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The Architect as an Exile

Introduction by Joost Meuwissen

Perhaps because architecture is international or at least in its forms not hindered by a language barrier, because in a culture of mobility and communication a cosmopolitan attitude is appreciated, travelling serves encounters and is not considered a sad farewell and because architects are practised in living each commission situation wherever the commissions, relatively little attention has been paid to the theme of exile. Exilliteratur exists, but Exilarchitektur not or hardly so[i].

The theme is strictly biographical. Yet there may be numerous moments for architects to have made it subject of their architecture, as an autobiographical moment. But it takes place in secret. Edith Farnsworth and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe argued about the fact that the house he had built for her was too hot in summer and too cold in winter and not about the catholic detailing of its Schinkelesque memory of a Prussia which was too hot in summer and too cold in winter[ii].

In Raoul Bunschoten's London, Berthold Lubetkin was always the moral authority who confronted the English with the fact that architecture could be more solid, consistent and substantial. The stranger had remained a thoroughly good person who happened to carry the riches of his profession as his luggage and who, in order not to collapse under this load, a load from the country of origin, gave the rebukes he administered left and right, the form of a comforting word.

The exile goes round providing comfort[iii]. He does not colonize but, in Raoul Bunschoten's words, *domesticates*, as if to test the wildness of the country of arrival for its unexpected possibilities in its further curbing. There is a connection between the fact that the story of the country of origin cannot be told again and again, and the implied agreement prevalent in the country of arrival about the stories which could be told but with which everyone is already acquainted.

Because the exile does not want to pose as a stranger for ever and does not want to cherish his memories in loneliness, they are fictionalized according to a narrative logic which articulates only the basic metaphors, only that which would remain the same, in the story that could have been told. The story of his life is erased. It is stripped of its aesthetics in favour of an emphasis on the presuppositions which underlie it but which are at the same time wholly arbitrary. No matter how universal the basic metaphors may seem, whether 'Spinoza', the 'door', the 'tricycle' or the 'earth', they remain a choice in the frame of individual ethics which they represent, as if they were a mode, an element of architecture, in which a feeling and the expression of this feeling coincide so that the feelings are no longer purely individual but remain, as it were, available for the individual. The real story of which they are the setting or which they carry, reflects only the genesis of the events that are not told. Raoul Bunschoten's projects are no representations of objects, for instance buildings or landscapes. They are alternately 'demonstrations' and 'explanations' of their genetic processes, buildings and landscapes breaking up into a series of basic metaphors as attributes or even vehicles of architecture. The garden, in *Spinoza's Garden* (1985), "represents the genetic process of the Flevo polder", the last land reclamation of the Zuider Zee. The tricycle in *The Skin of the Earth* (1991) depicts "learning how to walk, pushing the horizon".

The space is asymmetric, fictitious and possibly absent. In the pergola of the winning competition entry for the reconstruction of the Museumplein in Amsterdam (1988), the space is a "fictitious field of objects (driftwood)", which is only there because it makes it plain that elsewhere something has happened. Those elements of history that have been washed ashore, the driftwood that has been able to take on any

constellation, is no ship's log. Wood and sea only tell of genesis, not of being, only of origin and arrival, but not where. Also, the basic metaphors have no mutual relationship, other than in the narrative which itself is absent. It is not the sea that is the three-dimensional but fictitious field of objects. The pieces of wood keep their constellation even when they have been washed ashore or dredged up. The fictitious field is not a natural presence. It does not come into being until every link between the basic metaphors has been severed, not until 'wood' and 'sea' have gone their separate ways. There is no way back. As a constellation driftwood has something of the ultimate metaphor of the exile who, spurred on by fate, sees his personality multiplied, in about the same way as the 'door' in *The Skin of the Earth* emancipates into a fictitious field of objects that we could call 'driftdoor' if the word existed, 'driftwood' without hope of return to the door that we have slammed shut behind us. The door has become a feeling. Genesis is an entropy or, in the words of Hermann Broch in his outstanding exile novel *The Death of Virgil*, a continuous turning away from the way back, which never again ends up in the simple country of the past, but if it does lead back, it does so to the "multiplicity of the foreign".

There is a suffering from the multiplicity of basic metaphors that form the setting of the story of genesis, untold because it is life itself, like a paragon, like something which from the untold story is seen as a multiplicity of the foreign, but from the outside only exists because it belongs to the narrative. There is a suffering from the dependency of the basic metaphors. Choosing a basic metaphor means at the same time wanting to emancipate it and urging it to movement so that it can develop into a fictitious field of objects. In this way the sadness of a door is changed into a happier feeling, not as modernistically programmed happiness, but simple, so that the dissatisfaction, the sadness and the mourning are recognised as moments of change and not of a standstill, not of resentment. Through the basic metaphors self-pity is turned into a compassion for the people, but it stems from a dissatisfaction with the objects, with the things that cannot be told but that continue to communicate as unhappy feelings. The dissatisfaction is not with the people but with their things, including their dissatisfaction with their things. It is aimed at the things, not at the words or that is to say, the words have bearing on the things in three ways: as substantive, as verb and as adjective.

The basic metaphors, such as 'Spinoza', 'door' or 'tricycle', are substantives that precede meaning-conferring or reference. They are demonstrations, no indications, like imageless portraits which have been detached from the coherence of language and do not direct the story of genesis. They demonstrate the multiplicity of the foreign as if it concerns things that pass, that blow over. As a constant frame the basic metaphors are demonstrations, but passive and ultimately negative.

In *The Skin of the Earth* the 'name' is always the beginning of a sequence aiming at avoiding the objects or at least the dissatisfaction with both their enclosedness and with their dependence. Every name implies a 'portrait' which is not a fixed image, neither in terms of portrayal nor as a mental image, but which really only consists of ripples which can, when we give it some thought, 'unfold' into a configuration which in its turn is a whole. Every configuration, be it a door or a tricycle, has a central design and details. A configuration does not work as a whole but through the details. As a whole, the configuration cannot be designed but it can be thought up from the details. On the basis of the details all the non-detailed can act as a mould or a framing for the configuration as a whole. From the basic metaphors, the manifestation of a configuration is determined out of the absurd, *ex negativo*. The sequence that leads from basic metaphor to manifestation is no story of genesis in terms of styling or designing process. It has the features of an argumentation in which the basic metaphor, as the constant factor, is forever the formula for the variable which never appears as

surroundings, but always as a detail. As non-detailed, the basic metaphor is the surrounding, the mould, the context for the manifestation of the object it demonstrates. Based on the interest in visual arts of the time, *Spinoza's Garden* defined the whole of architecture as late as 1985 in about this way as an alchemic brew, as "a crater in which all perceptions and contemplations are mingled, according to Eleatic recipes, and thought and being becoming one" [iv].

As a *substantive* the basic metaphor is a framing without detail and without form. It is taken away so that what then appears is a form in absolute genesis, without design, without plan, without teleology and even without finality or at least, what becomes in absolute genesis, meets only two characteristics, that of

openness through which it can expand materially and that of independence which prevents it from getting lost in its material expansion. The important discovery in *The Skin of the Earth* is that an enclosedness of objects is not connected with their independence, with a being secluded in the self, but that, on the contrary, it has to do with their dependence, with being at a loss and with an inability to express oneself. A closed door, Raoul Bunschoten sighs in *The Skin of the Earth*, “is an awkward object. It does not stand on its own in a domestic field (...) The door is a constantly reopened wound of the house”. If the door is no genetic process like the salutation or farewell tears that fall on the threshold, if the door does not develop into a fictitious, *domestic* field of objects, it is necessarily absorbed into a bigger whole. It becomes a dependent part of the house, a flaw in it, a hermetic, irreparable accident. As a type of construction, as an architectonic category which must be defined time after time, a house is no constant basic metaphor but a multiplicity of the foreign, a heterogeneity of basic metaphors in which genesis is absolute.

The door is a *substantive* but the house is a *verb*. It is what is done. The house is a process of domestication. This process is the house. It does not take the house as its subject or object. There is a pure, *logical* consumption of the house as a process without object and there is a practical, *ethical* consumption of the objects in the house, the door, the bed, as constant basic metaphors. As genesis the house is defined, but not told. The tragic thing is that the story of genesis can only be told as an absence, when absolute genesis has stopped through human interference, through inhibitions and fears, when the process of domestication has been turned into a process of colonization, where the constancy of the basic metaphors is taken for a constancy of the objects which, taken from elsewhere, fill an empty space or rather, by filling it, deny its own development and assume it to be empty. In this way every narrative is that of a tragedy. The projects by Raoul Bunschoten do not narrate, but alternately follow a basic metaphor as argumentation of an idealistic genesis and the explanation of a feeling that such a basic metaphor expresses as a setting of an actual, but unnarrated genesis.

The feelings, of sadness and happiness, are *adjectives*. There are sad doors and happy doors. The genesis is not narrated but evoked by the course of moods that form the adjectives of the basic metaphor. In addition to the logics of the house as a genesis without object and the ethics of the basic metaphors, there is an esthetic consumption of the affects, which is ‘explicated’. The ‘explication’ enforces openness and independence from the passions. Sad feelings are dependent. Happy feelings are independent. A possible emancipation of the basic metaphors not only brings comfort because the form of sadness is overcome, but also indicates the possibility of a change in mood. It labels the moods as temporary. The basic metaphors are fields of objects. The field is fictitious, but carries a feeling. As a multiple of such fictitious fields the house or the space is in itself not domestic or three-dimensional. The house and the space are not in themselves fields but ideas of what comes into being without objects, what expands without objects, in a density that can be larger or smaller, whether it is the crust of the

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earth, in *Spinoza's Garden* and later projects, or the thinness of the air, or both, like the biosphere of *The Skin of the Earth*, or the matter in the universe, which has been put together into spheres, as a cosmological emptiness in *Soul's Cycle* (1989). Every expansion takes place not in space, but in matter in the making. The matter is expansion. The matter is ‘lava’, which flows layer after layer and which expands horizontally. As heterogeneous as the house and the space are, so homogeneous are the matter and the fictitious fields of objects. As horizontally as the matter expands into a continuity of streams and cracks, so flowing and floating are the basic metaphors as fictitious fields of objects. It is true that they are cut out of the same material – their concrete stands for lava – but they have also been cut loose, so that they can be thought. They are lifted in order to be shown, as objects of a demonstration. As lifted matter, the bed, the door and the tricycle remind of the rudimentary form of the triumphal arch of Antiquity, not in its appearance as an arch or as a city gate, as a boundary line, but as a lifted mass.

The basic metaphors follow a triple road to independence, free from the matter. Their material, the concrete-lava, has definitively been cut loose from the expandable matter. The breaking away from the crust of the earth is irreparable. It can only be mended by other, not horizontal and expandable, but linear matter, the metals which themselves are breaking material and the fibres that spring up from the furrows of the earth. The chunks of concrete are supported and held together by wires and steel, which in their turn guide and maintain the latent mobility of the material. Finally there is a third emancipation in *The Skin of the Earth* when the latent mobility is turned into a patent mobility, when in two stages wires and steel take their own

forms, that of the hinge as the local mobility and that of the wheel as the mobility in the end most independent and no longer local. It is with the wheel that man enters the scene. Man does not arrive with the cutting of the stone or with the tectonics of support and weight which upholds the stone. Man does not arrive with the 'demonstration' of mass in terms of appearance and disappearance of the building as a fixed image. The 'demonstration' is no 'exposition'. It is unchanging matter that, once broken off and detached, is proof of something completely different. It does not give insight into itself but into that which changes. Thus hinge and wheel, as parts of the demonstration, imply no infinite mobility but a flexibility, a manoeuvrability, pliability and movability within a configuration, within a particular fictitious field of objects of which the basic metaphor is the setting. The mobility effected by hinge or wheel is related to that of the crust of the earth, which bends, ripples, folds and breaks. But it has been set free from it within the homogeneous constellation of 'door', 'bed' or 'tricycle'.

Together door, bed, tricycle or earth do not form an analysis of building, house or surroundings. As vehicles of mobility and transitoriness the attributes or basic metaphors are not seen as an act in time. It is not the user's function that plays a role in the house as a genetic process. Describing an act, for instance building, as mobile and changeable, would be a platitude. Building can be just as rigid as the house or a closed door. Colonization is the process of such rigid acts. What is known is expanded into an area that is unknown and remains unknown. Or is even made unknowable, in terms of exclusion. Expansion in space follows the road of abstraction, a representation of inclusion and exclusion or, in the words of Michel Foucault, "discipline and punish", which in their turn can be replayed as a game, in terms of collision and escape, of corporality as input and output[v]. The domestication which Raoul Bunschoten sets against this has, it is true, the same motive of "extending familiarity, substituting horizons by domesticity", but it includes on an equal basis old and new, the existing and the changing, the controlled and 'the house', domesticated and domus, in a genetic process which in its turn generates new horizons,

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not from outside but from within. *The Skin of the Earth* can be seen as a slow replacement of an old, 'natural' horizon by new, artificial horizons which not only rouse but also express the longing for distance. The 'horizon' itself is the basic metaphor which forms the setting of the process of domestication as a whole. It is the most immaterial basic metaphor and if it appears, it does so as a break. However infinite the process of domestication is in principle, seen from one basic metaphor it wears itself out in the matter which infinitely expands both on a big and on a small scale. It ends in the matter, as the basis in its genesis as a 'door' or a 'tricycle' gets exhausted, or it continues, but apart from the matter, as a side wing, as a baroque appearance. In the latter case the tricycle becomes a car, pre-eminently the baroque means of transport, the camera obscura with the world as its image. *The Skin of the Earth*, its waves, cracks and atmospheric pressures, are exactly the opposite. Whereas the manoeuvrability of the tricycle remained linked to the native soil but made the horizon mobile, as a learning process for walking, rising, as a genesis of verticality, the car, being by far more mobile, would make domestication change into a colonization in which the distance is only an image for ever receding and the 'horizon' as an attribute becomes superfluous.

In the projects by Raoul Bunschoten, the image which excites feelings but does not express them, is as it were object of a real, medieval *iconoclasm*. As a representation of genetic processes the projects also look as if every passive portrayal, every tempting image is avoided, whether it is the visual culture of television or of the flowing vista from the car window. The only way the sublime, the noble simplicity of the country of origin can still be approached, is with words. As ethical problems of expression the 'door', the 'bed' and the 'tricycle' are first of all moral poems, allegories, which indicate that sad feelings are not something to be ashamed of for they can be replaced by happy ones. It is only the fact that the same attributes can express both that sad feelings could be avoided.

It is precisely the calvinist-jewish culture of the word which manages to maintain the medieval primacy of the acoustic over the visual in seventeenth-century Holland in favour of what can best be described as a visual intensifying of objects and landscapes, because their appearance is excused acoustically. The things are supplied with an inscription and a legend, like the titles and short comments in Raoul Bunschoten's commentary on *The Skin of the Earth*. We have the inscription, the title, the noun, the medieval command, the demonstration, the argumentation. And we have the legend, the commentary, the adjective, the medieval prayer, the explanation, the feeling. *The Skin of the Earth* can be seen as a seventeenth-century genre painting in which 'door', 'bed' and 'tricycle' are next to the 'slippers', the 'broom', the 'little dog' and even

the 'letter'. Each in itself forms the setting for human acts that are often not painted as acts. No matter how perspectively constructed, the space is no interspace between the objects, no platform on which a recognizable mythological performance is restaged. The tableau is domestic without known narrative. The space itself crumbles as much as possible into door, window, vista, panel and map on the wall. Likewise the incidence of light is particularized as if every object and every segment of space has its own incidence of light. What remains is darkness. Space, house, daylight, as generalities they are caught in fabric, in the obscure folds in a curtain or the shining crease in black clothes, in about the same way as Raoul Bunschoten defines a curtain in *The Skin of the Earth* as "a dark crust of the light", in which the light becomes material and expands as matter.

The calvinist-jewish culture knows predestination without purposiveness. People and objects are in a state of genesis, without a picture of the future. They particularize and become ever more individual, ever more independent. Their morals become contradictory. There is a continuous process of fragmentation, of secession and expulsion. There is a guilt-

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ness of the individuality, as a state of simply being, as a form of pride, as a lack of modesty and ordinariness, which is excused by the word. And, in this genetic process, there is a guilt in the lack of individuality, in dependence and subordinacy, in the not-wanting-to-become, which is punished with an unhappy feeling that radiates, that people and objects cannot keep to themselves.

All appearance is change, or in Spinoza's words, 'alteration' (modus). Architecture is not defined in the immobility of the building as a whole, but in what moves and changes: the door, the bed, the tricycle and the earth. As phenomena they are not instruments of change, but material vehicles in which change comes to light. In this way a landscape is not an observation turned into a rigid image, but a stream of solidifying lava which expands as matter and crumbles into a multiplicity of ever receding horizons, both on a large and on a small scale, both internal and external. Landscape as an image of distance is replaced by a landscape as distance in time. Seen in time, the horizon in the landscape painting is not so much the skyline in the depth of the image, as a knife wound between the paint of the air and the paint of the earth, a wound that can be stitched up with strands, with architecture. The craquelure of the paint is a craquelure of horizons. And, next, there is an intimacy of the craquelure that is not meant to be observed. The prevailing opinion is even that it takes something away from the observation of the image in its frame in the space that surrounds it. But as a source of anxiety the cracks can also be objects of contemplation. If the skyline, the *natural* horizon, is seen from the craquelure, it carries a feeling. Such an observation is strictly individual and subversive vis-à-vis the image of which the metaphorical nature is pushed aside and the composition is overlooked in favour of a completely different filling up of the landscape, not as a space but as a feeling.

Something similar happens with the light. The light is darkness. The darkness is not an absence of light but either an absence of matter, in the cosmology of the universe, or a presence of matter in its unrestrained coagulation, as a black hole but which at the same time disintegrates, as it were in the second stage, as the final result. The fact that light, really also a basic metaphor as a vehicle of observation as change, finds its origin in the darkness from which it shines forth and not in the sun as a source of light – a light in the universe – reminds one of Jakob Böhme, for whom light originates from the dark gleam of a pewter plate, from the dark gleam of the mineral from the depth of the earth^[vi].

The beautiful pictures by Hélène Binet indicate that the objects do not move in a nineteenth-century, romantic illusion of a seventeenth-century chiaroscuro, not in gradations of light in which they can or cannot be distinguished. But one could say that light as a material expansion without corporality and without pliability, as the essence of the skin of the earth as a layer of light, air and openness, resting in a cracking matter, is a 'distinct-obscure' of a matter that is an expansion of feelings which are 'indistinct-clear'. The demonstration of the basic metaphors is 'distinct-obscure'. The explanation of the feelings is 'indistinct-clear'^[vii]. It is probably the core in Raoul Bunschoten's work.

[i] The exception being Aldo Rossi, especially his design for Mantua: *Architetture padane* (Mantua: Provincia di Mantova, Casa del

Mantegna, 1984). In 1991-92 Raoul Bunschoten lectured on the theme of 'self-chosen exile' at the Architectural Association in London.

[ii] See Peter Blake, *The Master Builders: Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976), 242-249.

[iii] Tracy Quoidbach, 'Berthold Lubetkin: criticus binnen het moderne', *Archis*, Januari 1992 (Houten: Bohn Stafleu Van Loghum, [1992]), 52-59.

[iv] Raoul Bunschoten, 'Spinoza's Garden', AA files. *Annals of the Architectural Association School of Architecture*, Number II, Published Spring 1986 (London: The Architectural Association, 1986), 54.

[v] Peter Halley, 'The Crisis in Geometry', *Collected Essays 1981-1987* (Zurich: Edition Gallery Bruno Bischofberger, 1988), 74-105.

[vi] Ernst Bloch, *Vorlesungen zur Philosophie der Renaissance* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), 69-84.

[vii] Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 274-276. Raoul Bunschoten's anti-Cartesianism, though, does not seem to follow Leibniz's model but that of Spinoza, not only in *Spinoza's Garden* but in all subsequent projects, culminating in *The Skin of the Earth*. For Spinoza in that respect, see Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (Paris, les Éditions de Minuit, 1968).