

Fragmentation and Intimate Space in Olivier Ratsi's Anarchitecture Photography

By Lital Khaikin

French multimedia artist Olivier Ratsi evokes doubt in the mind of the viewer by initiating an inquiry into representations of abnormal architecture. Concrete structures become mirages, reminders of temporality. The fragmented images are reflections on the fragility of appearance, anticipating interpretation and revealing the artifice of meaning. The surrealistic forms in Ratsi's photography are in dialogue with many innovative architectural theorists and practitioners who have been exploring the abstraction of form over the past forty years, most specifically borrowing the term "anarchitecture" introduced by New York avant-garde artist Gordon Matta-Clark in the 1970s.¹ Ratsi represents a contemporary inclination toward the phenomenological within architecture, employing an aesthetic that rejects archetypal geometry and returns instead to the materialization of individual experience in urban space.

One can reject all history and yet accept the world of the sea and the stars. The rebels who wish to ignore nature and beauty are condemned to banish from history everything with which they want to construct the dignity of existence and of labor. Every great reformer tries to create in history what Shakespeare, Cervantes, Moliere, and Tolstoy knew how to create: a world always ready to satisfy the hunger for freedom and dignity which every man carries in his heart.

—Albert Camus, *The Rebel*

The reconciliatory mission of the architect is poetic. This is necessarily an individual task, encompassing personal expression and reference to the totality. There is no meaningful logic without acknowledging the intersubjective world, best revealed in dreams and myths.

—Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*

TRACING ANARCHITECTURE: FROM GORDON MATTA-CLARK TO OLIVIER RATSI

In all of its innumerable shapes, orchestrated movements, and meanings, the city is a silent oppressor. Obedience is etched into the hand that reaches for a metal handle instead of tracing the most natural trajectory to the glass. Entrances and exits are defined by the metric swaying of doors, the minute gradations between concrete strata distinguishing spaces. Everything that can be sensed has a

static order, a clear function. And even the shock that comes from the body touching the unknown is extinguished by the certainty promised by logical corners, purposeful curves and, everywhere, a concrete definition of direction. In cities such as this, there is no discovery, only encounter.

Based in Paris, Ratsi experiments with the transformation and subversion of existing architectural spaces through the use of photography, digital installations, audiovisual performance, and generative mapping performance. Ratsi is also known as a co-founder of the European artistic collective AntiVJ, whose light-based installations and projections experiment with abnormal perceptual experience. Individually pursuing some of the themes concurrent to AntiVJ, Ratsi uses the subjects and processes of his own photographic series to isolate the viewer's perceptions of space in an image and, through this disruption, to inquire into the notions of a normalized urban environment.

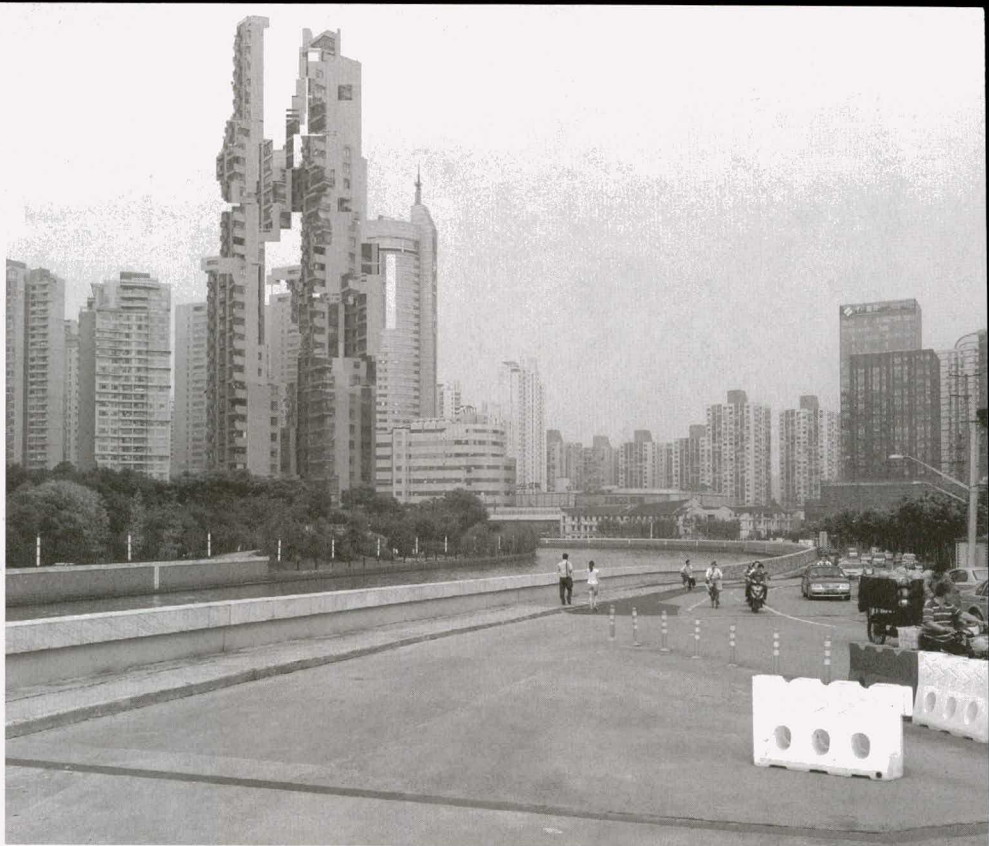
112B from the series *Anarchitecture Seoul* (2009–11) by Olivier Ratsi; courtesy the artist



Based on research begun in 2005, Ratsi's prolific photographic exploration of "anarchitecture" is part of a larger body of work called *WYSI*not*WYG (What You See is Not What You Get, 2009–14)*, and is his most political endeavor. The series in this collection engage with the deconstruction of objective reality as it is expressed in architecture, and incite the viewer's creative agency through the reconstructive act. In this work, Ratsi's eye rests on the macroscopic elements of the urban environment, the crests and peaks of a cityscape to which the viewer's attention is most often drawn. Monumental skyscrapers and prominent characters of urban infrastructure are distorted through the manipulation of technological error, either spontaneously occurring in Ratsi's photography or intentionally produced, resulting in a disrupted image that seems to shatter, puncture, or misplace parts of the structures. In a process similar to the cut-and-paste of paper collage, Ratsi later recreates astonishing and implausible structures from the digital wreckage.

Some of Ratsi's most believable constructions among these anarchitectural series were inspired by Grand Évrý, one of Paris's southern suburbs, which was transformed in the late 1960s as part of the French "new town" initiative. Ratsi's deliberate attention to architectural form and structural plausibility is evident in *Grue G3* from the series *Anarchitecture Évrý* (2012), where, in the modernist façade of a newly constructed residential building, it is possible only after a second glance to detect the artist's shapeshifting of overhanging balconies, the protrusion of windows disconnected from their walls, and the interruption of the apartment's levels. The rational cubic shapes of *Grue G3* appear as though in revolt against their carcass but, even still, cannot break out from their functional frames. The sidewalks are clean, as geometric and orderly as the white buildings flanking their sides; even the two black-clad pedestrians seem to be pressed neatly away from the concrete expanse. Leaning against the barrier that protects the construction site, the idlers seem unaware of, or disinterested in, the incorrectness of the building leering behind them.

Such deceptive normality also characterizes the entirety of Ratsi's anarchitectural work. *Sco v1* from his *Anarchitecture Shanghai* series (2013), for instance, carves a single high-rise into two jagged stalks. The skybridge thrown between the structure's vertical segments alludes to the inevitable crumbling of ideals, magnified in its Brutalist concrete and mosaics of steel and glass. A single monstrosity budding out of a faceless district in Shanghai, the tower nevertheless hardly seems incongruous against the otherwise pristine cityscape. The photographic layers of *Sco v1* are carefully repositioned from the original building to form this new hybrid, revealing the artist's manipulation via the aesthetic dissonance



Sco v1 from the series *Anarchitecture Shanghai* (2013) by Olivier Ratsi; courtesy the artist

that exists between the scene's tallest tower and the surrounding apartments. The visibility of the abnormal is made possible not by its own explicit difference, but through the silent mundane that encompasses the remainder of the frame.

The photographic deconstruction of Ratsi's anarchitectural photography finds its conceptual origin in the emergence of an aesthetic movement during the 1970s known as the Anarchitecture Group. Driven primarily by the vision of Matta-Clark, the Anarchitecture Group was also comprised of a diverse collective of interdisciplinary artists including Laurie Anderson, Tina Girouard, Carol Goodden, Suzanne Harris, Jene Highstein, Bernard Kirschenbaun, Richard Landry, and Richard Nonas. The collective was influential in their critique of the industrial mechanisms of modernist architecture and the illusions of permanence that were latent in urban design. Matta-Clark's anarchitecture questioned these illusions of solidity and permanence, as well as the social reliance on architecture as an instrument of definition. Matta-Clark in particular challenged the representational role of architectural form and the relationships that definitive shape would provoke—relations that are fundamentally based in the mechanisms of capitalism, which he criticized in such projects as *Food and Garbage Wall* (both 1971), and *Photoglyphs* and *Fake Estates* (both 1973).

The collectively influenced anarchitectural concept was most notably explored in Matta-Clark's violent dissections of the urban environment, in which he cut through the structural supports of both private and public buildings. In Matta-Clark's anarchitecture, walls, floors, and ceilings became dominated by cavernous holes and rifts; this, too, is evident in Ratsi's photography. Such deconstruction was most famously realized in Matta-Clark's gaping incision into



Untitled image from the series *Discrete Time* (2005–12) by Olivier Ratsi; courtesy the artist

the exterior wall and several floors of a Paris apartment building in *Conical Intersect* (1975), and his cross-sectional slicing of a suburban New Jersey house in *Splitting* (1974). This assault on form ensured that the essential presence of the buildings would be expressed, not as their intended form or associated function, but rather as the distortion itself as it is imposed upon them. From substance, the focus is shifted onto the destructive act and the resulting void—the disruptive act removes material presence from structure.

The most obvious parallel between Matta-Clark's transformations of urban structures and Ratsi's photography is the direct use of anarchitecture as method. The nuance of anarchitecture, however, also reveals a kind of dialogue between Ratsi and Matta-Clark, which is especially important to giving Ratsi's photography critical context—it would otherwise be easy to dismiss Ratsi's deceptively simple images as superficial play.

Ratsi's anarchitectural installation *Tour des Convoyeurs* (2009), in collaboration with light-projection artist Joanie Lemerrier and musician Thomas Vaquié, engages in almost direct conversation with Matta-Clark's *Day's End* (1975), where Matta-Clark orchestrated an illegal incision into the metal hangar of Pier 52 on the Hudson River in Lower Manhattan. Exhibited

as a site-specific installation at Montreal's 2009 MUTEK digital media and culture festival, Ratsi's *Tour des Convoyeurs* is a video projection of fragmented architectural specters on an existing edifice that overlooks Montreal's harbor, seemingly reflecting an environmental reference. The primal form of a building's steel frame is staggered in a grid that oscillates and twitches with angst. Blocks of white light pixelate over the projected image of the architectural interior as it deconstructs, eventually overwhelming the industrial form with a purely geometric pattern—a kind of Jacob's ladder of horizontal lines and connecting diagonals reaching along the entire vertical structure. Ghosts of the human construction of the edifice flicker through this pattern, fading from the water's edge to the sky. A sudden stillness of the projected image, as the movement quiets to a slow progression of digital shadow, provokes a sense of awe at this disembodied, digital architecture; these irrational fragments seem to consume the host building, parasitically leaching from the tower and creating a new organism from their fragmented state. Given the context of its exhibition, *Tour des Convoyeurs* cannot be seen as the radical act of protest that characterizes *Day's End*, but it nevertheless shares a deconstruction of structural boundaries

between the architectural interior and the environmental exterior, and the transformation of buildings from functional emblems into relational encounters.

The affinity between the anarchitecture of Ratsi and that of Matta-Clark can also be seen in Ratsi's installation of *Subspace Ana 3* (2011) at Le Cube digital art center in Paris. *Subspace Ana 3* was a window installation of a fragmented Parisian cityscape imposed on plexiglass panels, positioned as if to trick the viewer into blurring the distinction between the deconstruction and the real horizon behind the panels. Even in a situational context, Ratsi's installation suggests Matta-Clark's *Window Blow-Out* (1976), in which Matta-Clark illegally shot out all of the windows of the American Institute of Architects in Chicago. The superficial relationship between Matta-Clark's act of protest against the architectural institution and Ratsi's gallery-based photographic installation is interrupted when Ratsi positions his work within an institutional center. The significant contrast between *Subspace Ana 3* and *Window Blow-Out*, however, is in the differing responses of Matta-Clark and Ratsi to the destructive nature of fragmentation. While Matta-Clark left his anarchitectural projects as inconclusive, gaping maws in the city, as anti-structures without resolution, Ratsi inserts reconstruction into a dialogue that is generated by fragmentation.

CRITICAL NARRATIVE THROUGH RECONSTRUCTION

The reconstructive method of collage that defines Ratsi's anarchitecture reveals an evolution from the inert character of his deconstructive photographic series—in particular the multimedia project *Deconstruction Time, Again* (2005–12)—which explored similar themes of urban disruption, but without extending the dialogue beyond deconstruction. The integration of collage into anarchitecture enables Ratsi to develop a critical undertone while avoiding an uninvolved regurgitation of Matta-Clark's concepts through a different medium.

Discrete Time part. 2, a chronophotographic subseries of *Deconstruction Time, Again*, evokes transience and incomplete identities with the temporal displacement of automobiles along a single road. In this set of four images, Ratsi creates a suggestion of presence; information is conveyed by a few letters that can be made out from a license plate, corners of headlights and bumpers, door handles, and grills. Ratsi captures several moments of passing vehicles, cutting these select elements and pasting the digital debris along a rational trajectory across the roadway. But these suspended cutouts, blocks of cropped photographic data, are abandoned by the whole. The separation of these altogether microscopic elements from the complete images of moving vehicles and their passengers withholds a story. It is impossible to tell how fast these broken objects are moving, their exact positions on the road, or even their origins and directions. The cues that would make the transient objects of *Discrete Time* significant are removed, leaving husks of a complete scene.

Ratsi's reaction against his own use of objective representation in these series is expressed in a spatial fragmentation that forms the essence of anarchitecture, as opposed to the temporal distortion to

which he limited *Deconstruction Time, Again*. The chronophotographic method employed in this project—in which a photograph depicts multiple instances of movement within a single frame—faithfully preserves a scene's architectural elements with the only visual disruption being that of the layered shards of time's passage. Ratsi's manipulation of visual disruption in *Discrete Time part. 1*, in particular, actually relies on the structural integrity of a given cityscape to give context to the blurred movement.

Looking at *Discrete Time part. 1*, one can see how the distorted vehicles of *Tiers-Payant*, from this series, contrast against the congruency of the depicted infrastructure. Realized through six variations, *Tiers-Payant* depicts the movement of vehicles through an intersection from a single perspective, in the same way as *Discrete Time part. 2*. The buildings consistently remain ambient against the mutable screen of bodies and vehicles. Movement is contained, abated even, by the idle structures of *Discrete Time*. The significance of this is that despite using a deconstructive aesthetic, the architecture in *Deconstruction Time, Again* maintains its referential capacity, which Ratsi later recognizes as problematic.

It is this representational quality that limits the critical tone toward normalized structure in Ratsi's *Deconstruction Time, Again*, revealing the absence of confrontation with architectural shapes and their manipulations of human relationships. The fragmentary character of *Deconstruction Time, Again* never reaches beyond the rudimentary process or effects of disturbing the photographic features that do not initially serve as signifiers of place. This fixedness that results from the abstraction of solely non-architectural forms restricts Ratsi's photography to a language that appears merely decorative and silent. It is by unsettling the identifiable spatial forms that Ratsi can initiate the emotional connection with the viewer that he has pursued recently through anarchitecture.

In his various anarchitectural series, Ratsi applies the shattered aesthetic to architectural subjects instead of the human or otherwise transient objects of a scene. Ratsi uses the fragmentation of shape to communicate dissonance in architectural function, and to negate the referential qualities of architecture. The sensible geometry of existing cities is distorted into implausible shapes that revolt against physics and the possibilities of engineering, against the potential of their own construction. Yet Ratsi is careful not to disturb the adjacent buildings that surround the fragmented structures of anarchitecture, as demonstrated in *Grue G3* or *Sco v1*; these are untouched, creating identifiable realms that suggest the plausibility of even the most unnatural forms.

The structures of anarchitecture cannot be constructed in real space, but they deceive the eye into believing in their possibility with their easy dissolution into Ratsi's cityscapes. When Ratsi distorts the geometry of buildings, he does so with the awareness that shape is an architectural mode of communicating particulars that becomes devoid of such clarity when the continuity of form is altered. Further, the impossibility of engineering the imagined shapes of Ratsi's anarchitecture denies their photographic representations any fundamental capacity to act as signifiers, in much the same way as the gaping walls and floors of Matta-Clark's vandalism transform real buildings into useless shells.

DISRUPTING THE HOMOGENIZED CITY

Despite the diversity in the geopolitical origins of Ratsi's structures, plucked from skylines as dispersed as Shanghai, Seoul, and Paris, the majority of these buildings share a homogenous appearance that is devoid of regional nuance or characteristic ornament. Ratsi's anarchitecture does not depict structures that communicate particular cultural idiosyncrasies. Absent from the fragmented cityscapes are the unusual shapes that would excite and disturb. Like Matta-Clark before him, Ratsi distorts the structures of both residential and public architecture, yet this unvaried aesthetic is amplified when anarchitecture depicts the monuments of consumer culture (shopping malls, corporate headquarters, Hotel Ibis, and the adjacent commercial center of Grand Paris) as much as the residential high-rises that command attention in Ratsi's *Anarchitecture Seoul* subseries (2009–11) or throughout the images of *Anarchitecture Shanghai* (2013). The uniformity that arises out of a lineage of formalist architectural language lends a placelessness to Ratsi's depicted cityscapes.

Mexican-Canadian architectural historian and theorist Alberto Pérez-Goméz writes on the alienating anonymity that arises out of architecture that is incapable of containing or representing cultural mythology, in favor of "processes or techno-political values."²² The reality of such a city is to remain a mechanism of production for the industries that profit from the anxieties that fuel compulsion and consumption. In the rationalist model, utility is the justification for the construction of architectural space. "The industrial city realized through capitalist formalism," argues Pérez-Goméz, is "a hermetic, elitist manipulation of forms, with no intended culturally based meanings."²³

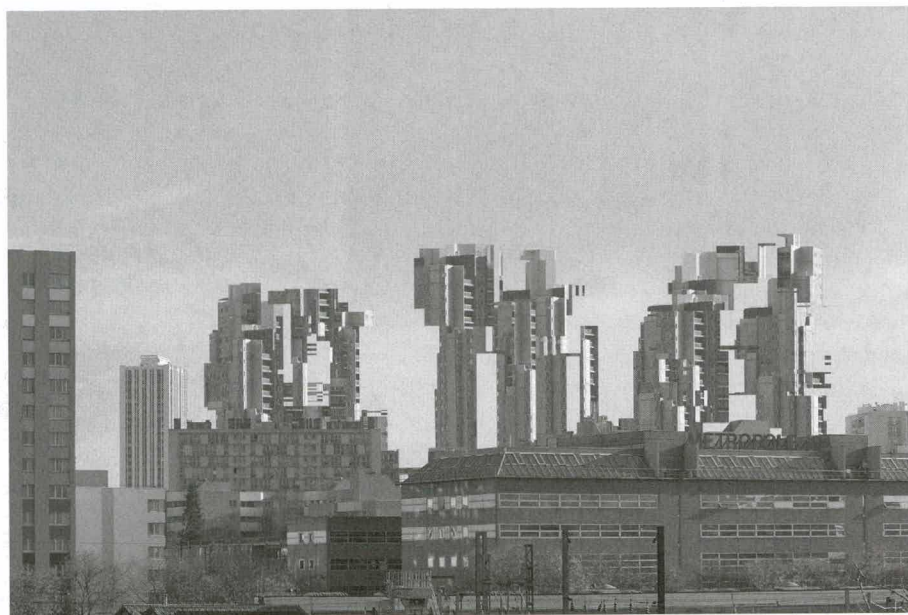
The standardized modernist aesthetic that is inescapable in a realistic depiction of Ratsi's cityscapes is nevertheless disrupted in the aesthetic of anarchitecture. The giants of each cityscape are transformed into absurd, fumbling kaleidoscopes of concrete and glass. The orbs of Shanghai's Oriental Pearl Tower become splintered eyelids, gleaming red. In Seoul, rusted iron bridges traverse landscapes in contradiction to their horizontal paths, inciting doubt and pause. The pastel concrete of Grand Paris hovers in disconcerting tension between foundation and horizon. The use of the deconstructive aesthetic is even more palpable in the images of construction sites—*11h17* from the series *Anarchitecture Grand Paris* (2009–11) or *112B* from *Anarchitecture Seoul*—the apparent sameness of the carcasses of buildings is, however, grotesquely amplified in broken layers and joints. Anarchitecture succeeds in deconstructing the forms of buildings before they have even been completed, in anticipation and reaction against the uniformity that dominates the international style.

Ratsi's anarchitecture expresses the same embrace of fragmentation and suggestion of possibility that is referred to in Pérez-Goméz's encouragement of a phenomenological approach toward architectural thinking—an approach that considers the individual experience as primary to the building and identity-creation of cities. Pérez-Goméz recognizes the significance of theoretical architecture for its inherently radical, and therefore deeply personal, role in conceiving urban environments. The incomplete nature of such theoretical architecture is an important response to the uniformity of formalism. The suggestive and implausible are not necessarily functional, but such disconnection allows for a culturally mediated expression of constructed space. Ratsi's anarchitecture advocates for the reclamation of an intrinsically personal relationship

to urban space. It is the public nature of the buildings of anarchitecture that so potently communicates this conflict. Within the public sphere, architecture should respond to ideals determined through a multiplicity of aesthetics and meanings. In their primarily commercial nature, many of the structures depicted in Ratsi's photography are bound to the depersonalized aesthetic of the industrial model, which intensifies the subversive character of fragmentation in their photographic depiction.

A humanitarian reality can be given breadth in the subversive and radical act of reconstruction, "the 'truly artistic' act," according to Ratsi. This alternative would be expressed as a more sensitive architecture, concerned with what Pérez-Goméz refers to as the "primordial shared experiences of human beings as embodied, spatially oriented individuals."²⁴ Here is a proposition for an architecture conceived on the basis of respect for the personal experience of environment—for the free construction of

Métropole 19 v4 from the series *Anarchitecture Grand Paris* (2009–11) by Olivier Ratsi; courtesy the artist



meanings, purposes, orientations, and behaviors. But in order for such an architecture to be realized, the form with which it is expressed must itself be questioned.

REBELLION THROUGH IRREGULAR SHAPE

Distortion is made apparent in Ratsi's anarchitecture by improbable geometry that exists upon a threshold between the representational and the abstracted. Ratsi considers the nuanced dialectic of shape as the communicator of a formal architectural language, a fabricated commandment from which there is little to no deviation. "I would like to modify the type of information both transmitted by the observed object and received by the observer,"⁵⁵ he says. Form determined by function makes for a self-referential architecture that cannot extend beyond its shell to become an object of contemplation, of surprise, and of the poetry that comes of an urgent interpretation of the unknown. "Self-referential buildings expressing no more than a marketable style, a technological process, or a single fashionable meaning," writes Pérez-Goméz, "play a crucial role in forming, if not increasing, our psychosomatic pathologies and political crises."⁵⁶

By destroying the silence of pre-symbolic form—the stillness flooded with capacity for expressing all potentialities—architecture is reduced to an ambient environment of value-objects. What is manifest then is an incapacitating substitution of the city-as-place with the artifice of city-as-function. Anarchitecture is a parry of this numbing character, deflecting archetypal meaning from urban structure and confronting the formalist necessity of such association. "Unbiased reality fascinates me so much that it has become the principal aim of my work," explains Ratsi. "I like looking at the world untied from any reference, as if I were looking at it for the first time in my life." And it is with the engineered impossibility of the shapes in anarchitecture that Ratsi enables this semiotic break.

This approach toward irregular geometry in the architectural context puts Ratsi's anarchitecture in friendly company with the work of Hungarian-born French architect, designer, and urban planner Yona Friedman, whose designs for urban architectural organisms proposed in *L'Architecture Mobile* (1958) remain bound to paper and models. The hovering and tessellated buildings of Ratsi's anarchitecture seem to realize the utopic principles of the anti-geometry proposed by Friedman. Ratsi's *Metropole 19 v4* (2011) drapes over Paris, evoking Friedman's own designs for the capital in the form of *Paris Spatiale* (1959)—a surreal mosaic of interlocking dwellings suspended above existing structures. Then there are the *Écoles du Colombier* from *Subspace Ana 3* (2011), which are almost direct translations of Friedman's irregular shapes in the style of *Le Train* (1992).

Ratsi's fascination with disordered urban form intuitively connects to Friedman's vision of non-design as an architectural practice. Where Friedman sought to actualize a model of community-directed architecture in his plans for *Ville Spatiale* (1959), Ratsi gravitates toward the unintentionally anarchic environments of a city. "I'm attracted to urban areas which are found near to road infrastructure," he says. "In other words, by anarchic urban areas

that have been shaped by man without there having been thought on the development of these areas."⁵⁶

Architecture without a concrete geometry is ultimately a rejection of a standardized vernacular of rectangular frames, supportive cylindrical pillars, and cavernous triangular peaks, with all of the associated distinctions they create in the lives of those who dwell in their spaces. This rejection of permanence in form and function, so clearly expressed in Friedman's irregular shapes, contributes to a broadening landscape of alternative vision, from Ratsi's fragmentations to Matta-Clark's idealistic rebellion against the industrial model.

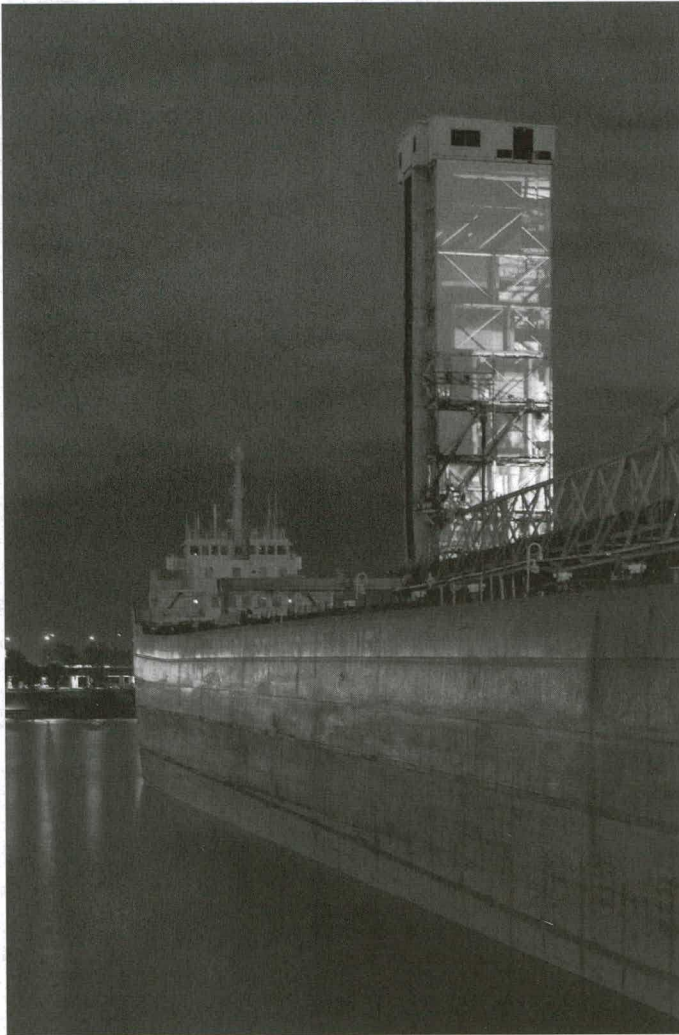
IMMENSITY AND THE UNCANNY IN ANARCHITECTURE

The structures of Ratsi's anarchitecture impose upon the rational cityscape—their rearranged façades disordered, their foundations impossible, and their incoherent presence discomfiting. The slumbering dweller is awakened by a shock to their normalized state of submission; they no longer know whether the shapes they perceive are true, or what they mean to communicate about the environment. This rift is essential in order to construct an alternative vision for architecture and the dweller's spatial relationship to the city. In a momentary suspension of belief, a new language is materialized with which to interpret the experience of the city.

Beyond the similarity with Friedman's irregular forms, Ratsi's anarchitecture brings to mind the work of American architect and theorist Peter Eisenman, who explicitly pursues the abstraction of form and function. And, indeed, Ratsi's structures have an aesthetic resemblance to the collaged qualities of Eisenman's Falk House, the mute layers of his Aronoff Center for Design and Art, or the aggressive chasm of his Max Reinhardt House. The most grotesque deconstructions of anarchitecture—Ratsi's transformations of Grand Paris—erupt with a similar fervor against the rational shapes that encase them. The balconies of *Metropole* crumble into gaping cavities, while the walls of *Sanyo* no longer support its corpus and its windows bleed into smeared strokes of concrete.

In Eisenman's work, it is through the use of rotating grids, abstracted distinctions between interior and exterior spaces, and the avoidance of archetypal function that such a fragmented aesthetic is achieved. This abstraction creates the conditions by which Eisenman seeks to actualize an architecture that would incite the experience of anxiety, negativity, and silence of form in the urban environment—experiences he believes are more resonant with the human truth.⁷ Eisenman's fixation on the element of anxiety has further important parallels to the architectural uncanny proposed by British architectural historian, critic, and designer Anthony Vidler.⁸ Vidler associates the uncanny—the tremendous unknown—with the experience of the sublime. In much the same way, Eisenman seeks a structural communication in architecture of fundamental silence existing outside of imposed symbol.⁹

The uncanny is experienced in a primal state of urgency that is incited by the enigma—the unease at confronting a certain, but unfamiliar, reality. Vidler's vision of the uncanny is clearly expressed in the architecture of Eisenman, famously translating anxiety into



Tour des Convoyeurs (2009) by Olivier Ratsi; courtesy the artist

a spatial experience that incites doubt, and perhaps displacement, in the anticipated relationship between dweller and form. Ratsi's anarchitecture expresses a similar disregard for site and function as is characteristic of Eisenman, arousing the sense of disquiet that Vidler associates with the experience of such disruptive space. And it is in this light that one can appreciate Ratsi's desire to create a rift of doubt between the viewer and the structural implausibility of anarchitecture. "This break must be visible enough to sow doubt and challenge the Viewer," explains Ratsi, "but not too much because the deconstruction process serves as a gateway. It is the burden of the viewer to interpret even the continuation of the process."

The silence of form that is integral to the deconstruction of Eisenman, and by extension Ratsi, is best evoked in French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958). Silence of form contains within an inner immensity, "an 'essential' impression,"¹⁰ that precedes meaning or the implication of meaning, the essential quality of which is denied when shape assumes the role of function. This immensity can only exist in the absence of concrete identifiers. Eisenman himself poetically

referred to this immensity as "the excess that contains the possibility of presentness."¹¹ Where Bachelard elaborates on the immensity that subsumes all potentialities of geographic and structural space, Eisenman pursues an architecture that is antagonistic toward economic and political meaning. Ratsi, in turn, activates the disturbance of archetypal function as an extension of his reconstructive anarchitectural method, to continue a dialogue with the viewer as participant.

RECREATING MYTHOLOGY FROM DISRUPTION

There is a weightlessness that exists where meaning is surrendered to infinite potentiality. Without the certainty given by the language of function, we are abandoned to the brimming void that remains. Ratsi could have chosen to leave his fragmented structures suspended in the nihilistic state that follows the decay of meaning, as in the finality of the temporal distortion in *Deconstruction Time, Again*. But in his decision to use collage and the viewer's doubt as a mode of reconstruction, Ratsi's anarchitecture extends into an experiential, phenomenological approach to architecture, where otherwise authoritarian representational structures are transformed into mutable vessels for intimate experience and meaning.

Ratsi explores the reconstructive act, spoken simply through collage, and the immersion of the otherwise passive audience—harkening toward a relational architecture—particularly through the projections of *Tour des Convoyeurs* and the installation *Space Ana Enghien* (2009), created in collaboration with Joanie Lemercier, Yannick Jacquet, Romain Tardy, and Thomas Vaquié. *Enghien*, especially, involves the participation of the public as the reconstructed forms take over the walls of a building in a public space. The involvement of the crowd and the surrounding buildings, which create a kind of enclosure, build the intimacy of the participants using the projection. The reconstructive element of Ratsi's anarchitecture emphasizes subversive myth-making that is repressed by industrial mechanisms inherent to the technological city that Pérez-Gómez criticizes, and which Ratsi depicts in his recurring architectural subjects. "This could be a critique of urbanization, a research on the aesthetics of the architecture, a landscape of science fiction," says Ratsi. The poetic suspension of reality in the implausible structures of anarchitecture allows an escape, however momentary, from the oppressive modes of thinking and design that are inherent to functionalism.

The process of internalizing and critically interpreting urban space is a resistance to economic imperatives acting as the determinant of architectural narratives. It is, after all, the hope of inspiring individual liberty in the lived experience of architecture, the freedom to determine one's own relationship with an environment and not be subject to it, which unites Ratsi to a greater movement that expresses anarchic ideals through the architectural context. The inherently phenomenological model proposed by Pérez-Gómez and alluded to by Ratsi empowers the anarchic reality of the body in the city—in all of its wildness, inhibition, and unpredictability—and its mutable encounter with the external. Matta-Clark incited such primal experience through the destruction of structure, causing shock and disorientation in confrontation with the unknown.

Anarchitecture appeals not to divisive industry, but to lyrical, artistic dwelling, emphasizing the significance of a visceral relationship between the self and the affective qualities of architecture: the primacy of shock, doubt, and questioning that can be incited by geometry, and the innocence of encountering an essential mystery. Such architectural thinking is empathetic to the ephemerality of human desires and emotions, and celebrates collective relationships in the complexity of urban networks. Within environments that otherwise perpetuate oppressive social systems, merging dominant technological models with intuitive understanding allows for the restoration of human dignity.

The conceptual kinship that winds from Matta-Clark to Ratsi, and through Bachelard, Vidler, and Eisenman, can be seen as a determinately ethical response to a depersonalization of spatial experience. The role, necessity, and reclamation of the imagination is radical because it returns to the individual a creative power, inspiring the urban dweller to reemerge from a boundless silence. Yet even within the conceptual context of Ratsi's photography, anarchitecture is not a solution. It is rather a vocabulary that allows nuanced criticism of formalism. By allowing space for dissonance, for the natural precedence of the anarchic into the realization of urban space, architecture can enable us to become aware once again that the city is not an unyielding external place, but one that it is contained within each of us.

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NOTES 1. Richard Nonas, American sculptor and member of the Anarchitecture Group, letter to the IVAM, August 1992, in *Gordon Matta-Clark*, exh. cat., IVAM Centre Julio Gonzalez, Valencia 1993, p. 374. 2. Alberto Pérez-Goméz, "Modern Architecture, Abstraction, and the Poetic Imagination," *Walkenkuckucksheim, Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, Vozdushnyj Zamok 1* (1997), available online at www.cloud-cuckoo.net/openarchive/wolke/eng/Subjects/971/Perez-Gomez/perez-gomez_t.html. 3. Pérez-Goméz, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1984), 325. 4. Pérez-Goméz, "Modern Architecture, Abstraction, and the Poetic Imagination." 5. All quotations from Olivier Ratsi are from an email interview with the author, November 4, 2013. 6. Pérez-Goméz, "Imagining a future: On cultural memories, language and the role of beauty," *Architecture Norway*, June 2014, www.architecturenorway.no/questions/histories/Perez-Gomez-memory/. 7. Constantinos V. Proimos, "Architecture: a self referential sign or a way of thought? Peter Eisenman's encounter with Jacques Derrida," *South African Journal of Art History* 24:1 (2009): 104-20, <http://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/14013>. 8. See Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996). 9. Ibid. 10. Gaston Bachelard writes about immensity, "It would be difficult to express better that here the functions of description—psychological as well as objective—are ineffective. One feels that there is something else to be expressed besides what is offered for objective expression. What should be expressed is hidden grandeur, depth." Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 186. 11. See Peter Eisenman, *Written into the Void: Selected Writings, 1990–2004* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

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