“Ground” is a word like “foundation,” with uses in both philosophy and architecture suggesting some deep analogy or affinity between the two.¹ More modestly, the word may be said to have a conceptual potential that one can exploit to suggest new ways of thinking and perhaps also of building. That is what I propose to do. I will take "ground" as a nodal or synaptic word in a complex mixing different architectural and philosophical senses, which I will try to unfold.

A classical source for this exercise may be found in Heinrich Wölfflin's Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture (1886)—a sort of philosophical manifesto of what it means to build in a milieu.² Wölfflin combines Kant's idea of the schematism and of the architectonic whole with Schopenhauer's notion that architecture is the art of overcoming heaviness or gravity and the resistance of matter. Thus for Wölfflin, the ground has to do with a basic Formlosigkeit (formlessness) that the will, as a vital force immanent in things, must overcome; the Formkraft (force of form) is to pull us up from this formless state, against which all of life struggles. The principles of regularity, symmetry, proportion, and harmony all derive from this idea. Heaviness or gravity is thus a vital matter. It appears when breathing gets slow, its rhythm irregular, as in the state of melancholia that Wölfflin sees in a painting by Dürer of that title, which depicts a woman staring mournfully at an irregular and unmeasurable stone block that, as Wölfflin points out, appears to be falling down toward the ground. But painting is not the primary art of formlessness and vital grounding; it is rather architecture, the Baukunst or set of tectonic arts, and Wölfflin expresses astonishment that there is no philosophy of it.

But let me now jump to some points in modern architecture and thought, where the question of grounds and forms has been raised in ways that are still part of our history. I'll start with a very familiar case, that of Le Corbusier, though similar things may be said about glass and "dematerialization" in Mies. Let's take for example what Le Corbusier says about "artificial sites"...
in 1933 in The Radiant City. There he dismisses the "natural ground" as a "dispenser of rheumatism and tuberculosis" and declares the natural site to be the "enemy of man." Thus we should sever the traditional connection between building and ground, giving up the sort of continuity where a building is the figure whose ground is supplied by its natural setting. With such "artificiality" goes a kind of abstraction. The house becomes an "abstraction" of vertical and horizontal planes, the floor plan free to take on various configurations and the facade open for various kinds of transparency. As with the Maison Dom-ino, the house is thus freed from the earth of historical tradition to move in an extendable boundless space, acquiring a Mondrian-like autonomy, where the ground is only a vestige. Take the illustration that Le Corbusier captions "The architectural revolution is complete." The before picture shows load-bearing masonry walls sunk deep into the earth, holding up poorly lit little box rooms; the after picture, against a neutral light background, shows a rectilinear structure, opened up, with a feel of airy impermanence, raised off the ground to allow a car underneath. In this revolution, houses will be put on pilotis barely touching the ground, roofs flattened, and everything turned into intersecting horizontal and vertical planes and monochromatic stucco surfaces. That is what we can do once we see the ground as a source of false naturalism. "Ungrounded" thus acquires the sense of "off-the ground," freed from the "weight" of tradition, artificial rather than natural, abstract rather than figurative—abstract in a now canonical sense of reduction to a pure or universal language, reproducible anywhere, irrespective of the natural site. A series of oppositions would grow up surrounding this idea of ground—the natural vs. the artificial, the organic vs. the abstract, the figural vs. the geometric, the contextual vs. the autonomous—the architectural revolution being the act that replaces the first set of terms with the "new order" of the second. There would be many reactions. Some would try to revalorize the first pole of these oppositions—the natural, the organic, the figural, the contextual, the "site-specific." I would like to look instead at several attempts to get out from under these oppositions themselves, finding other spaces lying in between them—in other words, to unground them. While my cases are quite different from one another, they all share three features concerning the question of ground. First is the attempt to move away from "proper" visual form, geometric or rectilinear, horizontal and vertical; thus "ungrounded" no longer means off-the-ground but rather has to do with a kind of form-giving movement prior to the ground as understood in autonomous up-down structures. Thus, secondly, there emerges a sense of "ungrounded" not as a state to be achieved once and for all, as in a revolution completed, but rather as a potential or force in things that must be shown or released. In the third place, we then find notions of history or memory that move away from the progressive time of a "new order" toward a more complicated sense of time as a process, always unfinished, to be taken up again in unforeseeable circumstances, as though each period brought with it a potential ungrounding that architecture might exploit, release, or show.

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My first case is Peter Eisenman. I think that in several senses his early houses may be said still to move within the series of modernist oppositions I associated with Le Corbusier, with their sense of autonomy, rectiliniarity, and artificiality. The question of "grounds" is raised in the rethinking that comes with his turn to "cities of artificial excavation," which return to the question of how buildings are "grounded" in their urban sites and therefore "ungrounded" or released from them. But Eisenman refuses to go back to figure/ground relations or continuities. For he here conceives the urban setting as an accumulation of superimposed layers in which the partially invisible "memory" of cities is deposited. What matters is thus a "geology" of urban memory in which one can move about through superposition, juxtaposition, grafting. From this there arises a sense of space more Piranesian than Mondrianesque, in which figures are freed to move against the fundamentally ungrounded mnemonic geology of the site. There follows a shift in the sense of artifice. Eisenman's "artificial cities" are artificial in a sense different from that of Le Corbusier's "artificial sites." Artifice is no longer opposed to the natural site but instead becomes a kind of fiction that intervenes with respect to the joints or connections that supply urban memory with its false or "natural" sense of continuity. Thus superpositions and odd connections among different strata of time can be established much as in cinema montage. Armed with this idea of the artifice of fiction as a power prior to narrative continuities and sure judgments, Eisenman moves away from the "progressivism" of the idea of a completable architectural revolution. Instead one finds something akin to Borges's idea of the labyrinth, as in his fable of the garden of ever-forking paths. It is as though there were no period in history that did not contain points of divergence that open onto other histories, such that the "joints" of time can become undone at certain moments and things can go "out of joint." What emerges from Eisenman's "stratigraphic" conception of urban memory is thus a "disjointed" architectural style that seeks a plane, at once historical and formal, prior to the opposition between modernist abstraction and postmodernist contextualism.

No doubt there is much to be said about this outlook and the directions in which it would take Peter, but there were also other attempts to rethink the idea of ground. For example, some people were impressed by the architectural "cuts" that Gordon Matta-Clark incised in derelict settings. Here ungrounding as a process goes together with unbuilding or undoing, providing another route out of contextualism. Thus Dan Graham would see in Matta-Clark's interventions an antimonumentalism that contrasts with the attempt to retrieve the context of the historical city through architectural form. For they exposed not an architectural memory in monuments but a

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4 It is Deleuze who first introduces Hamlet's phrase "the time is out of joint" in a philosophical context—as the first of "four poetic formulas which might summarize the Kantian philosophy": see the preface to Kant's Critical Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). In the revised French version, Critique et clinique (Paris: Minuit, 1993), 40ff., he adds a historical note about how this notion of time out of joint differs from the temporal "aberrations" that one finds in ancient meteorological or terrestrial notions of time, which still stay within the circles or spirals of determinant movement. "Time out of joint" is "the time of the city and nothing else," he declares (42)—it no longer depends on an original cosmic movement of the heavens nor on a rural movement of seasons or weather. Perhaps it remains a time in our "global cities," where the distinction between artifice and nature tends to be blurred in at least the sense suggested below.

subversive memory hidden by social and architectural facades with their false sense of integrity or wholeness, breaking out through the openings in the body of banal spaces. Today some critics have gone back to Matta-Clark, seeing in his work a continuation of a theme in Robert Smithson, according to which the Earth is no longer conceived as a stable ground but rather as an entropic force ever undoing the "information" of formal structures; yet it remains an open question how such "unbuilding" might move from such para-architectural activities to become a part of building itself.  

There has been another alternative, which introduces an ungrounding that derives neither from artificial excavation nor from antimonumental intervention but rather from a sort of "dynamic topology." Such topologies attempt to move away from the classical relation between gravity and vision, weight and upright posture, through which Wölfflin, for example, rediscovered the sense of proportion and harmony, the concinnitas of Alberti and Vitruvius. "Formlessness" now becomes a positive feature of visual space, even of an anorganic vitality. For example, the faceless figures in the paintings of Francis Bacon reveal an undoing of the Albertian relations between face and ground in favor of another kind of corporeal space, shown as well in the loss of the skeleton/flesh relation, flesh becoming "meat"—soft, malleable, perhaps even bloblike.  

Today of course we have many examples of architecture proud to depart from Corbusian right angles along some such topological lines; soon we may even see them lumped together as a new style. For my third case, I will take someone not likely to be included in this group, who came to architecture from painting back in the 1950s to work in Paris with the Groupe Espace. This group was quite opposed to right angles, admiring in Le Corbusier something one rather sees in Ronchamp or the Philips Pavilion. I am referring to Paul Virilio, who is better known for his writings on electronic technologies, which in fact came to the fore with his break with Claude Parent and the Groupe Espace. I'll say something about that in a minute.

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4 See the section on entropy in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, L'informe: mode d'emploi (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1996). In architecture, Krauss sees Matta-Clark continued by Rem Koolhaas. Thus she declares that "Koolhaas's position that the scale of contemporary architectural projects (like the Bibliothèque de France) is beyond design as we have thought of it before" leads him to questions of "formlessness and disorientation"; by contrast, Frank Gehry in his recent museum projects only "makes artily elaborate concatenations of different elements" (ANY 5, March/April 1994). Similarly Koolhaas is prepared to count Matta-Clark as an unintended precursor of his "strategy of the void" in the Big Library, although without the "glamour of violation" first associated with Matta-Clark or with Lucio Fontana in painting ("Thinking Big," Artforum 33 [December 1994], 46–65). The delight in "violation" in Matta-Clark's work is often associated with his attempt to open private spaces to public spectacle in politically charged settings; and in his work with the Anarchitecture Group, he was involved with introducing voids or gaps in urban "movement space" that might serve to interrupt daily routines. But what happens to such "violation" in Koolhaas's "big" design? When for example Krauss likens the library to Giacometti's X, the comparison seems primarily morphological or "sculptural"; see "Six Notes on the Subject of the Grid," in Anyone, ed. Cynthia Davidson (New York: Rizzoli, 1991). Yet for the connection to be only of this sort would seem to weaken the force of her contrast with Gehry's mere "decoration."  

7 Cf. Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: logique de la sensation (Paris: La Différence, 1981); and for the relation between face and ground in classical Albertian tradition, see the plateau on "faciality" in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). In describing the "figures" in Bacon's paintings Deleuze refers to a distinction drawn by Jean-François Lyotard in his book Discours, figure (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971) between "figural" and "figurative" space. The latter is in effect the space of Alberti while the former replaces the vanishing point with an invisible "matrix." In figural space, the body would discover the "plasticity" seen in Bacon's paintings, which Deleuze contrasts with the still-too-pious phenomenological conception of the "flesh." Thus one may count Bacon's "figures" as an instance of what below I call the "indefiniteness" of the spatial body. Deleuze and Guattari draw on literary examples in their discussion of faciality, notably the moment in Proust when the face becomes défaite (undone). One may thus link the indeterminateness of the body in Bacon's pictorial figures with its role in relation to literary figures or personae—one example would be Herman Melville's idea of such figures as "originals" (see Deleuze, Critique et clinique, 106ff.).
The Groupe Espace still spoke in the tone of a manifesto: "We are now confronted by the overriding necessity to accept as a historical fact the end of the vertical axis of elevation, and the end of the horizontal as permanent plane, in order to defer to the oblique axis and the inclined plane, which realize all the necessary conditions of the creation of a new urban order and permit as well a total reinvention of the architectural vocabulary. This tipping of the plane must be understood for what it is: the third spatial possibility of architecture."\(^8\)

There had been a horizontality of villages and landed populations, then a verticality of metropolises and skyscrapers. Above all the Groupe Espace detested tall towers. The "oblique function" promised a new idea: a topological conception of urban spaces linked to movements made possible through "oriented surfaces that allow the ground to be covered." As against modern verticality, the oblique function would allow for what Virilio would call a "reeroticization of the ground" as a sort of folded or pleated force field.\(^9\) Virilio had come under the influence of Maurice Merleau-Ponty at the time. His idea of a new "ground" for architectural space was to be part of a more general rediscovery of the body or "the flesh"—part of a more general phenomenological critique of the abstract Cartesian space that was supposed to have led "European science" into a state of crisis. Virilio was drawn to Gestalt theory and the attempt to derive figure/ground relations from upright posture and frontal vision, thus rediscovering a topic central to Wölfflin—the relations between ground and form, gravity and vision.

But for Virilio the events of '68 in Paris meant a break with this group and its project or manifesto. As he puts it: "I dropped the issue of space completely to focus on topics like time, speed, dromology … time and politics."\(^10\) Instead of a new urban order with more grounded spatial possibilities for architecture, he saw the emergence and global spread of an ungrounded media civilization, eventually moving in real-time transmission, which abolished the phenomenological sense of groundedness, proximity, and gravity or at least introduced a new sense of "dislocation" into it. Thus there is a certain tension in his thought between a grounded lived space and an ungrounded "live" time; and Virilio diagnoses many maladies that the body would suffer when deprived by the new electronic time-space of its properly grounded sense of distance and proximity. It is as though the body, which used to be nicely grounded in the perspectival space of the classical European city, were to suffer from a generalized disorientation in the global cities of our information societies: an inertia, a panic, a hyperactivity, even a screen addiction. This side of Virilio's thought seems consistent with a critical phenomenological view of the body in the age of

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\(^8\) Quoted in "Paul Virilio and the Oblique," introduced by Enrique Limon, in Sites & Stations, Provisional Utopias ed. Stan Allen with Kyong Park, Bau 13 (Madrid), and Arch + 2 (April 1996).


\(^10\) Ibid.
smart machines, as for example with the complaint that with computer-assisted design goes a loss of the "bodily feel" of architectural or urban space given through drawing.

But another line in Virilio's thought seems to depart from the traditional phenomenological view of a corporeally grounded lived space, in which the Earth doesn't move and in which the body is thought to be "situated" or "thrown into the world," and hence from the senses of grounding that Heidegger would associate with the identity or "being there" of historical peoples. Instead it works with a dynamic view of the body, according to which movement or trajets constitute our corporeal space and make us who are. This view leads to an eroticization not of the ground but of dynamic process of ungrounding, indeed eroticization as an ungrounding or release of the ungrounded movements of the sort seen in Klee's pedagogical notebooks or in Kleist's fine essay on puppet theater. Ungrounded movement is then the movement that is no longer bound to move from one fixed point to another but rather traces its own unbounded space through the trajectories or paths that it takes.

Virilio expresses this dynamic view of our bodily being when he says that we are constituted by a corporeal "trajectivity" prior to our subjectivity and objectivity. In these terms we might think about the "desituating" features of the new electronic spaces—for example, our ability to move about in them unseen and unnamed—as something other than a phenomenological nightmare. We might use it to envisage in new ways the "becoming city" of our bodies, the "becoming body" of our cities, and the spaces in which such becomings transpire. For much as it is said that axonometric drawing disposes us to an overly rectilinear or segmented view of the possibilities of architectural space that a dynamic topology might correct, so one might say that the concept of "program" may dispose us to an overly operational view of the space through which our bodies acquire their trajectivity, which another less programmatic, more affective diagram might allow us to see. A new question then arises: What kinds of spaces or constructions might accommodate, show, facilitate, release, these ungrounded sorts of movement, encounter, connection, for example in urban spaces, and the ways in which we fill them out? What would an architecture of such trajectories and movements look like, and what larger philosophy of the body might it suppose?

Such a philosophy would require, I think, a sense of indetermination in the conception of who we are, and so in the movements that our bodies make in the space of our lives. We must see ourselves as vague or indefinite beings prior to the fixed qualities that tie us to grounds or lands, and so as beings always able to be released from such qualities. For there are always points in our lives where we may move away from such grounds or identities on a kind of uncharted voyage, which form part of the multiple geographies and landscapes that make us who we are as corporeal beings. As indeterminate spatial bodies, we are thus something else than calculating individuals, organic members of communities, or even cheerful participants in a nice "civil society." We have other "powers," which raise other sorts of questions concerning our social
being: those of the times and spaces through which the singularities that make our lives indefinite might freely intersect, connect, assemble.

Perhaps then we need to get away from the picture that social life has roots in the ground or soil that supplies it with its basic sense and circumscribes the movements of which it is capable—that the life-world is in the first instance a grounded world. We find this picture in the great divisions that the sociology of the last century associated with the emergence of the nation-state—the divisions between modernity and tradition, individual and community. Thus one was said to be "grounded" in tradition or community, "ungrounded" in modernity or as an individual. One was offered the unattractive alternative of being either an individual atom moving about in a Cartesian social space or an integral member of an organic whole, fitting together in an Aristotelian social place. A quite different picture derives from views that combine the sense of indetermination with another notion of the spaces of social movement and therefore of the social whole. They introduce another view of modernity than the one that divides us up into "possessive" individuals and "nurturing" communities. Modernity is not the process that passes from the first to the second, from community to contract. It is a process that constantly turns us into indeterminate beings who fit neither into communities with their collective narratives nor into the "self-organizing systems" of acquisitive individuals with their more or less rational interactions—beings who thus become "ungrounded" and so don't integrate quite so easily into the modern nation-state. There is a simple reason why. The modern world unleashes patterns of demography or migration that put people in situations where, in relation to themselves and to one another, they are no longer able to tell straight narratives of their "origins." They become originals without origins; their narratives become ungrounded, out of joint, constructed by superposition or juxtaposition rather than by development or progress; a "time" of socially ungrounded movement is thus introduced into their being. The "transnational" situation of both corporations and immigrations that Saskia Sassen finds in our global cities, along with the new divisions they introduce and the new "movements" they may yet invent, is a contemporary case in point.

In such a conception of social space, we can all be said to be potential "anybodies" before being turned into "somebodies." There is thus an indefiniteness in the "life" of the body, which may be associated with the word anybody, and contrasted with the particularities that delimit us as definite somebodies determined or grounded in space and time. One might speak of a principle of

11 One finds such ideas in the "philosophies of indetermination" that move from Bergson to James and to Whitehead, James correcting "psychology" and Whitehead "cosmology" so as to make room for them. Thus Bergson talked about an "open society" long before Karl Popper and in a different sense—a society is open when based not on myths and origins but on differences and "fabulations." It would be instructive to reread Georges Sorel's Illusions of Progress and Reflections on Violence of 1908 in this light, as well as the sociology of George Herbert Mead. In a more contemporary vein, Gilles Châtelet offers a sharp critique of the current enthusiasm for "self-organizing systems," opposing to them a model of l'homme quelconque—one might say a model of "anybody" in the indefinite or indeterminate sense sketched below. Cf. "Du chaos et de l'auto-organisation comme néo-conservatisme festif," Les Temps Modernes 581 (March-April 1995).

the indefiniteness of the body: each of us has a body in this indefinite sense, each of us is an anybody or is capable of becoming anybody. The indefiniteness of corporeal being is thus impersonal yet quite singular: to have a body, to be able to become anybody, is in fact what is most peculiar to each of us, even though it never reduces to anything particular about us, since it supposes that there is always something yet "to be constructed" in our bodily being and being together.13 There is no one who is not possessed of such a singular, indefinite body, closer to us than "our bodies, ourselves"—than our particular bodies and selves, our communal bodies and selves. The potential of our indefinite yet singular bodily being means that we are "close to" and "distant from" ourselves and one another in peculiar, unplannable ways. Once we give up the belief that our life-world is rooted in the ground, we may thus come to a point where ungroundedness is no longer experienced as existential anxiety and despair but as a freedom and a lightness that finally allow us to move. Movement and indetermination belong together; neither can be understood without the other.

To come back to the young Heinrich Wölfflin, twenty-two years old, astonished in his thesis that philosophy had no principles for the "schematism" of the body in architecture, nor therefore for the corporeal sources of the spiritual. We might imagine someone taking up this question again today but without the assurances of the Kantian architectonic or of the a priori nature of the schematism. Then we would have not only a different "psychology of architecture," working with another kind of relation between grounds and forms, but also a different style of thought, working with another sense of bodily schemata and history. Thus I come to perhaps the most critical point in this exercise. It is a matter of priorities, of what one puts first. Must we conceive of ungrounding in terms of fixed or determinate grounds, indefinite anybodies in terms of situated or localized somebodies? Or can we put ungrounding first, analyzing the relations between grounds and forms, grounds and identities, in terms of the potential for free ungrounded movement that is always virtual in them?
