

Food, Dress and Architecture as Everyday Practice

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Abstract

The concept of architecture as cover and shelter for the human body needs to be radically revised. What needs to be covered and sheltered is not the inside space of home, and the "heimlich," but the outside space of Vanishing Nature. The outer world needs to be sheltered from the growing powers of life-in-the interior and the cultures of interior domesticity. Architecture, in its monumental, large-scale form, gives expression to the power of global capitalist development. Opposing the global are small scale architectural practices and hybrid actions connecting professional and academic spheres, attempting to invent a new space of architectural practice addressing everyday life and pluralistic metropolitan practices. For architecture, a new question arises: whether it can, in addition to providing shelter for human activity in "eternal" solid forms, embody the scenarios of diverse and controversial activity. Can architecture expand from the constant to the ephemeral, from solid to soft material, from the inorganic built world to the organic life-material?

Everyday practices -their forms and their actions- can be questioned from the architectural point of view. This act puts architecture as we know it into crisis. How can every day actions and attitudes be put into question, how can they even be organized by architecture and how can architecture be transformed in order to be critical enough and still operative in order to gain such a role into everyday life and its practices?

Introduction

The metaphysical concept of architecture as a cover and a shelter for the human body has come to a radical reverse. What needs to be covered and sheltered is not the inside space of home and the "heimlich" but the outside space of vanishing nature. The outer world needs to be sheltered from the upcoming powers of life-in- the-interior and the cultures of interior domesticity. In this condition, architecture in its monumental, large-scale expression gives form to the expansions of

inner world-domains in global capitalist development. Opposing global strategies, architectural practices engaged in in small scale and hybrid actions between professional and academic levels try to invent a new space of architectural practice in the fields of everyday life and pluralistic metropolitan practices. For architecture, a new question has arisen as to whether it can embody in its domain not only shelter for human activity in "eternal" solid forms, but also the forms of diverse and controversial activity itself. Thus architecture expands from the constant to the ephemeral, from solid to soft material, from the inorganic built world to organic life-material.

The flow and form of everyday practices can be critically posed as a question from an architectural point of view. This act puts architecture as we know it into crisis. How can everyday actions and attitudes be put into question, how can they even be organized by architecture and how can architecture be transformed in order to be critical enough and still operative in order to gain such a role within everyday life and its practices?

The term "*the practice of everyday life*", was coined by Michel de Certeau in the context of the humanities and social science and was made applicable to architectural studies in a work under the same title¹ published in English in 1984 (the first volume) and in 1998 (the second volume). De Certeau was mainly interested in finding ways of creating beyond the boundaries of capitalistic consumption. He and his associate, Luce Giard, draw their examples from the fields of urban tactics and the kitchen. The kitchen, the table, and the streets of the city are the domains where the rhetorical practices of socializing, cooking and walking are displayed. These two types of space – street and kitchen, the public and the private – are the context for personal urban behaviour and for practices in the inner space. At the same time, the body is introduced as the main object of study and as subject of both *habitus* and invention. *Habitus*, as "technique du corps"

(*body technique*), is a term that was introduced by Marcel Mauss in the thirties² and was first used systematically as a concept by Norbert Elias in his work *The Process of Civilization*. He was mainly interested in specifying habits in regard to food.³ Since then, it has been used broadly and has been elaborated and analyzed in major works by Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, *habitus* is the way the body of an individual carries in its movements social meanings and values deriving from the class and education of the person. Bourdieu extends the notion to the symbolic meanings of gestures and tastes, and thus argues that "Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, em-bodied, turned into permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking".⁴

Body techniques are for Bourdieu predispositions of each individual and have symbolic meanings; but for De Certeau they can stand as a model of creation beyond where consumption rules.

Body techniques are a means of linking space to activity and process. They are in a way a form of ephemeral architecture that can stand as mere product of architectural thinking, but they can also lead to the creation of forms. Marcel Mauss writes:

The body is man's first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body 5.

How can the body contribute to architectural studies and how can it participate in the quest for understanding the experience of architectural space?

The body thus introduces time and process in form, and this is the point at which we want to start.

Let us focus now on the domain of dressing and the domain of cooking as crucial parts of everyday life. Dealing with human dress, we do not abandon architecture, but, on the contrary, we expand its realm into that of everyday practices that give form to social life. When dealing with food and the human metabolism we do not neglect architecture either. We expand its scope to embrace an ephemeral giving of form to the sustaining of life. We propose a practical exploration of the relations between architectural construction and the construction of body shape through dress and clothing and the construction of food.

Architecture as reflection upon construction the behaviour of materials is projected onto the processes of cloth and food making. The process by which a meal is constructed is infiltrated by metaphors of

architectural construction. The process by which a dress is constructed is similarly questioned by metaphors of architectural construction. In any event, architectural construction itself is now habitually conceived in a broader sense than the concerns of building ethics, principles and methods used to provide in the past. Here, the experience of food preparation is considered from an architectural point of view. The experience of dressmaking in order to fit to human shape and action turns to architecture in order to widen its methodological and practical codes.

The dress does not cover a void. It covers the naked human body. A house does not cover the void. It covers everyday life. The subject of everyday living is the human body itself. In this topography of the house, the dress and the body, all permutations are possible:

House Dress Body

1. The house is not a mere object. It is a construction that resists gravity and weather conditions. The state of a "resisting house" describes a condition of lively reaction. The inorganic material of the building, by resisting, acts! In this way it becomes to be animated and political⁶, hence it embodies the properties of a living body. The house comes to be Body itself.

Dress House Body

2. The cloth that covers a naked body is not a mere object. We get to know people as they are, always dressed. We get to introduce ourselves by sharing the cultural definition of our image through our dress. The construction of the self is visualized through the dress. Dressing, then, means to invest the inanimate material of the garment with a specific will towards living. So the clothes come to be body itself.

Body Dress House

3. The living body is not a reality created by nature. The living body, among other living bodies, is already dressed and it is already housed before we conceive it, before it comes forth as language to us. The body is affected by the dress and the house and is not therefore ever naked and pure as such. Yet, through language and thought, the house and the dress are already in a sense *inside the body*. That is why, when bodies express themselves, they become dressed and they become housed in manners that are both individually defined and under the terms of collective modes or fashion.

The interchangeability of the words *dress*, *house*, *body* leads us to the

formation of three different sentences: HOUSE DRESS BODY, DRESS HOUSE BODY, BODY DRESS HOUSE. These sentences become meaningful and correct because the word *house* and the word *dress* are both, at the same time, nouns and verbs. What can a dress do? It can dress! What can a house do? It can house! In *doing*, there is the very essence of things. They escape the dress as an object of definition and they elude the formal character that belongs to an *object*.⁷ They become *motion* and *actions* (acts).

We believe that the present state of architecture should be readdressed in light of this identification of two concepts of architecture. The one conceives it as a process to form pure objects. Through the development of representation and construction technologies the formation of built objects leads to expensive highly-detailed solutions in terms of form. These forms are endowed with a highly symbolic meaning which is capitalized by the institution that can fund expensive projects. The other conception of architecture defines it not as giving form to objects but as a process or action that formulates everyday life in more or less ephemeral terms. We follow the second concept, and experiment in both our professional practice and our academic research to embody in certain ways architectural practices in everyday life. Returning to our theme of the triplet "Body, dress, house", we present examples of this work:

HOUSE DRESS BODY (2)



After its completion, our project for an apartment house on the coast of Athens was selected to be shown in an architectural exhibition (**img. 1**).⁸ Our basic concern when designing the building was to design its shell in such a way as to provide suitable bioclimatic conditions for the interior. A double skin was introduced: the inner, a typical concrete construction; the outer, a metal

frame to give shade to the first. In between the two we proposed an extended planting on all floors (an action which, incidentally, was never realized by the inhabitants). In order to demonstrate the idea in the exhibition we constructed a model of the building to the scale of a human body (**img. 2**). This body, being dressed with the shell of the building, was presented "live" and moved around during the opening of the exhibition.



DRESS HOUSE BODY (2)

What happens when the body lacks the shelter of the house? The question was posed in a thesis project in the Department of Architecture, at the University of Thessaly.⁹ One of our students made an investigation of the routes taken by immigrants who leave their countries of Afghanistan and Iraq and start on the long trip to Europe. Much of their journey sees them making long walks in uncanny places. In this circumstance, the apparel of the wandering traveller houses his body day and night, in all weather conditions. For this purpose, a dress was designed that can transform itself to house the body for the various needs of the travelling life. The nomad's dress can be shaped in order to function as a raincoat, and the raincoat can be reshaped into a tent for night time (**img.**

3). Then, another accessory for the migratory traveler is a cross-shaped piece of cloth that can act as an overcoat (img. 4), as pants (img. 5) or as a nosebag (img. 6). Spare fragments of these accessories can be used as blankets (img. 7). Finally, a 'shoe-mode' is being developed so that shoe coverings can be adapted to different walking conditions (img.8). This kind of approach does not apply only to migrants *per se*. It refers to a potential condition for all humans and the potential nomad that any one of us could become. Thinking of a garment in terms of a house we start to question our condition of living, and a secret desire arises for a life more orientated to the outdoors, instead of living in an ever more exclusively interior world.



tent-raincoat



refuge wear for migratory travellers, reaching the second skin of the refugee. Maria Kouskouza

b



multiple-choice cloth



refuge wear for migratory travellers, reaching the second skin of the refugee. Maria Kouskouza

C



multiple-choice cloth



refuge wear for migratory travellers, reaching the second skin of the refugee. Maria Kouskouza
Shoe coverings zipped to a single bottom



BODY DRESS HOUSE

What we eat and ingest creates our body from the inside and what we wear creates it from outside. The regeneration and transformation of the human body by its diet and clothing is as essential and as aboriginal as the human body itself. We wear our body like a body wears its clothes. Norbert Elias writes referring to Erasmus that costume - clothing - "is the body of the body".¹⁰

We eat and we wear (and build) the material of the natural world that surrounds us. It is possible to talk of a world of plant culture: the extensive fields of rural culture: the extensive fields of rural products, wheat and cotton, are converted into cultures of pastas and light casual clothing. In the world of animal stock farming, animal matter is converted into alimentary products rich in proteins or junk food, and the animal's skin is converted into the apparatus of clothing of legs, bags hands, seats (buttock, backs). The origin of all clothing, eating and building processes can be traced back to actions performed upon the earth.

Our earth-originated materials are transported by global networks in order to be transformed through everyday processes. The cook, the tailor and the architect act similarly for sake of the formation of their product. They extract, carry, stock, measure and cut their matter, and they give form to it, performing

practices that are a standardization of *body techniques*. The making of a dinner, its cooking, the dinner table itself, and garment-production are extensions of architectural practice. The common factor in such practices is geometry. *Geometry* means, literally, 'to measure the ground'. While architecture measures and gives shapes to the ground itself, cooking and clothing processes measure and give form to ground and animal products that human bodies incorporate by wearing and eating.

Next to be presented and discussed are the process and results of an architectural workshop and an exhibition related to it, held in Athens "Fashion Week 2008". The workshop was called "FOOD-WEAR-Architectural Transformations. From Cooking to Dressing Practices".¹¹ As the title indicates, its subject was the transformation of cooking practices into practices of clothing formation. Food and clothing production are here considered as practices of architecture, using pliant, organic materials. The aim of the workshop was the production of a performance and installation where materials and procedures of the body's metabolism would be transformed into clothing. The participants in the workshop were students of Architecture and Fashion Design.



Three basic steps had to be done by the students.

First, they were to cook and eat a dinner. They registered the whole process by listing the ingredients and all the operations they performed upon them: measuring, chopping, dicing etc. all the way to their final transformation into food.

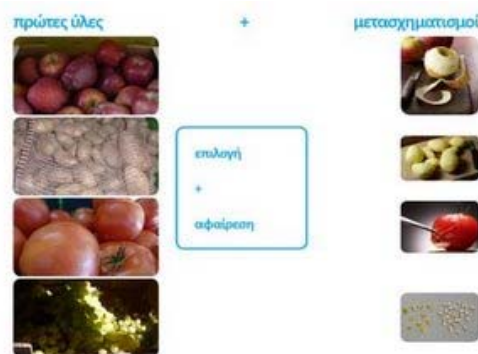
Second, this process – culinary formalism

– was to be transferred to the act of forming clothes, by finding analogies between the procedures and the activities, and also the sensations and the materials that were involved. Analogies were to be drawn also with the dishes cooked, by analyzing their final composition and creating metaphors for body-wrapping and construction. Thus they adopted a methodology related to the processes of cooking. Greg Lynn had selected for his own purposes (computer generated forms) three of these categories, but with the aim of producing folding architecture.¹² However, we intended something less restrictive. Selecting metaphors of processes and materials and submitting them to analogous processes was the proposed way to produce clothes that also had variations. The result could be worn by one or several persons together. This last was the proposition by a team that chose to study the culinary performance itself, in a Chinese restaurant, where the cooking and the eating were performed communally and together around a table.

Third, the students were asked to present the final product, footwear, as part of a catwalk performance.

The following examples take as a point of departure the actions that transformed the initial raw cooking material into to its prepared form for cooking.

1. Thanos Stathopoulos/Danae Frantzi, on the actions of: transformation:: mutation:: section:: :: selection:: rejection:: abstraction:: residue-ing::



2. Sappho Makri, On slicing



3. Maria Doxastaki, Myrto Dramountani, Eirini Giannakopoulou, Ioulia Gioula, Yorgis Noukakis: Around a Chinese table. Wrapping.



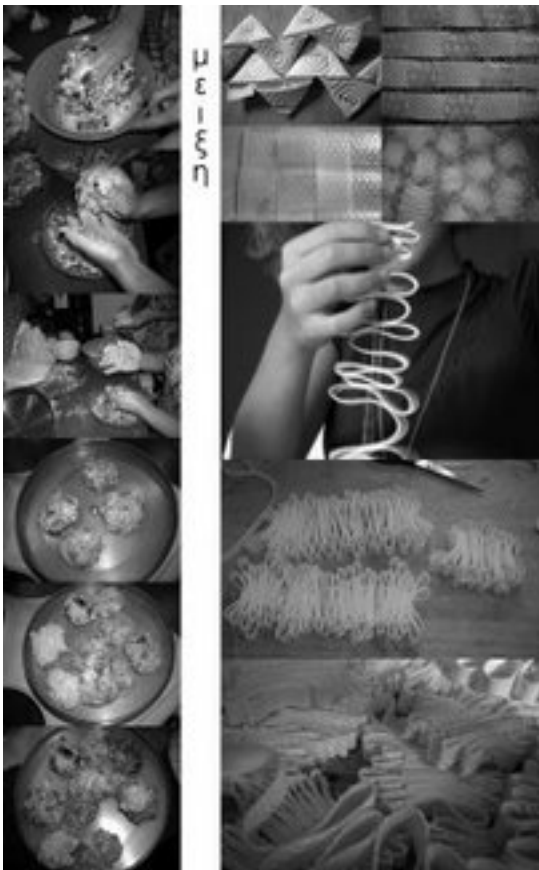
4. Myrto Birliraki, Andreas Ioannides, Rea Kotioni, Laoura Maria Fotiou: section and wrapping



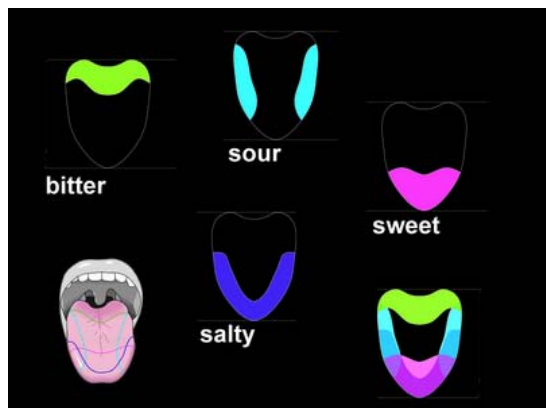


5. Ioanna Aggelopoulou, Daphne Eliaki, Evi Rentziou, Venia Tsatsaki: fragmentation -mixture-shell;



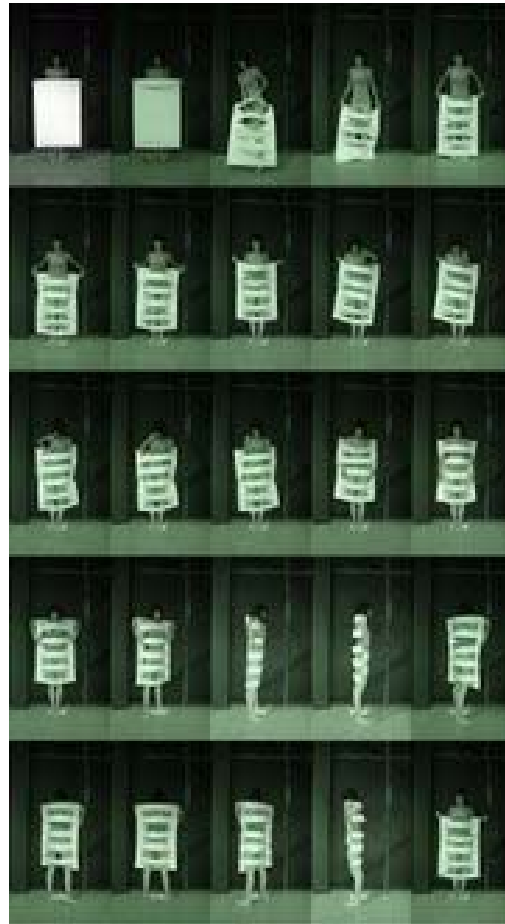
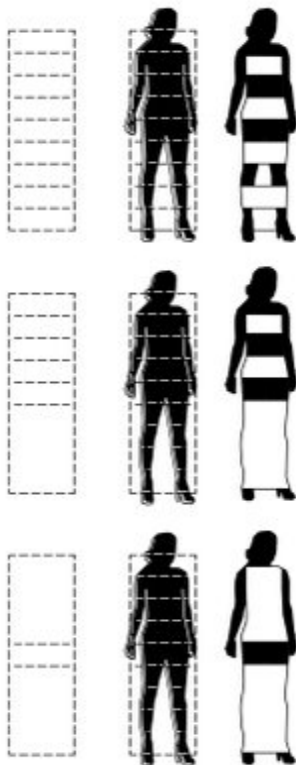


6. Rea Kotioni: tongue: topography of sensations





7. Irene Giannakopoulou: surface, section, space



EPILOGUE

The works we present trace a process attempting to define approaches to architectural formation that originate in the way the body moves, metabolizes, acts, affects and is being affected by everyday life. The question of how to act is a political one. If we see it in this way, the political expands into life and invades architecture. The invasion of the political into architecture expands architecture itself into a topology of acting bodies. Finally, the question of “how to act” has a moral aspect: we have to be aware of the crisis of the human body that expands in the world in terms of massive hunger, thirst, migration and despair.

Notes

- 1 Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Translated by Steven Rendall, (University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, 1984). Michel De Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Vol. 2, *Living and Cooking*, Translated by Timothy J. Tomasik, (University of Minnesota Press : Minneapolis, 1998). Before that, it was Henri Lefebvre, with his *Critique de la vie quotidienne II, Fondements d'une sociologie de la quotidienneté*, (L'Arche : Paris, 1961) who turned the interest towards the everyday life.
- 2 Marcel Mauss, « Les techniques du corps », *Journal de Psychologie* XXXII, no. 3-4 (1936).

- It was a paper presented at the Société de Psychologie in 1934.
- 3 Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. Erster Band. Wandlungen des Verhaltens in den weltlichen Oberschichten des Abendlandes and Zweiter Band. Wandlungen der Gesellschaft. Entwurf einer Theorie der Zivilisation, (Basel: Verlag Haus zum Falken, 1939), published in English as *The Civilizing Process, Vol.I. The History of Manners*, (Blackwell : Oxford, 1969), and *The Civilizing Process, Vol.II. State Formation and Civilization*, (Blackwell : Oxford, 1982).
 - 4 Pierre Bourdieu, "Belief and the Body", in: Mariam Fraser, Monica Greco, *The Body. A Reader*, (Routledge: London and New York, 2005), 87-91, 89, excerpt from Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, (Blackwell : Oxford, 1984)
 - 5 Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body", in: Mariam Fraser, Monica Greco, *The Body. A Reader*, (Routledge: London and New York, 2005), 73-77, 75. Excerpt from Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the body", translated by Ben Brewster, *Economy and Society 2* (1973 [1936]): 70-88.
 - 6 We can think of a house that "resist" in the way that a political body resists. If a political body resists against a certain political or social determinationpower, then a house always does so. By resisting to gravity, and weather conditions it also resists by providing a political determination to its resistance. A bamboo hut in Indonesia resists to rain in a totally different way than a skyscraper in New York does.
 - 7 Here we can refer to Deleuze's reading of Spinoza: "...a body is defined by relations of motion and rest, of slowness and speed between particles. That is, it is not defined by form or by functions". Gilles Deleuze, "Ethology: Spinoza and Us", in: J. Crary, S. Kwinter, (eds), *Incorporations*, (Zone: New York, 1992).
 - 8 Zissis Kotionis, "Double Skin Habitation, Apartment building in Athens", *Biennale of Architecture*, (EIA: Athens, 2005).
 - 9 Maria Evageliou, diploma thesis, "Refuge Wear for Migratory Travelers", Dept. of Architecture, University of Thessaly, supervisor Zissis Kotionis, (Volos, 2004).
 - 10 Norbert Elias, 1939, 128 of Greek edition.
 - 11 <http://foodwear.blogspot.com/>
 - 12 Greg Lynn specifically develops these culinary techniques in his own practice of computer-generated form . According to Lynn, "Culinary theory has developed both a practical and precise definition for at least three types of mixtures. The first involves the manipulation of homogeneous elements; beating, whisking and whipping change the volume but not the nature of a liquid through agitation. The second method of incorporation mixes two or more disparate elements: chopping, dicing, grinding, grating, slicing, shredding, and mincing eviscerate elements into fragments. The first method agitates a single uniform ingredient, the second eviscerates disparate ingredients. Folding, creaming and blending mix smoothly multiple ingredients "through repeated gentle overturning without stirring or beating" in such

a way that their individual characteristics are maintained. For instance, an egg and chocolate are folded together so that each is a distinct layer within a continuous mixture. Folding employs neither agitation nor evisceration but a supple layering": Greg Lynn, "Architectural Curvilinearity: the Folded, the Pliant and the Supple" in "Folding in Architecture", ed. Greg Lynn, special issue of *Architectural Design*, vol. 63, nos. 3-4, (1993) : 8, quoted by Paulette Singley and Jamie Horwitz in their Introduction in the book *Eating Architecture*, ed. by Jamie Horwitz Paulette Singley, (The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 2004).

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