philosophical discourse. There would be a close bond between philosophy and architecture, a “complex and restless dynamic” of interdependence. The Japanese philosopher Kojin Karatani, addressing the centrality of architectural metaphors for philosophy in a similar vein, speaks of a “will to architecture” in Western philosophy,

rative Language in Architects' Assessment of Built Space (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2006); Andri Gerber and Brent Patterson, eds., *Metaphors in Architecture and Urbanism: An Introduction* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013).

17 See, for example: Antoine Picon and Alessandra Ponte, eds., *Architecture and the Sciences: Exchanging Metaphors* (New York, N.Y.; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003); Peter Galison and Emily Thompson, *The Architecture of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999).

18 See, for example: Simon Unwin, *Metaphor: An Exploration of the Metaphorical Dimensions and Potential of Architecture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019).

19 Andri Gerber, “Introduction,” in *Metaphors in Architecture and Urbanism: An Introduction*, ed. Andri Gerber and Brent Patterson (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 28.

20 Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1997), 18.

as they had provided philosophers with “a way of grounding and stabilizing their otherwise philosophical systems.”²¹ However, Karatani also addresses the constraints that architectural metaphors can impose, a point equally raised by Dennis Hollier, a scholar of French language and culture. Referring to the role of architectural metaphors beyond the boundaries of philosophy, Hollier acknowledges that architecture would provide a vocabulary by means of which things could be systematized and thereby rendered widely legible. However, “anything resembling play, exteriority, or alterity” would be suppressed in the process.²² Martyn Dade-Robertson’s study *The Architecture of Information* discusses this issue in a more concrete context. While spatial and architectural metaphors were of great historical importance by providing the structure for the design of and interaction with virtual information environments, the constraints imposed by the physical and material world no longer apply to these environments. The result was a battle between their potentials in respect to the organization of information on the one hand, and the need for us to be able to interact with them through spatial metaphors on the other.²³ Regardless of the respective main interest of the aforementioned studies, what emerges here as well as in other studies concerned with the qualities and functions of architectural metaphors, is an emphasis on their material, structural, and consolidating qualities. This can also be detected in their use in everyday discourse.

Architectural metaphors, like all metaphors, primarily serve as a conceptual framework to understand other domains. However, their focus and reliance on material, structural and organizing qualities aspects of architecture also refers to a specific image of architecture and the architectural profession which, in turn, raises the question how the prevalent metaphorical use of architectural vocabulary outside of the architectural context retroactively affects disciplinary discourse on architecture. Could architectural metaphors—in particular their use in everyday language—, contribute to a perpetuation of established images of and expectations towards architecture

21 Kojin Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 5.

22 Hollier, “Architectural Metaphors,” 193.

23 Martyn Dade-Robertson, *The Architecture of Information: Architecture, Interaction Design and the Patterning of Digital Information* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011).

and the architectural profession and make it more difficult to change views, standards, and processes?

Architecture and Architectural Metaphors

The reporting on *Project 2025*, a right-wing initiative to radically reshape government institutions in the USA that was extensively and heatedly discussed in the media during the runup to the 2024 US presidential election, provides a good example for the metaphorical use of architectural terms in everyday culture. Devised by the conservative think tank the Heritage Foundation, the *Project 2025 Presidential Transition Project* presents a wide range of suggestions on topics including migration, the economy, education, and foreign affairs, all aiming to “put America back on track.”²⁴ Characterized by the BBC as “a 900-page policy ‘wish list’ ... that would expand presidential power and impose an ultra-conservative social vision,” it caused widespread political and public outrage.²⁵ In public discussions of the initiative, Russell Vought, one of the central figures behind *Project 2025*, was frequently referred to as its ‘lead architect.’²⁶

The term ‘architect’ is frequently used to refer to people tasked with solving a complex and demanding issue, often politicians, analysts, or managers. The tasks they deal with require them to have analytical but also creative skills, maintain a high level of oversight, and devise and implement a structured, complex, and detailed plan that often has far-reaching ramifi-

24 <https://www.project2025.org/>, accessed April 4, 2025.

25 Mike Wendling, “Project 2025: The right-wing wish list for Trump’s second term,” *bbc.com*, February 14 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c977njnvq2do>, accessed April 4, 2025.

26 See, for example: Stephen Groves, “Senate Confirms Project 2025 Architect Russell Vought to Lead Powerful White House Budget Office,” *Associated Press*, February 7, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-russell-vought-confirmation-budget-project-2025-7d1c476694176876256e95cecbd49231>; Isabell Jacobi, “Ich will den Deep State zerstören–Der Architekt des Project 2025 zieht die Fäden in der Trump-Regierung,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, February 8, 2025, <https://www.nzz.ch/international/russell-vought-bestaetigt-trump-und-das-kontroverse-project-2025-ld.1870023>; Max Chafkin, “Behind Trump’s Imperial Presidency (and Elon) there’s Russell Vought,” *Bloomberg.com*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2025-russell-vought-doge-musk-trump/>, all accessed April 28, 2025.

cations. The Oxford English Dictionary defines an architect first of all as a “person who designs buildings, preparing plans and overseeing construction” and “[m]ore generally: a person who constructs buildings; a builder.”²⁷ However, the entry also addresses the term’s importance and prevalence beyond the realms of the building profession by listing as additional definitions a “person who designs and creates a complex structure or system; a person who organizes material into a particular structure or plan”, a “person who is responsible for devising, planning, and realizing a particular goal; a person who contrives the achievement of a desired result” and “[i]n extended use: something which shapes or influences a situation, state of affairs, etc.”²⁸

When portrayed as the architect, rather than author of *Project 2025*’s plan, or as one of the ‘heads’ behind it (to use another metaphor), Vought’s characterization summons and foregrounds the above-mentioned qualities. The same applies to other historical and contemporary figures referred to as architects, such as Frances Perkins, the first female US presidential cabinet secretary and central architect of the New Deal, or the architects of the Good Friday Agreement.²⁹ However, the term is also utilized in the context of more abstract societal as well as historical movements and events, for instance in the case of ‘architects of terror’ which has been used to describe Maximilien Robespierre, Heinrich Himmler, Joseph Stalin or — more recently — the Wagner group, amongst others. There is also historian Paul Preston’s book *Architects of Terror* which examines the ‘construction’ of the dictatorship in Spain under Franco.³⁰

This small sample already points to the vast variety of architectural metaphors and their use, which I want to draw attention to here. Just as there

27 Oxford English Dictionary, “architect (n.),” <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5313478274>, accessed 20 March, 2025.

28 In 2019, the entry in the OED online edition was expanded to include a sub-entry on the use of the term ‘architect’ in computing under the header ‘additional sense.’ Ibid.

29 See for example: Hannah Steinkopf-Frank, “Frances Perkins: Architect of the New Deal,” JSTOR Daily, <https://daily.jstor.org/woman-architect-of-the-new-deal/>, accessed April 20, 2025; “Architects of the Good Friday Agreement: Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement,” <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/committees/33/committee-on-the-implementation-of-the-good-friday-agreement/architects-of-the-good-friday-agreement/>, accessed July 1, 2025.

30 Paul Preston, *Architects of Terror: Paranoia, Conspiracy and Anti-Semitism in Franco’s Spain* (London: William Collins, 2024).

are architects of terror, there are also architects of peace. Outside the world of politics and political news, we encounter 'decision architects,' whose role is to guide individuals or groups towards determining the best possible outcome for a given task or problem. There is also the phrase 'architect of success,' which is used to refer to people who have achieved remarkable feats—for example, in sport or business—but also applied to a wide spectrum of attitudes or activities, from 'discipline' or 'pain' to 'action' and 'hard work'—all being architects of success. Not surprisingly, such metaphors are particularly frequent in the context of self-improvement, such as in book titles or on inspirational posters and even coffee mugs.

Some of these more 'extended' metaphorical uses of the term architect—to pick up the OED's terminology—may indeed appear rather strained, such as referring to pain as an architect of success. At the same time, they also illustrate how common and conventionalized the metaphor has become and reveal how the metaphorical use of the term architect clashes with the realities, requirements, and challenges of architecture as a profession and cultural technique. It has been pointed out repeatedly and continually, both in and beyond scholarly research, that the role and responsibilities of architects are complex, diverse, contested, and subject to change.³¹ Discrepancies also arise between the popular image of architects as highly creative, solitary geniuses, not least embodied by many of the on-screen architects, and the everyday practices and ways in which the architectural profession works. Architectural theorist Mark Cousins even detected "an almost unbridgeable gulf between the popular conception of what happens and what actually happens" when it comes to architectural design.³² He also characterized architecture as a "weak" discipline, in the sense that it is not a self-validating discipline, has unclear and shifting boundaries, changing contents, and is

31 For two examples addressing architects' roles in relation to their responsibility to respond to global developments and specific events see: Daniel Barber, "After Comfort," in *LOG: Observations on Architecture and the Contemporary City*, no. 47 (2019); Oliver Wainwright, "Professional Buck-Passers: Why the Excoriating Grenfell Report Was Right to Damn Architects," *The Guardian*, September 5, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/sep/05/professional-buck-passer-excoriating-grenfell-report-architects>, accessed April 20, 2025.

32 Mark Cousins, "Building an Architect," in *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User*, ed. Jonathan Hill (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 16.

shaped by a variety of external forces.³³ Architecture is also highly collaborative. Architects rarely work all by themselves and they always need to consider and mediate between different interests and requirements, including the existing architectural context, clients' views, laws, etc. Furthermore, the process of constructing a building involves a multitude of parties while, in addition, scholarship highlights the significance of different media as additional, though not less important, architectural production sites, including books, magazines, photographs, drawings, and digital platforms.³⁴

Contemporary architectural scholarship is increasingly moving away from a more traditional and narrow understanding of architecture and its history, and who is and is not recognized as a producer of architecture. Instead, architectural topics are approached from a wide range of perspectives, contexts, and concerns—not only focusing on buildings and their designers, but also engaging with issues such as territories, conflicts, colonialism, energy consumption, media, archives, infrastructures, and more-than-human actors and entanglements, to name just a few. Likewise, a growing number of architects and architectural firms reflect on and expand their fields of activity, by exploring new ways of making architecture and by asking what practicing architecture today means. The development of new materials and technologies and the growing influence of AI challenge and change the profession and the professional realities of architects rapidly and fundamentally. The ever-worsening environmental crisis, as well as political and social shifts on local and global scales, create new demands and challenges, and also affect the debate about how, where, as well as by and for whom architecture is produced. Considering the power and potential that metaphors and metaphorical thought have for opening up new ways of thinking and looking at the world, they might provide a powerful tool to find responses to these questions and challenges.³⁵ However, in the case of common conventionalized architectural metaphors, this potential could be countered by the narrow understanding of architecture they rely on, exemplified by the metaphor of the architect discussed above.

33 Jonathan Hill, "Introduction," in *Occupying Architecture*, 5.

34 See for example: Beatriz Colomina and Joan Ockman, eds., *Architectureproduction* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988).

35 Incidentally, while numerous studies have examined the potential of metaphors in relation to environmental issues, relatively few have focused specifically on the

The philosopher and media theorist Marshall McLuhan writes that metaphors can be both “helpful” and “crippling,” while having the potential to direct “the thoughts of whole periods of history.”³⁶ The presence and centrality of built environments across cultures, times, and places makes architecture extremely valuable, important and helpful as a metaphorical reference to frame, explain or concretize ideas, thoughts and processes. The ubiquity of architectural metaphors is therefore hardly surprising. Yet, as I have discussed, these metaphors remain grounded in and continue to reconfirm and actualize an image of architecture that is tied to qualities such as structure, materiality, and solidity—and respectively, of architects as analytical, problem-solving creators of complex plans. As architectural metaphors characterize their targets in terms of stability, order, and structure, they can—as Karatani, Hollier, and others have pointed out—inhibit more creative, fluid, and dynamic ways of thinking by creating and nurturing a sense of and longing for stability and finality. By referencing and thereby foregrounding specific qualities, they consolidate a conventionalized image of architecture and architects and may thereby contribute to an underlying reluctance—within professional institutions, among architectural practitioners but also in the wider public—to critically reassess this image and what it entails. In its highly conventionalized form, the metaphorical use of architectural concepts and images refers to an outdated understanding of architecture in the contemporary moment—an understanding that has arguably always been selective and idealized to begin with. This continues to tie architecture in the present to precisely this delineated frame of reference, while the world around us continues to change and require new ways of doing and thinking architecture. Approaches that shift the focus from solidity, finality, and perpetuity towards aspects such as fluidity, circularity, and diversity might play an important part in this respect. Although such practices and scholarship are not non-existent, certain long-established ways of thinking through and

field of architecture to date: Brook Muller, “Metaphor, Architectural Design, and Environmental Response,” in *Enquiry: The ARCC Journal for Architectural Research* 4, no 1 (2007); Stephen J Flusberg and Paul H Thibodeau, “Why Is Mother Earth on Life Support? Metaphors in Environmental Discourse,” *Topics in Cognitive Science* 15, no. 3 (2023); Anaïs Augé, *Metaphor and Argumentation in Climate Crisis Discourse* (New York; London: Routledge, 2023).

36 Marshall McLuhan, *Letters of Marshall McLuhan* (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 136.

about architecture prevail and continue to dominate discourse. Even though architecture is shaped by a variety of forces, both material and immaterial, it is still generally “expected to be solid, stable and reassuring—physically, socially and psychologically,” as Jonathan Hill argues; which are precisely the traditional qualities referenced by the most common architectural metaphors.³⁷ As explicated earlier, these kind of metaphors have a long history, and they play an important role in organizing and structuring abstract thought by offering a linguistic framework through which complex and abstract ideas can be conceptualized and communicated. Consequently, it may well be this very discrepancy between our conventionalized architectural metaphors on the one hand, and the conditions of our contemporary situation on the other that should continue to be both catalyst for ongoing critical engagement, as well as inspiration and potential framework for alternative contemporary solutions and ways of thinking. We can, and arguably should, attempt to deploy conventionalized architectural metaphors more critically and reflectively as a way to reconsider and potentially challenge and expand established notions of architecture, architectural practice, and space. Invoking Meryl Altman’s claim that we need to pay “relentless attention to metaphor’s historical and non-universal dimension—to the power to exclude that lies implicit in the power to name,” what is actually vocalized with architectural metaphors, what is left unspoken, what is the meaning of the space in between, and why are both sides of the coin important?³⁸ Architecture is implicated in the negotiation of social, political, and ecological challenges through both its material and its metaphorical presence in society. If, indeed, metaphor has the inherent potential to direct “the thoughts of whole periods of history,” as McLuhan suggests, then the process of challenging and reshaping the catalogue of conventionalized architectural metaphors could play an integral part in transforming our contemporary moment through metaphorical reference.³⁹

37 Jonathan Hill, *Immaterial Architecture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 2.

38 Altman, “How Not to Do Things with Metaphors We Live By,” 504.

39 McLuhan, *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, 136.

