

**GILLES DELEUZE**

**the architecture of space and the fold**

*“The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside.”* Deleuze – Foucault p.96-97

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**Philosophy of Materials and Structures**

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Contemporary theory of architecture has seen the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze emerge within the context of architectural discourse and the questions of space. Words like 'Smooth' and 'Striated Space', 'the Fold' and 'Rhizomes' are consistently being passed around the seminar tables in academia and can be seen throughout any current architectural journal. But what does an architecturally derived Deleuzian space actually entail?

While this question may in-fact prove to only ask more questions, I will try and suggest the 'one of the many' ways in which a few key Deleuzian concepts could in theory be executed within an architectural endeavor. The one concept I will discuss is arguably the most architecturally congruent philosophical notion put forth by Deleuze (Le Pli); the concept of the fold.

It is important to be willing to accept Deleuze's theory of the fold to fully realize its potential in an architectural discourse. The fold, not as a technical device, but an ontology of becoming, of multiplicity, of a differentiation while maintaining a continuity.

***“Thus a continuous labyrinth is not a line dissolving into independent points, as flowing sand might dissolve into grains, but resembles a sheet of paper divided into infinite folds or separated into bending movements, each one determined by the consistent or conspiring surrounding... A fold is always folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern. The unit of matter, the smallest element of the labyrinth, is the fold, not the point which is never a part, but a simple extremity of the line.”<sup>1</sup>***

The fold is never to be accepted as a singular event but rather it is to be seen as a population of many folds. Even its antonym 'unfolding' is not to be understood as the opposite of the fold as the language may suggest but rather it follows the fold up to the following fold. It is itself a multiple of the fold.

Deleuze further defines the fold not as one of a metric or dimensional change but one that can operate as a degree of development and differences.

***“Folding-unfolding no longer simply means tension-release, contraction-dilation, but enveloping-developing, involution-evolution... The simplest way of stating the point is by saying that to unfold is to increase, to grow; whereas to fold is to diminish, to reduce, to withdraw into the recesses of a world. Yet a simple metric change would not account for the difference between the organic and the inorganic, the machine and its motive force. It would fail to show that movement does not simply go from one greater or smaller part to another, but from fold to fold. When a part of a machine is still a machine, the smaller unit is not the same as the whole.”<sup>2</sup>***

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. “The Fold-Leibniz and the Baroque: The Pleats of Matter.” Architectural Design Profile No.102: Folding in Architecture (1993): 18

<sup>2</sup> Ibid p. 19

In terms of architecture, this can be interpreted as a series of potential expressions of pure movements, defined as differentiations. Movement or alterations where there are no fixed reference points or suggestive identities. Setting forth relations not based on traditional architectural attempts towards resolution through order and repetition of the same, but relationships based on uncertainties and differences. Folding, as a means of introducing another concept of space and time within the landscape of conventionally conceived 'spatial boundaries'.<sup>3</sup> Spatiality as a 'becoming' with no external measures or ends within a complex repetition, no longer restricted to imitation. For example, the problematic relation of ideas can develop new ways of seeing the relationship of architecture to environment; building to site. The fold can begin to re-consider questions of figure/ground contextualism. No longer creating a separation of figure/ground (Le Corbusier and the *Piloti*) but one where a continuous and reversible dialogue can occur. A folding across lines to create uncertainty between boundaries, instead of defined boundaries of separation. These uncertainties create the potential of a multiplicity of folding and unfolding; a re-reading of an architecture of becoming.

The differentiation of figure/ground only presents one degree of consideration and as previously discussed, folding occurs independent of scale. **"The fold is the general topology of thought... 'inside' space is topologically in contact with the 'outside' space... and brings the two into confrontation at the limit of the living present."**<sup>4</sup> A flow from outside to inside, across different scales and independent of distance, where neither is fixed but rather in constant exchange. Thus, a building is not one space and one site but many spaces folded into many sites. Architecture conceived where there is a folding of space into other spaces. A multiplicity where everything is always read and re-read but we never see it in its entirety. A reading of space now as variable intensities of movement. An intensive complexity distancing a long-established means of Cartesian measured space, to a space of **"groundless depth from which irrupts something that creates its own space and time."**<sup>5</sup> **"It is not the line that is between two points, but the point that is at the intersection of several lines."**<sup>6</sup> Several folds creating a blurring of inside/outside, solid/void and space to space thresholds; re-conceptualizing traditional architectural notions of spatial connections and separations. Within the fold, the conventional architectural conception of spatial adjacency (the modernist 'bubble' diagrams of space allocation) is itself problematized, no longer rendering the repetition of the same but a repetition of differences. Space conceived, developed and executed with an experience of variations as opposed to traditional architectural style of an 'experience of identity'.

It is important when considering the fold in an architectural context, that it encompasses a continuously differentiating entirety. It is not a matter of separate folded 'parts' within the 'whole' but the 'whole' has also been complicated with the many 'parts'. A 3-dimensional folding beyond pattern and instead, considered as a fabric where the pattern is imprinted and folded along. A recursive folding of complexities where the 'edge' is no longer definable and instead, the nebulous 'line' overtakes the site.<sup>7</sup> An architectural process of spatial conception,

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<sup>3</sup> Rajchman, John. Constructions. MIT press, 1998 p. 12

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. Foucault. University of Minnesota Press, 2000 p. 118-19

<sup>5</sup> Rajchman, John. Constructions. MIT press, 1998 p. 16

<sup>6</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. Pourparlers Paris: Minuit, 1990 p. 219 – (as referenced by John Rajchman in Constructions)

<sup>7</sup> Rajchman, John. Constructions. MIT press, 1998 p. 22

where new and unanticipated possibilities (between folded, enfolding and yet to be unfolded) occur without predetermined outcomes. A pliable topological space where connections acquire vitality, with emerging possible interactions implying multiple fluid thresholds. A space which is no longer detached from program and event but where the folds become the events themselves.

But how can this active space exist beyond theory or a computer/animated space and occur in the tangible reality? Can an architecturally responsive manifestation of such potent ideas actually come to realization? Various architects have themselves discussed such possibilities (such as Peter Eisenman, Greg Lynn and John Rajchman to name only a few) but for now, it remains primarily in theory, diagram or in a formal static variation. I would argue, for architecture to move from a theoretical (Deleuzian) diagram of space, to a built construct, a new type of construction and material is needed. One potential actualization could lie within programmable matter; most importantly, the development of nano-technology. The ability to have a series of surfaces programmed to not just fold and unfold but to evolve and continuously refold itself. Surfaces built from the bottom up, atom by atom; differentiating and reconfiguring along a smooth space of multiplicities. An architecture, where by virtue of evolution, will endlessly and unpredictably refold spaces and spatial thresholds, redefining and questioning architectural relationships of building to site, room to room, surface to surface, body to surface and body to body. A progressive and regressive undulating re-articulation and re-definition of inhabitable space(s); responding and evolving more fluidly to the body and its folded actuality.

With the spatial ideas of the fold, coupled with the potential for nano-technology in an architectural context, we can now see on the horizon an architectural manifestation of the many suggestive philosophies of Gilles Deleuze. A dynamic space where infinite 'product' possibilities, processes and virtuality could unfold across a diverse architectural landscape with no definable beginning or end; rather, an evolving continuum.