The Ten Contaminants: 
*Unheimlich* Trajectories of Architecture

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Architectural embodiment perpetuates the myth that architecture brings human activity home. Architects and their constituents are just as nomadic now as they were when the redactor of the Bible referred to dwelling as tent and thus equated dwelling, being, i.e., existence, with eternally movable. The initiation of an architecture having fixed limits, i.e., presence, is first inscribed biblically in the ninth century B.C.E. with the construction of Solomon's Temple (see my *Architecture of Exile*, published by Rizzoli, 1988).

Architecture is no more at home in building-as-presence than it is in the quintessence it dissimulates. A building's form of existence is as itinerant as its location on the planet Earth generally, or as failed as its contaminants degenerate it, specifically. The presumptions that imbue its presence signify humankind's determination to resist dwelling in nature naturally and to replace mobility with static images simulating an unrealizable permanence. Architecture's inability to define itself inherently brings forth its "*unheimlich*" condition every bit as much as when humankind, individually and collectively, denies its own temporality. The conceit underpinning the presence of building leads to a false sign of endurance.

Deconstruction appears to have coaxed architecture's uncanny nature out of its repressed state: it is uncertain at this time whether it can ever be
suppressed again. The only hope is that, once out, the initial shock of the unexpectedly disjunctive forms of this new architecture will, through reiteration (the first signs of convention), become sufficiently familiar to suggest elaboration and embellishment.

Thus impelled, architect and generalist alike may come to understand that architecture's undigested (and unsynthesized) constituencies only relieve those who practice the discipline from unnecessary and/or exaggerated obligations toward seeking closure through unnaturally forced acts of "resolution." The slippery way in which architects have traditionally repressed expressing the constituent parts of their craft without digesting (and synthesizing) its several parts may come to be seen to be just as horrifying as the way in which the field's uncanny counterpart is perceived currently.

The problem, delimited by the presence of architecture, is one of embodiment. The subtext of architecture's absent mythic state, once thought to be locked into its location in memory recorded by history, is disrupted and dislocated by dredging it up into a state of embodiment. The house of architecture is thus haunted through embodying its memory by endowing it with an artificial form out of time. In this way history is exploited as a rationale, though that claim is made only in the name of the perpetuation of architectural language. The evolution of that language, combined with the ostensibly natural desire to seek its roots both etymologically and actually, is presented as sufficient justification for this activity.

Certain conditions exist which displace our understanding of architecture as being a series of "readable" forms that, through closure, attain comprehensibility. These conditions relate directly to the inability that architects have in overcoming their insistence that nothing resists positioning the field as an autonomous discipline. This insistence distorts the fact that while architecture is measured continuously by its endlessly significant "others," the building discipline is presented as being innocently free of contaminants, despite the fact that it is the contaminants that energize the field, giving architecture much of its vitality. The insistence that architecture is an autonomous discipline is relevant only if it exists independently of its contaminants; but before questions of sovereignty can be taken up, the reciprocity between architecture and its contaminants is a subject insufficiently scrutinized until now.

Now it is certain that architecture is both defined and conditioned by many significant others, among them: capital, religion, ethics, gender, inequality, the body, measure/finitude, and correspondence/technique of the Other. (These significant others were the subject of an unrealized symposia that John Whiteman, W. J. T. Mitchell, and I posited as a yearlong University of Chicago seminar, culminating in a special issue of Critical Inquiry on