Response Essays

An Alternative Network Architecture: Sexing the Moment of Complexity

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I have a vision, a realist image of unreal events. It flows without knowing like a mystic pad; the city like an unconscious of architecture unveils itself, three modes of time in three analogues of experience: permanence, succession, simultaneity. A register of urban inscription, these three together—now I am reading, now I am writing—the boundaries are not clear. I can read the words, the unsaid, the hidden, there where no man wants to read, where there are no monuments to speak of an established and unitary system of architecture. Like an optical illusion, the grid becomes an object, then the fabric, then the object again.

—Diane Agrest

A project of synthesis across so many disciplines, such as Mark C. Taylor’s The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture, is risky. Like all interdisciplinary work, it runs the risk of being undisciplined, of standing under-dressed before an audience of experts. But this book is an exciting risk, laying the foundation for more detailed and developed analysis or extension. I find Taylor’s work interesting because as a rhetorician, I share many of his concerns: the shape and space of universities in the twenty-first century, meeting our students’ educational needs with a pedagogy of imagination, the meaning and use of a networked world. Therefore, I want this response to be less a critique of his work than an attempt to extend it to include a more richly textured reading of my second discipline, architectural studies, as well as the shifting values and methods that inform that discipline’s theory/practice.

At first blush, the values and methods of architectural studies do not appear to offer much to scholars of rhetoric, although I have studied them together for more than ten years now. But because contemporary rhetoric and composition are always already interdisciplinary, because we so freely appropriate ideas, texts, and methods, I hope that my reading of Taylor can be something of a cautionary tale, one that can help us shape a complex interdisciplinarity as a model of scholarship in our discipline. My two concerns are related: 1) if we are interested in discussing and describing a moment of complexity, we must be willing to develop a rhetoric that values untidy and misshapen arguments; and 2) if we want to undertake interdisciplinary studies, we need to be able to reveal the complexities and contradictions that shape intellectual inquiry in those interdisciplines—and that, too, might be messy as we learn to inhabit unfamiliar spaces.

As an interdisciplinary scholar, my first home was architectural history, but I developed an interest in rhetorical history and methods, a concern for thinking of the texts of architecture (buildings and documents) as both theory and practice. And once I began inhabiting texts of my discipline, I became interested in the gendered nature of those spaces, the ways in which the spaces of texts, like the spaces of the buildings I had long studied, divided the world into two—inside and outside. It is this vision of the intellectual possibilities of interdisciplinarity that Taylor and Esa Saarinen write about in Imagologies, suggesting: “Responsible action within the structures that constitute our worlds must always be undertaken from an ‘outside’ that is ‘inside’” (12). In this essay, I am calling for that responsible action in our work as interdisciplinary scholars.

**Inside/Outside the Discipline**

That is the promise of interdisciplinarity—that it can force us outside, if we are in, and inside, if we are out. As scholars, we must be able to examine the space of that history/building/text from the inside, for there are cracks and fissures in the foundations that must be inhabited to be interrogated. But Mark Wigley, Derrida scholar and architectural theorist, asserts how complex it is to reoccupy, rewrite:

An originary construction is not something that simply lies behind the false structures of the tradition. [...] Rather, it is built into the structures and can be addressed only by reappropriating. [...] not in order to collapse those structures, but, on the contrary, to demonstrate the extent
to which the structures depend both upon the flaws and the ways they are disguised. (206–07)

The complex insider/outside knowledge that allows us to rewrite, reappropriate, reoccupy the textual spaces that make up our disciplines—that is the promise of interdisciplinarity, that we can see the thing we value anew, through the lens of another discipline’s values and methods. However, for interdisciplinary scholars, that promise is also the challenge, for we also need specific disciplinary knowledges (inside knowledges) before we can be interdisciplinary. In “Architecture/Discipline/Bondage” Karen Burns writes:

Part of the possibility of interdisciplinary study is perversely, the project of paying careful attention to the specificity of knowledges, to its neatly delimited spaces, and to the histories of formation of particular disciplines. It is a project that asks questions of a discipline’s protocols: what values organize a discipline, form its methodologies and constitute its range of objects. (75)

The danger of interdisciplinary scholarship is when it appropriates without occupying, borrows metaphors and images without inhabiting them. This concept of inhabitation is not news to Taylor, who declared with Saarinen, “Images must be inhabited not simply interpreted” (3).

Complexity, therefore, is both a cause, and an effect, of interdisciplinarity. Complex questions, objects, and situations, like the moment of history at which Taylor asserts we stand poised, require increasingly complex responses. The ability to stand outside/inside a discipline both answers and creates complex questions and situations. The Moment of Complexity, though vigorously interdisciplinary, seems a too-neat response to complex questions, objects, and situations. Interdisciplinary work is messy; this book is not.

For example, one of the ways in which our disciplinary knowledges have become more complex is through the introduction of the categories gender/race/class as differences from notions of “universal man”—differences the understanding of which can and must restructure our disciplinary values and move us toward a greater understanding of human complexity. Because we have acknowledged the importance of these categories as ways of expanding the intellectual work we can do in our disciplines, scholarly values and methods are changing in most disciplines to reflect the call for this new intellectual work. To use the example of architectural history, traditional values, according to Jane Rendell,
"have tended to concentrate on those buildings financed by wealthy and influential patrons, and to analyze them in terms of their form and aesthetics" (218). But while a shift from these values is happening quickly, Taylor's work omits women entirely from the history of architecture by remaining focused on the notion of the architect as a singular creator. 1

In contrast to this traditional scholarship, an effort to expand understanding of women's roles in architecture is underway within that discipline. This effort examines women's historical roles as critics, historians, collaborative partners, clients, and designers of domestic and sacred spaces. Diane Favro's analysis of the work and practice of Julia Morgan, Gwendolyn Wright's and Delores Hayden's work on women as designers and users of domestic and public spaces, and Beatriz Colomina's research on architectural collaboration—all show how feminist research in architectural history is changing the field. Colomina writes in "Collaborations: The Private Life of Modern Architecture" that "[c]ritics and historians are shifting their attention from the architect as a single figure, and the building as an object, to architecture as a collaboration" (462). This recent disciplinary move to an understanding and description of architectural production as a more networked and complex system is one often glossed over in traditional tellings of the history of architectural modernism. While Taylor's desire is to meet the challenges of sophisticated interdisciplinary practice at the moment of complexity, until this practice engages in issues of gender (or race and class, for that matter), his work, in his own words, will "only preserve traditional structures under the guise of resistance" (17).

Thomas Kent has suggested that we (as rhetoricians, academics, human beings) only have "knock down" fights with those whose ideas we are with ninety percent of the way. (We don't much bother with those whose views are fundamentally different from our own; we can't; there's too much space, not enough time.) I'm with Taylor much of the way; as Richard Rorty would say, my beliefs and interests "hang together" with his. Because I inhabit that narrow space where architecture, rhetoric, and gender studies intersect, my primary intellectual preoccupations concern coming to rigorous interdisciplinary practices (or perhaps rigorously undisciplined), practices, as Rorty would assert, whose "center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere" (qtd. in Linder 169). These are practices whose description would very much "hang together" with Taylor's own definition of the moment of complexity as "far from equilibrium" but "at the edge of chaos" (14).
I will leave it to the art historians, philosophers, technologists, biologists, physicists, and institutional historians to extend Taylor’s work to create more complex and nuanced readings of their disciplines and interdisciplines. This paper, however, represents a sustained engagement with Taylor’s use of architectural analogies that preserve and entrench (rather than redescribe) traditional gender politics of architectural studies. I attempt to provide a close, inside reading of Taylor’s use of architectural metaphor to argue that his use of a linear (and tired) architectural history is too neat and tidy to reflect contemporary practice in that discipline. I offer an alternative network—a response asserting the need for not one history, not one building, but more, a varied vocabulary and set of practices, ways of employing architectural metaphors that will challenge or reconfigure these theoretical commonplaces. I want to help Taylor tell a better story, appropriate more widely, inhabit more thoroughly.

Hanging Together with Taylor

I think it’s important to begin by noting the many ways in which I think Taylor has it almost right—and is therefore well worth reading for those interested in interdisciplinary applications of architectural studies. He had it just about right in Imagologies when he wrote: “The imagination must be undisciplined. That is why the university cannot bear it” (5). He creates himself as an interdisciplinary scholar whose imagination skims light across the surfaces of many disciplinary knowledges. Taylor is what Richard Rorty calls on academics to be: “culture critics”—interdisciplinary scholars who try to tell a story that describes how a variety of things “hang together.” In The Consequences of Pragmatism, Rorty seems to describe the inside/outside scholar who has, “no special problems to solve [. . . ] no collective self-image as a ‘profession’[. . . ] all-purpose intellectuals who are read to offer a view on pretty much anything, in the hope of making it hang together with everything else” (xxxix). Taylor, when he is at his best, in this book and across his career, is exactly that sort of intellectual. His work is strongest where it weaves a story and makes the varied threads hang together.

While Taylor is weaving a story to convince us that our interests and concerns (as academics, contemporary intellectuals) hang together across disciplines, he is simultaneously untangling, simplifying. He writes, “Multiple threads have been intricately interwoven to create the complex webs now entangling us. While these webs cannot be unraveled, their strands can be distinguished and analyzed in ways that illuminate contem-
temporary experience" (6). He hopes to retell our stories in ways that hang together with our experiences, assuming, across disciplines, our common preoccupation with this emerging network culture. It is in this story that I find his work most compelling: the ways in which he teases out and borrows, simplifies an argument here, extends an argument there, turning essences into momentary foci of attention.

Like Taylor, I am more web-weaving than practicing literary criticism. And for this reason, with postmodern feminist author and critic Kathy Acker, I want texts to do things, and I want to do things to and with them. Acker writes, "I've never been sure about the need for literary criticism. If a work is immediate enough, alive enough, the proper response isn't academic, to write about it, but to use it, to go on. By using each other's texts, we keep on living, imagining, making, fucking, and we fight this society of death" (31).

Taylor also appropriates, following Acker's definition. His writing demonstrates his engagement: the immediacy of his response to Gehry's work makes him want to do something with the text of the Guggenheim (in Bilbao, Spain), and so he appropriates it as the central metaphor for the complexity he desires to describe. He wants Gehry's buildings to be read not only as buildings, but as texts—in architectural theorist Catherine Ingraham's sense, "the building is the site of a gap filled up, provisionally, with the multiple descriptions that create a web of reality" ("Losing It," 161). The complexity of Gehry's work becomes, for Taylor, the creative excitement he hopes the new university will be able to instill in students. His response to the Guggenheim Bilbao is immediate and embodied—so he wants to use that, "to go on." He's found his metaphor. This is the moment where I feel akin to Taylor. I love Gehry's buildings, too; my response to them is not intellectual, it is in my body. I feel them in strange places, a wateriness in my knees and a constriction in the back of my throat. It is, I think, the terror/awe of the sublime, but a sort of awareness of a human sublime, an "oh-my-god, look what we are capable of." I came upon Gehry's Weisman Museum (an art and teaching museum on the University of Minnesota campus in Minneapolis) once, at sunset. Although I had seen it before and had been each time surprised by its beauty, walking across the Mississippi on a fall evening, I was stopped in my tracks. My memory of the moment is not of the beauty, or the building, but of my bodily reaction to it—of having an experience beyond language, even though, as a disciplinary practitioner, I should have access to the specialized language that would allow me to describe even complex architectures. I think that Taylor has had this same experience, because
he writes about "ideas, images, concepts and systems jostling with each other in a struggle for recognition." Yet, he is aware that his response to these things is "mysterious." He writes, "Even though I do not understand the draw, I know it is not merely intellectual" (197).

So I feel a great kinship to Taylor when I read his passages about the Guggenheim Bilbao. And when he likens his experience of that building to the thing he wants for students, I think I understand. He writes, "I dream of educational institutions that do as much for the imagination as Frank Gehry's buildings do for the eye" (269). And so it is within that reaction to Gehry's work that I find kinship with Taylor, but about Gehry that I most disagree with him. To ask a single building and a singular architect-figure to provide an analogy to the moment of complexity erases a whole history of architecture, as well as truly networked cities and a rich and varied history of architects as collaborators, planners, and composers of complex and networked texts. It is in Taylor's willingness to flatten rich and varied experience into one thing—a singular hero-story—that I see the Moment of Complexity as least complex.

So that is the last ten percent of the path, the winding way along which I am unable to follow Taylor. I want him to really appropriate Gehry—to do something more than engage the tired epistemologies of traditional architectural studies. Gehry's work, an architecture of marvelous complexity, is a start, but by focusing on the singular architect, building, and fetishized creativity, this tale easily becomes the old story of how white men get into our heads and shape our frames, our architectures of understanding. It is that last ten percent of Taylor's argument that seems worth interrogation, worth my time to narrow that space.

**Reading Architecture Inside-Out**

A tightly woven cocoon of gender-related preoccupations shape contemporary architectural studies. In this section of the essay, then, I offer a close reading of Taylor's appropriation of architectural discourse. As I've already noted, I'm with Taylor much of the way; I don't want to demolish his argument, merely repair it, update it with the understandings developed through an awareness of the contemporary feminist preoccupations within architectural studies.

The title of Taylor's first chapter, "From Grid to Network," reveals his teleological thinking. The movement from grid to network is traced in somewhat utopian and anarchist terms: the grid reflects the (old) Cold War system—"it simplifies complex relations [. . . ] with clear and precise oppositions: East/West, left/right, communism/capitalism" while
within the network "oppositions [. . .] unravel and the political balance of power disappears; [. . .] nobody is really in control" (23). The network exists on "the edge of chaos" (23). According to Taylor, these differences have clear modern architectural artifacts associated with them: Le Corbusier's ideas help understand the importance of the grid; Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's work represents it; Robert Venturi's architecture serves as a metaphor for surface; and Frank Gehry's work represents the complexity of the network.

Rereading Le Corbusier
Le Corbusier becomes Taylor's starting point for the discussion of the grid and its importance in defining the rectilinear beginnings of modern architecture. Taylor quotes Le Corbusier's City of Tomorrow at some length, focusing his attention on a very interesting passage in an essay titled "The Pack-Donkey's Way." In this book, one that has been extremely influential in architectural studies (I was assigned to read it in at least two classes, suggesting clear canonical status), Le Corbusier writes (and Taylor quotes):

Man walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going; he has made up his mind to reach some particular place and he goes straight to it.

The pack donkey meanders along, meditates a little in his scatterbrained and distracted fashion, he zigzags in order to avoid the larger stones, or to ease the climb, or to gain a little shade; he takes the line of least resistance. (Le Corbusier 11; Taylor 26)

Taylor goes on to list the binaries this passage reveals, those representing the pack-donkey's way and those representing man's way. Although he notes (in an endnote), that the traits Le Corbusier chronicles are gendered feminine and masculine, in his analysis within the text, he avoids that important discussion entirely by writing in gender-neutral language. He asserts, "These opposites are not of equal value [. . .] primitives and infants might be excused for being aimless, heedless, distracted, and messy, but if moderns display these traits, they defy the very essence of 'human nature'" (27). However, in Le Corbusier's textual world, "man" is not woman, just as "man" is not "primitive" (nonwhite, non-Western), just as "man" is not child. Therefore, the shift from Le Corbusier's "man" to Taylor's "human" works to cover a specific site feminist architectural historians have been
working to excavate. For although perhaps primitives (premoderns) and infants are excused for being "aimless, heedless, distracted, and messy," we know that women—long associated with these qualities, long struggling to free themselves from these associations—are not readily forgiven for qualities that they are assumed to possess only because of their binary opposition to "man." When Taylor adds the claim that "human beings progress from desire to discipline," by inserting gender neutral language, he ignores the lived experience of women who, because of a long history of Western philosophy, are associated with desire over discipline, and therefore, cannot "progress" if progression occurs only in a binary that holds us in relation to the less privileged term: desire. Le Corbusier's text represents a specific site of inquiry for contemporary architectural historians who want to expose the gender-based biases undergirding both modernist architectures and the function of traditional architectural historical methodologies.

But the invocation of Le Corbusier does not just conjure a space in which generic women are ignored. It is also the site of a historical discussion of a very specific woman whose contributions to architecture have been erased. According to Karen Kingsley, in the architecture and design journals of the 1920s, Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier's sometime collaborator, was credited with sole design "of many significant pieces of furniture" which today textbooks credit only to Le Corbusier. Although history has nearly forgotten her, she was "considered an important independent designer in her own right" (255). Two of the important changes in architectural studies have been the recent acknowledgment of the collaborative nature of architecture and a chronicling of the ways in which the history machine (and professional practice) have quite literally erased the contributions of women in design studios. Because Taylor seems unaware of this intellectual shift in the field, his work repeats the lineage of male genius purported by traditional architectural studies, reinforcing this erasure that contemporary scholars have been working to document.

**Rereading Mies**

The second architect whose work Taylor uses to develop a metaphor for the move from grid to network is Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. One of the most influential architects of his time, Miesian adages such as "Less is more" have become as much a part of our cultural vocabulary as his glass towers have become a part of our urban imaginations. Taylor introduces the Seagram Building in New York City in order to discuss the ways in
which Meis’ work represents the grid function—and he is certainly correct. The architecture produced by Mies’ design group adhered religiously to the grid, but Taylor suggests this while showing a black-and-white photo of the Seagram Building’s exterior. Mies’ buildings were grids, in design. But I am not convinced that inhabiting these buildings would put one in day-to-day contact with grid logic; they are far more complex than that. The inhabited experience of Mies’ buildings seems more readily described as a continuous flow of space (the grid does not connote three-dimensional space, and it is that third axis that makes Mies’ buildings most fascinating). As architectural historian Christine Magar writes,

Mies uses an assembly of mass and planes as a means to bind heterogeneous spaces of difference and to divide homogeneous spaces of sameness, similar to a sewing seam that can bind two disparate pieces of fabric or divide homogeneous pieces. Mies stitches space to bind heterogeneity and to divide homogeneity. (90)

Moreover, the Seagram Building, from the exterior, in full sunlight, is an amber jewel-box. The whiskey-colored glass literally hangs on the building’s skeleton—visually, there is no structure, for clearly the narrow spandrels holding the glass in place offer no structural support. The use of these vast planes of window, mirrored to reflect the living city, creates a motion-filled surface hanging precariously from the static building. This play of contrasts—movement and stasis—is stunning and complex. “They appear to morph even while standing still,” Taylor writes of Gehry’s buildings, but that description is equally applicable to Mies’ work. I am not disagreeing with Taylor, merely suggesting that Mies’s architecture is not quite reducible to the grid alone: it is grid, and surface and three-dimensional space. In many ways, it is the very tidiness (far from chaos) of Taylor’s argument to which I object, not his individual points, with which I tend to agree. The argument must be messier to do the work he asks of it, to represent systems at the edge of chaos.

Mies’ campus for the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) is perhaps even more difficult to read as grid alone. Although the campus follows a strict grid logic from the exterior (and from the air, where all is flattened to two-dimensions), contemporary architectural historians would want to know more than how the campus buildings are sited. It is equally important to study how the buildings are used, both the uses for which
they were designed and the uses for which they have been appropriated. Classroom buildings at IIT include large, open interior spaces designed to require student interaction. (While in practice they made for difficult spaces for professorial lectures, that very configuration encouraged, perhaps even required, classes that were student-centered.) Moreover, while city blocks were razed to make a clear space for the campus, as Taylor accurately notes, scholars today would want to study the interaction between the campus and the neighborhood, before deciding if and how the grid had been imposed upon the neighborhood and what the response to such an imposition is and was. Such scholars might ask, for example, how do those who live in the area use this space? Do they follow sidewalk grids, or do they make their own pack-donkey paths between the buildings? Do they use the buildings, or simply find convenient paths around them? To say this campus is only a grid avoids the issue of how the spaces are used—and how they have been used over the past decades of IIT’s existence. While I do not doubt that for Mies the goal of his architecture was to “create order out of the desperate confusion of our time” (qtd. in Taylor 34), such a statement does not necessarily mean the imposition of the grid (in Le Corbusier’s sense), and there is in that use of evidence a sort of intentional fallacy, as if architecture cannot be more (or less) than its author intended. Such a notion reiterates a somewhat antiquated notion of the uses of architectural history, one that denies the building exists within a rich social/historical network.

In addition, there is also a more complex reading of Mies’ design influences to be considered. Several recent books and articles have attempted to examine collaborative partnerships in the history of architecture—a collaboration in which the woman partner’s contributions are devalued—of which Beatriz Colomina writes, “The secrets of modern architecture are like those of a family, where everybody knows about things that are never acknowledged” (462). Colomina describes the collaboration of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lily Reich, suggesting that it was Reich who made Ludwig Mies van der Rohe “Mies.” Because there was nothing in his work before his collaboration with Reich that would suggest the work he would later do—and much in Reich’s work to suggest her influence—it certainly seems possible that their early collaboration shaped his architectural disposition. Colomina describes this influence as his “radical approach to defining space by suspended sensuous surfaces, which would become his trademark” (462)—for example, the Seagram Building’s exterior. Although like Charlotte
Perriand, Reich was credited with her contributions in early publications, once Mies was declared a genius (always singular) and the history machine began its work, Reich’s work and contributions—including her equal contribution to the famous Barcelona pavilion—had been nearly entirely erased.6

**Rereading Venturi**

In contrast to the linear, two dimensional grid he uses to describe Le Corbusier’s and Mies’ work, when Taylor discusses Robert Venturi, it is in terms of describing his work as surface, supplanting the grid, but not yet achieving the complexity of a network architecture.7 Now, I don’t want to nitpick here—I have a real aversion to scholars who miss the big picture in order to do that—but the evidence he provides of Venturi’s work being unable to progress to the complexity of the grid is that Philip Johnson’s AT&T Building (Chippendale pediment on the glass tower) was just a decorated grid. That just doesn’t add up for me—in terms of argument, or in terms of architecture. To make the argument for or against Venturi’s progression as an architect, we must at least look at the work of Venturi’s firm—Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour—both their textual output and their buildings. (And no one but Johnson’s firm and AT&T should ever be held responsible for that building.)

And I am confused as to why he would use this evidence when there are some very strong and carefully considered critiques of Venturi, Brown and Izenour’s work available. Most architectural critics who write about the firm suggest two things: First, that the notion that their notion of “Main street is almost alright,” from *Learning from Las Vegas*, represents an acceptance of the status quo that suggests that working people should not expect beauty in or even access to their public and commercial spaces. The second critique is gender related—that in spite of carefully gender-neutral language and critical readings of machismo in the modernist program, Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour are unable to adequately critique the ways in which the commodification of public space (through the proliferation of billboards, electronic media, and so on) encroaches upon women in particularly sinister ways, making some public places uncomfortable or inaccessible for women. While there are flaws in both of these critiques, they assert an inability of Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour to make a leap to a greater level of complexity, and they both reflect the concerns and preoccupations of the field.
Perhaps a more pointed concern is that of Venturi’s partner and spouse, Denise Scott Brown, who has become one of the most outspoken critics of the star system that has for so many years dominated architectural practice with the full complicity of the academic history machine. She describes her experience as the spouse and creative partner of a famous man:

I watched as he was manufactured into an architectural guru before my eyes, to some extent, on the basis of our joint work and the work of our firm. [...] By the time we wrote Learning from Las Vegas, our growing experience with incorrect attributions prompted Bob to include a note at the beginning of the book asking that the work and ideas not be attributed to him alone and describing the nature of our collaboration. [...] His request was almost totally ignored. (238)

Brown’s experience of being the devalued, female partner in a collaborative architectural practice is not uncommon. But what Brown can best attest to is the speed at which critics remove the female collaborator from the historical record. She continues: “To avoid misattributions, our office provides an information sheet describing our preferred forms of attribution. [...] some critics now make a pro forma attribution in an inconspicuous place; then, in the body of the text, the design of the work and the ideas in the writing are attributed to Robert Venturi” (238).

In his section on “superficial complexity,” “Taylor does exactly what Brown refers to (34–40). He mentions Brown and Izenour in one sentence, “In 1972, Robert Venturi and his colleagues Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour published the book credited with beginning postmodern architecture: Learning From Las Vegas” (34–35). Neither Brown nor Izenour receives another mention, though Venturi is mentioned at least twenty-seven times across three-and-a-half pages of text. Even when he is citing the coauthored book, Taylor uses “Venturi,” signaling a complete erasure of the coauthors, rather than the near-erasure of Venturi et al.

Although Taylor reads Learning From Las Vegas as a text through which Venturi demonstrates his understanding of high theory and offers a critique of high modernism, I would argue that the text more clearly concerns the theory/practice of everyday spaces. The book demonstrates Venturi, Brown, and Izenour’s reading of the everyday landscape and supplies a critique of the complex gender politics of modernism. In her article, “Everyday and Other Spaces,” architectural historian Mary
McLeod writes that “Brown and Venturi grant the world of women, children, and elderly people—domestic culture—a place in aesthetic culture” (191). Their focus is on everyday spaces, the spaces people choose and the spaces they are stuck with (public housing, care homes, daycare centers), as well as the public and commercial space we are all stuck with (strip malls, fast food joints, and Vegas honeymoon motels).

Moreover, McLeod demonstrates the many ways in which the text offers a not-too-subtle critique of Enlightenment philosophy and the resulting gender politics that shaped modernism. She notes that Venturi, et al. use “Man” ironically, aware of the problems involved in invoking a universal humanity under the name “Man.” For example, Venturi et al. note the architects who “build for Man rather than building for people” (192). McLeod points out that “the authors characterize the modern movement as ‘heroic and original,’ ‘violent, high adventure,’ ‘a bunch of angry young men under 30,’ ‘imposing on the whole landscape heroic representations of the masters’ unique creations’” (192). Venturi, Brown and Izenour supplant the cult of high modernism by interrogating the gendered nature of the hero-story that has been written as the history of modernism. While Taylor credits Venturi (alone) with supplanting the modernists, his argument sites the coup within architectural or stylistic choices, rather than in a redescription of history. By fetishizing aesthetics and ignoring Venturi, Brown, and Izenour’s political motives for their choices, Taylor actually depoliticizes work that is an early attempt to bring discussions of class into architectural studies. He does this to rearticulate the status quo—supply another hero-story (different hero, same story).

**Rereading Gehry**

In the fourth and final case of different hero, same story, Taylor’s interest turns to the work of Frank Gehry, a Canadian-born architect whose architectural work has been gaining influence from the early years of his practice in the late 1950s. Like Taylor, I love the buildings produced by Frank Gehry’s architectural firm. I have a physical response to them; they seem fascinating and complex. But I would like to work through the more complex story Taylor could have told about Gehry’s work style, about the Guggenheim, about the messiness of Gehry’s work that is at the center of his creativity. Gehry’s work team for the Guggenheim Bilbao included twenty-six men and women whose names appear on the project: Frank Gehry, Randy Jefferson, Vano Haritunians, Douglas Hanson, Edwin
Chan, Rich Barrett, Karl Blette, Tomaso Bradshaw, Matt Fineout, Robert Hale, Dave Hardie, Grzegorz Kosmal, Naomi Langer, Mehran Mashayekh, Chris Mercer, Brent Miller, David Reddy, Marc Salette, Bruce Shepard, Rick Smith, Eva Sobesky, Derek Soltes, Todd Spiegel, Jeff Wauer, and Kristin Woehl. Many more, of course, at lower levels of the firm worked on various aspects of the project. Moreover, the client was not an individual, but a foundation, with interested parties all over the world. The modes of production for this space suggest a complex network of collaborative project development typical of most large contemporary firms.

Gehry's firm is able to produce complex three dimensional space like that of the Guggenheim Bilbao because of a complex approach to production—one that includes the application of a French aerospace engineering software program called Catia. Interestingly enough, Gehry has never learned to use this software; in fact, his collaborators are perhaps the central heroes of this story—they worked with the software through its development and appropriation to architectural purposes. While Taylor accurately notes that "When Gehry's office started using the software program, Catia," he is unwilling to take the next step and talk of this shared intellectual and creative project as collaborative (41). He is even unwilling to embody any of the hundreds of architects who work in Gehry's firm; they become "his office." (It's not unlike the term housewife wherein a woman worker is called by the space she inhabits.) Writing about the complex context of production for the architecture of complexity seems like an excellent argumentative strategy, and yet Taylor does not take that step. He chooses instead to tell the hero-story of the singular genius whose architecture supplants that of the previous genius, Venturi.

In addition to the ways in which Taylor's book erases the complexity of architectural production, by describing the complexity of a global educational network using the metaphor of Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao, a building designed for a wealthy patron and an elite clientele, Taylor is doing more than ignoring disciplinary shifts in one of his many interdisciplines. He's developing a metaphor wherein he refuses to address access issues as thoroughly as he does in his description of the worldwide educational network he develops at the center of his argument. The "public" spaces of a museum of art are, in fact, spaces tightly constrained by issues of gender, race, and class, both in terms of who comes to see the building and the artwork it houses and in terms of whose work is displayed (for more detailed discussion, see Stevens, Guerrilla Girls). Similarly,
unless major economic shifts in global capital occur, a global education network through the internet would face significant access problems—black Africa, for example, in spite of the utopian television commercials we see, has almost no internet access (see Koolhaas, et al.). So perhaps I am saying that Taylor’s metaphor is perfect, although I certainly don’t want it to be. Rather, I can hope that rhetoric, like architectural studies, continues to display a disciplinary interest in issues of access in terms of public spaces—both literal and virtual.

Finally, there is a messiness to Gehry’s work that Taylor notes, and seems to applaud, but is unwilling to duplicate in terms of his argument. Gehry’s drawings—unlike those of any other architect with whom I am familiar, are frantic tangles of lines loosely demarcating untidy and misshapen spaces. It is in the structures of these tangled webs that Gehry seems most important to rhetoricians and compositionists. Architecture students are told that their proposal drawings must be arguments—that they must convince a client of a vision. Gehry’s mess, then, becomes the argument, and the argument is untangled into a network of associations that become a space, with an inside and an outside.

An Alternative Network Discourse
Clearly, one way of responding to Taylor’s argument is to attempt to repair it—to note that from within, one can supply a more complex (though admittedly messier) reading of the building/text. And to do this is certainly not unsatisfying, because there is much pleasure to be had through close examination of the beautiful object, the building/text/fetish. But an understanding of the collaborative and always already networked nature of the sited building does not entirely get us where we ought to be. Taylor writes, “The responsibility of educators is to prepare students for life and work in a world changing at warp speed by creatively shaping new educational spaces” (269). I couldn’t agree more. But those educational spaces must be more than physical spaces. We need to help our students shape their intellectual landscapes, as well. We need to help them grasp the myriad ways in which the world is changing at warp speed and the ways in which they must reshape their imaginations—imaginations at present over-constrained and limited by a Western, white, male vision of the past and therefore, the future. I want to spend a little time thinking through some alternative network architectures, the complex and messy textual architectures of two women whose work represents that moment where theory/practice meld.
Marion Mahony Griffin and Jennifer Bloomer are architects whose practices are separated by more than a generation. Griffin died an old woman when Bloomer was a small child, yet they have in common textual architectures of stunning complexity, as well as architectures of an almost textual complexity—architectures that play with language and allegory. These architects and their texts add to a rich and varied history of architecture and its academic study—this is not an ending point or even a substitution, but a supplement to Taylor’s work here. These architects, like Diane Agrest, whom I quoted at the beginning of this essay, are trying to talk and write about a moment of complexity through an argumentative strategy that mimics the untidy ideas they hope to convey to their readers. It seems it is their work, and the understanding that their work doesn’t represent a teleology or even a chronology, that might most effectively help us consider a network culture and what that might mean in terms of a rhetoric.

*Magic of America* as a Networked Text

Architect Marion Mahony Griffin’s ninety-year life speaks vividly of the ways in which women’s contributions in the professions have been overlooked or undervalued as the scholarly response to her autobiography, *Magic of America*, attests. This unpublished manuscript, probably begun between 1938 and 1940, and repeatedly revised between 1940 and 1949, attempts to redefine two lives (Griffin’s and her husband Walter Burley Griffin’s) shaped by the competing forces of idealistic belief in democracy, concern for the rights of individuals, commitment to a religion that saw a place for both, and a creative marriage in which these competing notions regularly played themselves out.

The text is not by any typical definition a literary autobiography, which has made the artifact—all 1,000 plus manuscript pages of thematically organized letters, short essays, newspaper articles, and over 200 pages of related ephemera—of little interest to literary scholars. More a huge scrapbook than a traditional autobiography, the text is very difficult indeed for the casual scholar to approach; its unwieldy size and lack of index or standard pagination make it a truly hypertextual document (not unlike Taylor’s *Imagologies*). In his 1988 essay, James Weirick describes the text, asserting:

The manuscripts, completed when Marion was nearly eighty years old, are in themselves, assemblages, collages—fragments of text, abrupt sequences of letters, original drawings and photographs almost randomly
collected, unidentified lecture notes, news clippings, contemporary critiques, snatches of architectural philosophy, genealogical data and substantive historical information, all enlivened with misquotations and misattributions. (13)

The text, then, is one of rich and diverse appropriation, an architecture of chaos that must be inhabited before it becomes meaningful. But perhaps more importantly, this architecture functions as an argument—an argument about the nature of architectural practice/theory and the ways in which it should be lived.

**Jennifer Bloomer’s Network Architecture**

Jennifer Bloomer’s texts, too, are messy, for they are assembled through a complex architecture of Joycean meaning-making that combines her interest in Derridian slippage and Freudian free-association. They are doubly messy in that her content (like the literal content of some of the vessels used in her architectural projects) is human mess, woman’s mess—the usually repressed reminders of our humanity: blood and urine and milk and afterbirth. Her texts are as tightly knotted as Gehry’s drawings, and as ungainly, complex, and beautiful as his buildings. Rendell writes,

> In Bloomer’s writing, text has a materiality and is carefully constructed and spatially structured [. . .] different modes of writing express different ways of understanding architecture, through the intimate and the personal, the subjective rather than the objective, through the sensual rather than purely visual stimulation. Bloomer’s text is her architecture. (234)

In her *Architecture and the Text: The (S)crypts of Joyce and Piranesi*, Bloomer explores a complex interdisciplinarity that brings together textual analysis, architecture, philosophy, and history. And her argument, written in the early 1990s and published in 1993, undertakes work that describes complexity in messy ways. The book is a hypertext in a much more literal way than Griffin’s; Bloomer links the book through a variety of key terms that undulate through her text, functioning as traces just beneath the textual surface—almost visible. Both Bloomer and Griffin were able to design networks in books—texts that function in three dimensions. Other architecture collaboratives are working on similar projects: *Mutations* (Rem Koolhaas and Harvard Project on the City; Stefano Boeri and Multiplicity; Stanford Kwinter; Nadia
Tazi; and Hans Ulrich Obrist), *Anyone Corporation*, and *Desiring Practices* are fascinating examples that provide rich and varied metaphors and insight into the contemporary practice of architectural studies.

**Conclusions?**

So finally, we get back to the point, and remember that this is a cautionary tale about interdisciplinary scholarship, an argument that is not as messy as I would like it to be. Because most rhetoricians are interdisciplinary scholars we need to remember that we must appropriate—it is what we do. But we need to appropriate with an understanding of the values and methods that shape contemporary practices in other disciplines. It is not just that Taylor's work could be more complex and interesting, or even more reflective of contemporary architectural studies. It is that his work reinscribes values that contemporary scholars have been fighting to overcome—and I know that is not at all what he wants to do. Taylor writes, "For more than thirty years, there has been a widespread consensus that the most pressing critical challenge is to find ways to resist systems and structures that totalize by repressing otherness and reducing difference to same" (47-48). He knows what the political issues are and represents them well—in his own field. Yet, he is unable to note the same challenges as functioning in some of the interdisciplines he evokes. So this is a cautionary tale; let us, as rhetoricians, not repress and reduce when we appropriate disciplines and texts and artifacts.

The potential of interdisciplinary research (that Taylor and I both embrace) is that it can be transformative, that disciplines can not just brush up against each other, but live with each other, sleep together, occasionally get drunk and argue, and in those processes become something else, something more self-aware, more other-aware. Our goals as interdisciplinary scholars must be to gain that inside/outside perspective that is the result of the clash of multiple knowledges, as we work through their complex entanglements, not to simplify them, but to reveal their messiness. Such transformation requires that we not just borrow metaphors from each other (as friendly neighbors borrow tools) but that we inhabit spaces, share information, and develop relations, in new, interconnected webs—far from equilibrium, but on this side of chaos.

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Notes

1. Over the last fifteen years, work on race, class, and gender in architecture has exploded, shifting the values and preoccupations of the field. See Agrest, Betskey, Bloomer, Chadwick, Coleman et al, Colomina, Dutton and Mann, Grosz, Hughes, Ingraham, Lokko, Rendell, and many others, some of whom write about women and people of color while employing the traditional methods of the field.

2. See Çelik and Colomina.


5. See Ahrentzen; Ahrentzen and Anthony; Brown; Chadwick; Chadwick and Courtrivron; Diaz, Buss and Tircuit; Dutton and Mann; Frederickson; Groat and Ahrentzen; Kingsley; Kinsley and Glynn; Van Slyck; and Willis.

6. Sonja Günther’s *Lily Reich, 1885–1947: Innenarchitektin, Designerin, Ausstellungsgestalterin* published in Stuttgart in 1988 was the first book-length treatment of Reich’s independent work and collaboration with Mies. Matilda McQuaid and Magdalena Drost’s 1996 collection, *Lily Reich*, has been one attempt to recover Reich’s work for an English reading audience.

7. For a more detailed look at feminist scholarship surrounding the work of Venturi, Brown, and Izenhour, see McLeod, and Berkeley and McQuaid.

Works Cited


The Teleology of Complexity: A Response to Mark C. Taylor

Michael Arner

By the time Al Gore invented the Internet, the history of that network’s privatization had already become complex, an interplay of ordering as well as of disordering principles. The dot-com era’s struggle to stake out “mindshare”—to profitably wrap, label and own territories of cyberspace, of cyber experience—can be understood, for example, as largely successful efforts to linearize what we have come to think of as the quintessentially nonlinear field. After its origins in the academy and its widespread adoption by the military, the Internet was transformed in its embrace by the corporation in ways seemingly antithetical to the principles of its conception, at least insofar as those principles valorized a “network” over a “grid” topology. The website portal (Yahoo!, MSN), gave the “centerless” network a center, a point of origin, a frame, a direction, and a hierarchical arrangement of content. The website application gave state (history, narrative, ordered sequence) to the user’s supposedly “stateless” sampling of information. Everywhere the “free” network’s contents were