

# GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

## Effective Architecture

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1997. Halfway between the end of Francoist Spain and the present, a billowing titanium artichoke on the banks of the slowly recovering Nervión River, the still-clogged artery of the Bilbao's nineteenth-century steel industry, emerged to inflect history just before the close of the twentieth. After the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, architecture could never be the same.

Frank Gehry's scribble-cum-monument fed the fin-de-siècle global imagination before it was even born. Its prenatal pin-ups saturated Martha Stewart-era lifestyle magazines and the dawning twenty-four-hour news cycle, metastasizing a new demographic of "architourists" thirsty for "starchitecture."<sup>1</sup> The "Miracle in Bilbao" forecast by the *New York Times* didn't take long to materialize.<sup>2</sup> Bilbao became an instant fetish destination. Newly accessible thanks to low-cost Easy Jetting, a consolidated currency, and dissolved borders, "the Bilbao effect" came to describe the dent it put in culture and coffers alike. Its economic impact alone is measured in the billions.

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Ockman and Solomon Frausto, eds., *Architourism: Authentic, Escapist, Exotic, Spectacular* (Munich and London: Prestel, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Muschamp, "The Miracle in Bilbao," *New York Times Magazine*, September 7, 1997, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/09/07/magazine/the-miracle-in-bilbao.html>.

This became the new astrophysics of building. The flamboyant star that rose just as the austere century of modernism was setting had such immense gravity it sucked the entire city itself into a cultural black hole, drawing all aspects of mass media and popular attention into its orbit, from Mariah Carey to James Bond. Architecture found itself again at the center of the cultural cosmos, a rebirth of archi-centrism not witnessed since the Renaissance. It was no less than Copernican.

There is no questioning whether or not the effect itself was *real*. What was questioned, loudly at first and often enough ever since, was whether or not it was *good*.

For the critics, historians, theorists, and curators presiding over the most self-conscious universities and journals and awards bodies and lecture circuits and academic publishing houses and museums and the rest of the clerical apparatus that preserves the idea that architecture is more than mere buildings, this was not a victory but the unforgivable breach of an unwritten code. Such a public demonstration of the incontestable effects of a building threatened to destabilize the fiction used to insulate architecture from having to actually perform the very same miracles they claim constitute it.

If you walk into a gothic cathedral and your spirit is not lifted, or into Le Corbusier's villa and your gaze does not meet the horizon, then there is something wrong with *your* spirit, with *your* vision. This is the dogma of architecture theory: for all who have a spirit to feel and eyes to see, architecture effects. *Unmoved* and *unknowing* can only apply to the subject; architecture never fails.

This is not elitism; it's survivalism.

The theory patch has been necessary at least since the oldest surviving text of Western architecture theory, Vitruvius's ten books. Written about an age dominated by pagan celebration, ritual sacrifice, personified gods, and mystery cults, the Vitruvian account of ancient Greece sadly requires no parental guidance. In place of a user's manual to the incantations, fumigations, sacrifices, and meditations used to animate their edifices, we have inherited a primer on how to appreciate their lifeless corpses. Unable to make the temples sing, Vitruvian theory converted these megalithic machines into carcasses for connoisseurs.

When indigenous Pacific Islanders encountered Westerners for the first time as their military convoys touched down in the Islanders' remote corners during the twentieth century, they saw these fire-breathing metallic beasts and their light-skinned humanoid tamers as visiting gods. When they left, taking their precious cargo with them, the locals deified the mystery machines, carving copies as idols to coax them back. Vitruvian theory did the same for architecture. It turned architecture into a cargo cult.

Vitruvian Order is not just a precise rhythm of columnar proportions, it is also the sect of theorizing priests who have preserved this Roman farce. Having lost the keys to the temples, they locked the people out and turned the structures themselves into idols.

Architecture effects were reduced to aesthetic illusions.

The same fanatical Christians that turned the stone bodies and homes of the old gods into mortar and quarries for the cathedrals of the new and only God also preserved the one surviving text that described what is now mostly lost.<sup>3</sup> It was from this ruthless flood against heresy that Vitruvius's words washed up at the end of the Dark Ages. Rather than an implausible, whole-cloth antediluvian survival, the text must be read as the

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine Nixey, *The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World* (London: Pan MacMillan, 2018).

reengineered propaganda it likely is: the religiopolitical occultation of the pagan origins of Western architecture. Vitruvian survivalism is a double move. Call it “Cargoculting” for short.

Having survived—perpetuated? —the Crusades, the Vitruvian Order inherited the abbeys and academies where reports of miracles were recorded and certified, giving its adherents a monopoly over canonizing buildings as architecture. As Daedalus before them, who breathed spirit into statues, they put breath into buildings, speaking for structures that could no longer speak for themselves. They are the ecstatic true believers, the born-again, the pilgrims who deceive their own senses with manufactured hallucinations that better fit their faith. From Palladian to baroque to mannerist to colonial to rococo to neoclassical to neo-Gothic to elementalist to functionalist to internationalist and modernist and high modernist and postmodernist and everything in between and since, the architecture theorists of the Vitruvian Order have conspired to turn the latest interpretations of the forgotten beginnings of architecture into new classes of invisible and ineffable effects that they alone can claim to eff.

This was a laudable strategy for an era dominated by monotheism, but it ran out of steam under scientific secularization. Declaring ornament criminal in the early twentieth century, the Order went all in on modernism, abandoning the motifs of classicism—columns, capitals, entablatures—behind which it had survived millennia of darkness. It lost. Unequivocally. As its failed efforts to better society were demolished, its successors sheepishly recoiled into autonomy, collecting the discarded pieces to play an insider’s game of cardboard classicism that declined the civic responsibilities of an adult profession. Cast out of Babel, architecture’s mouthpiece was left babbling. From mirror

glass neoliberalism to folksy New Urbanism, Peak Cargocultation had emerged in the form of hysterical cosplay by 1997.

Reduced to such embarrassing vulgarity, the Vitruvian Order could only chastise the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao for exciting the architourists' libidos. Publicly tried for selling sex, starchitecture was made to wear a scarlet letter. While its crime was turning tricks, its sin was practicing magic. Nothing is more taboo for monotheism. Mary Magdalene could be redeemed; Simon Magus could not. To borrow a term from technology theorist Venkatesh Rao, magic resists *normalization*.

For Rao, we are unfit for life in the arcane bare metal circuitry of reality itself. We interact instead with abstract interfaces, the "manufactured normalcy field" of stories and archetypes—the metaphors—that give us a simplified handle on the otherwise crippling complexity of technological acceleration.<sup>4</sup> New innovations are normalized under the cloak of existing metaphors so that everything can change without cracking the illusion of continuity from past into future. Technology drives history by reducing the cognitive load of adoption. It only took an encounter with an architecture theorist, Mark Wigley, for Rao to recognize the opposite at play in architecture.

Comparing contemporary architecture to a midlife crisis, Rao illustrated how the profession, "which is really about using Design to render visible the invisible nature of your place in the universe," no longer has an operative place in it.<sup>5</sup> In a networked world where bits supersede bricks, architecture has become a solution without a problem.

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<sup>4</sup> Venkatesh Rao, "Welcome to the Future Nauseous," *Ribbonfarm*, May 9, 2012, <https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2012/05/09/welcome-to-the-future-nauseous>.

<sup>5</sup> Venkatesh Rao, "We Are All Architects Now," *Ribbonfarm*, December 17, 2015, <https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2015/12/17/we-are-all-architects-now>.

Symptomatically—and schizophrenically—architecture theory lashes out by problematizing everything:

People not on critical paths have urgent critical conversations about critical paths. So an architectural crisis is really an urgent critical conversation designed to interrogate a problematic critical path that you're not on. Or a problematic path on which your design conversation is not urgently critical. Or a conversational path on which your criticism is not urgently interrogated by design. Or something. In other words, it is a freak-out about non-events starring absent figures who are mostly not even aware that you are having urgent conversations in their dark Jungian underbellies while they go about a dentin' the universe.<sup>6</sup>

But architecture discourse was not the punchline. It was a cautionary tale, for "We Are All Architects Now."<sup>7</sup> Digital innovation has finally landed us all on the vertical asymptote of history where more happens to us than our psychosocial apparatuses can process as software has eaten the institutions of the civilized world and replaced them with platforms that reduce us to our bank balances and basic biases. We have entered what Rao calls "the great weirding."<sup>8</sup>

The Great Weirding is when we can no longer know how to think or feel. "To be weirded out is to sense no firm ground beneath your feet."<sup>9</sup> This is a problem for Wigley's concept of theory.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Venkatesh Rao, "How Harambe Became the Perfect Meme," *Atlantic*, September 6, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/09/harambe-the-perfect-meme/498743>.

<sup>9</sup> Venkatesh Rao, "Speak Weirdness to Truth," *Ribbonfarm*, September 22, 2016, <https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2016/09/22/speak-weirdness-to-truth>.

For Wigley, all theory is architectural. It is the very figure of architecture—the edifice—that organizes theory per se, which requires metaphorically clearing the ground, laying foundations, mounting a consistent structure, and finishing it with rhetorically persuasive and communicative ornament.<sup>10</sup> The Great Weirding erodes the boundaries of the mental models of thinking and feeling that *architectural* theory makes explicit. It requires respecting the truly mysterious nature of the universe by entertaining its “ontological uncertainty (such as ghosts and time travel),” rejecting the possibility of grounding.<sup>11</sup> It makes architectural theory impossible by unleashing the possibility of the impossible itself. We are, indeed, all architects now, but without recourse to any coherent theory. There is an antidote: “When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.”<sup>12</sup> Rao prescribes regular practice: “crash early, crash often.”<sup>13</sup> By periodically overdosing on red pill revelations, you can dismantle your sacred priors into an unsentimental revolving door of weakly held beliefs no longer fragile to revolutions of the Truth. Pros don’t speak truth to power, they “speak weirdness to truth.”<sup>14</sup>

Rao’s medicine requires denying architecture: “What C. [Northcote] Parkinson said about the architecture of buildings and organizations applies equally to the architecture of minds: ‘... a perfection of planned layout is achieved only by institutions on the point of collapse.’”<sup>15</sup> Le Corbusier was right; it is “architecture or revolution,” but in times of weirdness, choose the latter.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida’s Haunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Rao, “Speak Weirdness to Truth.”

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Venkatesh Rao, “Crash Early, Crash Often,” *Ribbonfarm*, July 13, 2017, <https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2017/07/13/crash-early-crash-often>.

<sup>14</sup> Rao, “Speak Weirdness to Truth.”

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (1923; Mineola, NY: Dover, 1986), p. 267.

The Great Weirding, then, means architecture is in need of a revolution. This is what the parable of Bilbao offers. Twenty years on and for those unyoked by the Vitruvian Order, its lesson is coming into view. The measurable effects of the building require no manufactured witnesses, no fake news. A hammer doesn't need a narrative to hit a nail. In the words of chaos magic founder Peter Carroll, "Magic works in practice, not in theory."<sup>17</sup> Bilbao rendered Vitruvian theory obsolete by leaving architecture bare, accessible to all, through its widely perceptible effects.

Cargocult campaigns to tame it into the field continue to this day. A series of exhibitions and books recently sought to write Bilbao into the prehistory of digital architecture, the Cargoculting hand of historiography muffling its effects in favor of fetishizing their purported cause.<sup>18</sup> But effective architecture resists normalization. It is irreducibly weird.

When Isaac Newton's alchemical papers—which outnumbered his properly scientific endeavors—were made public in the 1930s, the first scientist was reclassified as the last magician. As the Great Weirding pushes the Overton window of reality interpretation into the fringes of ontological uncertainty, the Bilbao effect will likewise no longer be christened the apotheosis of modernism but the beginning of its demise. A new generation of commentators free of the taboos of puritanical Vitruvian prudishness will see it as architecture beginning to speak weirdness to truth again.

The liquification of truth by weirdness at the end of the twentieth century was already Charles Fort's basic assumption at its beginning. Half a century before Thomas Kuhn and Michel Foucault codified postmodern historiography as epistemological evolution, Fort prophesied that the same mutability would be extended to the ontological. More than

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<sup>17</sup> Michael M. Hughes, *Magic for the Resistance: Rituals and Spells for Change* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2018), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> See, in particular, *Archaeology of the Digital*, curated by Greg Lynn at the Canadian Centre for Architecture



tumbling paradigms within the Enlightenment doctrine of scientific materialism, Fort suggested science itself was just a metaparadigm, a “dominant” perspective through which all of reality was perceived. And clipped. And just as science eclipsed religion, so would science itself be replaced by a wider perspective. He called it the Dominant of Wider Inclusions.<sup>19</sup> Or Witchcraft.

Fort spent a lifetime indexing reports of the “damned facts”—poltergeist effects, ghost sightings, reports of frogs raining from the sky, formations of unidentified flying bodies, all manically scribbled on finely catalogued paper scraps—that show our microscopes and telescopes are trapped in Flatland. Truth really is stranger than fiction, and we have little business in writing either. Once we finally shed the materialist dogma of science, we will begin to build models that leave space for other forms of intelligent agency that do not have to play by the same rules.

At the other end of weirdness waits the “wyrd.” Weird is wyrd—its medieval root—stripped of its pre-Enlightenment fairies and demons. Making sense of their return today requires resurfacing old language. If the Great Weirding is when the normalcy field gives up and basic reality leaks through our abstractions, then the Great Wyrding is when so many damned facts add up that neither the basic premises of science nor the censorship of religion can claim ontological and epistemological authority over everyday experience. It’s when occultation is foiled as the gods return with their cargo.

The evidence for their arrival is already becoming plain in the betrayal of materialism on its own home turf, theoretical physics. Juan Maldacena’s 1997 paper on the AdS/CFT Correspondence, an intersection of theories that reduced three-dimensional space to

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Fort, *The Book of the Damned* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919).

two-dimensional quantum calculus, was the first blow.<sup>20</sup> Two decades of unpacking it have sacrificed Albert Einstein's baby—relativity, the idea that light determines the speed limit of the universe—to his bastard—entanglement, the spooky action at a distance that Einstein discovered but disowned, as it required information to outpace light. Under the newly emerging regime, spacetime itself is shown to be an emergent quality of entanglement. Location is born of nonlocality.

Maldacena's breakthrough is called the "holographic principle." Understanding it requires stuffing the entire universe into a new metaphor. Or, rather, normalizing it into a different old metaphor. Instead of a Big Bang, physical dynamics may be better predicted if we consider our universe as the event horizon of an ever-expanding black hole.<sup>21</sup> Instead of tiny billiard balls driving the probabilistic gears of a miniaturized mechanism that explodes into a macroscopic cosmos of rocks and plants and animals and planets, think of the universe as a two-dimensional soup of more-or-less chaotic—that is, ordered—geometrical information that we experience as three-dimensional space evolving over unidirectional time. In Flatland, the machine is a ghost. Space, time, and even gravity are all phantoms.

Physicists have always been professional weirdos, but the bleeding edge of their discipline is now cutting into the esoteric doctrines they thought they left behind when Newton's alchemical notebooks went into hiding. The doors are now open to perceiving new forms of wave-particle weirdness. Dean Radin has been on the case since the 1970s.

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<sup>20</sup> Juan Maldacena, "The Large N Limit of Superconformal Field Theories and Supergravity," *International Journal of Theoretical Physics* 38, no. 4 (April 1999), pp 1113–33 (submitted to arXiv.org on November 27, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> See Erik Verlinde, "Emergent Gravity and the Dark Universe," *SciPost Physics* 2, 016 (May 16, 2017).

After working at the Stanford Research Institute, Radin has led multiple labs investigating paranormal phenomena like telepathy—unspoken communication at a distance—and psychokinesis—moving matter with the mind—collectively known as psi. He began with the classic double-slit experiment, which still defies common sense. Firing a beam of light through two proximate slits in an otherwise impenetrable metallic foil onto a photographic plate produces either the image of a machine-gun fire of atomized particles or a continuous stream of waves, depending on whether or not a conscious observer is there to watch. Turning it upside down and inside out to get a better handle on what was meant by observer and what was meant by conscious, Radin moved the human element into an adjacent room, then down the hall, then dislocated the observer around the world through the Internet. The result persisted: mind moves matter.

Consciousness effects.

Radin alone is just a single data point, hardly enough weight to break the back of science. But recently declassified CIA reports describing what he worked on in the 1970s increases the pressure: Stanford Research Institute was the epicenter of the highly covert US military program for remote viewing.<sup>22</sup> Under threat of thermonuclear retaliation, Cold War generals spent tens of millions of dollars and multiple decades employing psychics, then training their own, to see in a way no one could believe, rolling their consciousness out of their bodies and into enemy territory to run invisible reconnaissance. It was certainly woo woo, but it worked. The Soviets and Chinese did it too.

After he left the military, Radin set out to kill scientific dogma with the scientific method, moving on from the double-slit experiment to voodoo dolls and Buddhist blessings,

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<sup>22</sup> Annie Jacobsen, *Phenomena: The Secret History of the U.S. Government's Investigations into Extrasensory Perception and Psychokinesis* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017).

tabulated in double- and triple-blind statistically significant and often repeated trials. He recently summarized forty-odd years of psi proofs into three categories of subtle but incontestable effects that materialism cannot normalize: force of will, divination, and theurgy.<sup>23</sup> Comprising action at a distance, sensing across space and time, and communing with disembodied entities, Radin's work describes the fundamentals of "real magic" that present themselves to a scientist not bound to the idea that matter itself is fundamental. Beneath the veneer of the spacetime shadows on the wall, we all carry concealed weapons of wyrdness, whether we know it or not.

This real magic is precisely what the Vitruvian Order leaned on for legitimacy while simultaneously cleansing it from the history of architecture by flooding it with metaphor. But if literal magic is demonstrably real, then we have to completely rewrite the history of architecture. Radin suggests beginning with Aldous Huxley's enumeration of the perennial—that is, trans-Vitruvian—philosophy: consciousness is fundamental, all is interconnected, there is only one consciousness.<sup>24</sup>

If Radin is attempting to smuggle Huxley in through the back door of mass culture, Michael Pollan, a guardian of its gates, has ushered him through the front. *How to Change Your Mind*, his new book on psychedelics, is as much a trove of lucid information as it is a symbol of the rebirth of a countercultural consciousness fetish into the mainstream.<sup>25</sup> Pollan chronicles scientists who have rediscovered overwhelming proof that heroic doses of LSD and magic mushrooms are a miracle cure for psychological disorders like depression, addiction, and anxiety, long ago abandoned to the moral panic

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<sup>23</sup> Dean Radin, *Real Magic: Ancient Wisdom, Modern Science, and a Guide to the Secret Power of the Universe* (New York: Harmony, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (New York: Penguin, 2018).

that came after Timothy Leary's long-haired mantra of turning on, tuning in, and dropping out fell flat. The stigma subsided, these scientists have rebooted psychedelics pioneer Stanislav Grof's program to use the molecules as a microscope to study the mind.

Paired with advances in neurochemistry—a field inspired by LSD, as Pollan reports—researchers can now peer into tripping brains with neuroimaging. They are finding that Leary's slogan was half right: the mystical experiences summoned by these chemicals tune brains in, but do so by turning them off. Parts of them, at least. The default mode network that directs the traffic of the brain dissolves with the ego it is responsible for nurturing as the psychonaut blasts off into inner space. Huxley had articulated their findings already in the 1950s: the brain is not a consciousness producer, it is a consciousness reducer. Our field of awareness increases as our brain activity decreases.

The full weirdness of contemporary consciousness research extends beyond the brain on drugs. Penny Sartori's recent work on near death experiences<sup>26</sup> and the legacy of Ian Stevenson's two-volume two-thousand-page 1997 opus, *Reincarnation and Biology*,<sup>27</sup> offer similarly hard proof that consciousness persists even when the nervous system responsible for embodying it does not. If consciousness is both irreducible and transcendent, then free of anthropocentric hubris we must assume it has a life of its own.

Or, as the psychedelic science suggests, minds to own. If our bodies are consciousness antennas, then the ego chooses the channel. Once you kill the ego, the channel chooses

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<sup>26</sup> Penny Sartori, *The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences: How Understanding NDEs Can Help Us Live More Fully* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Ian Stevenson, *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997).

you. You become a channeler, the medium for someone else's message. In Jungian terms, "people don't have thoughts; thoughts have people."<sup>28</sup>

As we learned in 2009, Carl Jung made his own private trip reports, painting the recurrent scenes he saw in deep meditation for over fifteen years.<sup>29</sup> Confronted with unnervingly similar iconography in alchemical treatises, he discovered his imaginings were not unique. The figures that came to him were archetypal, not personal. Consciousness, it appeared, was collective.

The process was crucial to the revelation. Journaling makes memories of dreams more vivid and accessible to normal states. It lets us bring back souvenirs for critical examination in a generic form of what Rem Koolhaas described as the Paranoid Critical Method.<sup>30</sup> Philosophers call it contemplation.

Josef Pieper's summary hints at the weirdness of this fundamental practice: "Like the contemplative self-immersion in Being, and the ability to uplift one's spirits in festivity, the power to be at leisure is the power to step beyond the working world and win contact with those superhuman, life-giving forces."<sup>31</sup> Jacques Vallée's interpretation of the UFO phenomenon affirms it. His decades of research led to the idea that seemingly superhuman contact may be part of a cosmic control system nudging along our collective evolution.<sup>32\*</sup> Contemplation is just the voluntary side of a two-way street. Sometimes we transcend the material to tap into it; other times it transcends the immaterial to tap into us.

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<sup>28</sup> M Czerna, "Jordan Peterson: Jung (Depth Psychology)," YouTube, February 16, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Carl Jung, *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, trans. Sonu Shamdasani and Mark Kyburz (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1978).

<sup>31</sup> Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (1948; Carmen, IN: Liberty Fund, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Vallée, *UFOs: The Psychic Solution* (Herts, UK: Panther Books, 1977).

\* An earlier version of this essay incorrectly stated that Vallée's research was military-funded. The author apologizes for this mischaracterization.

Comparing the accounts of abductees and mass UFO sighting observers with the mystical accounts of the instigators of the great religions, adventurous academics like Jeffrey Kripal have found a striking consistency to support this theory. The grand narratives that structure entire cultures may be downloads. This does not make UFOs any less real. Kripal's idea of a "mythical object" completes the Jungian circuit: "I mean a thing that is also a thought. I mean a friggin' story that shows up on radar."<sup>33</sup> US military radar inclusive, if you read the *New York Times*.<sup>34</sup>

If metaphors can *normalize* technological innovation, then inventions and basic stories that inflect history can *paranormalize* encounters with the anomalous. In the *Dominant of Wider Inclusions*, paranormalization itself becomes normal. As it does, materialism begins to look weird.

The erasure of materialist taboos unveils the puritanical whitewashing of the deep past, deoculting the pre-Vitruvian world. Scholars now increasingly admit that our ancestors accelerated their own heroic journeys with the same heroic doses scientists are beginning to understand. "The Greeks and Romans used opium, anticholinergics, and numerous botanical toxins to induce states of mental euphoria, create hallucinations, and alter their own consciousness; this is an indisputable fact."<sup>35</sup> Cold-fool powder was preferred in ancient China; ancient Egyptians favored the psychoactive blue lotus; Americans continue to use ayahuasca and magic mushrooms.

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<sup>33</sup> Whitley Strieber and Jeffrey Kripal, *The Super Natural: Why the Unexplained is Real* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2016), p. 304.

<sup>34</sup> Helene Cooper, Ralph Blumenthal, and Leslie Kean, "Glowing Auras and 'Black Money': The Pentagon's Mysterious U.F.O. Program," *New York Times*, December 16, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> D. C. A. Hillman, *The Chemical Muse: Drug Use and the Roots of Western Civilization* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2008), p. 87.

Pollan is blatant: “[t]here is not a culture on Earth that doesn’t make use of certain plants to change the contents of the mind.”<sup>36</sup> Gordon White is more evocative: “Twenty thousand years of coming up on mushrooms under a canopy of stars undimmed by light pollution, industry or high atmospheric moisture can only have generated a profound and complex cosmology.”<sup>37</sup> It is the architecture of this cosmology that was Cargocultured by the Vitruvian Order. It is magicians like White who are finally unmasking it.

If Ribbonfarm is the theoretical frontier for the Great Weirding, White’s independent online empire, Rune Soup, is the Alexandrian Library of the Great Wyrding. Many of the names and ideas above have appeared on his weekly podcast, while his regular lectures and quarterly online magic classes massage the damndest facts of contemporary science into a history and metaphysics required to jailbreak these ancient practices from the grip of Cargocultation.

White’s recent book, *Star.Ships*, uses magical technology as a time machine to speculate on a “prehistory of the spirits.”<sup>38</sup> Tracking the distribution of DNA, linguistic complexity, mythological mythemes, and other cultural motifs alongside the archaeological record, White’s story locates the yeast culture of Western civilization in the pre-flooded plains of what became Island Southeast Asia. Out of Sundaland—the continent drowned by cosmic catastrophe that brought the mythologically preserved but nonetheless historical Great Flood now thought to have ended the Ice Age<sup>39</sup>—multiple waves of a by-all-accounts Atlantean civilization subsequently flooded the world with their advanced magical technology of shamanism, psychedelics, symbolic communication, and open-

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<sup>36</sup> Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*, p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon White, *Star.Ships: A Prehistory of the Spirits* (London: Scarlett Imprint, 2016), p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> “Research suggests toward end of Ice Age, humans witness fires larger than dinosaur killer, thanks to a cosmic impact,” *Phys.org*, February 1, 2018



water navigation, all packed into the mnemonic device of star lore. Henceforth, call it Westward Civ.

Between the lines of White's narrative lies an accidental architecture treatise untouched by the Cargocult. Numerologically significant Harappan brick counts in the Indus Valley, the consistency of the "megalithic yard" used to size the stone monuments of the British Isles, and the astronomically aligned and meticulously engraved stone circles appearing in Anatolia right around the time of the Great Flood only get us to the doorstep of Egypt. It is here that state-sponsored shamanism brought magic to its architectural apotheosis in the pyramids and temples that the Vitruvian Order dissolved into mere eye candy. It has taken another 1997 event of starchitecture to reanimate them.

Discovered and disinterred beginning in the 1970s, the sandswept megalithic circles of Nabta Playa, a few hundred kilometers west of the Nile, were found to coexist with radiocarbon evidence almost as old as the Ice Age, roughly 10,000 BCE. Following the 1997 discovery that the stones had basic astronomical alignments, civil engineer and self-taught Egyptologist Robert Bauval and former NASA engineer Thomas Brophy set off to meticulously reverse engineer their complexities. What they found was a key to unlock the cosmological architecture of Old Kingdom Egypt, as the desert megaliths tracked the same stars as the first pyramid.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond equinoctial and cardinal alignments, they found an obsession with a single star at the end of the Big Dipper, a constellation coordinated with the earliest Egyptian pharaonic cosmology. Revolving around the Northern night sky that never sets into the Egyptian underworld of death and rebirth, such stars are known as "imperishable," emblematic of the pharaohs who do not die but are reincarnated by their predecessors.

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<sup>40</sup> Bauval, Robert and Thomas Brophy, *Imhotep the African: Architect of the Cosmos* (San Francisco: Disinformation), 2013.

They found the same astral obsession in the specific alignments of the step pyramid of Saqqara, most fascinatingly in the *serdab*, a life-sized statue of the pharaoh Netjerykhet that sat along the north face of the structure punctured by two holes at eye level eternally spying the same star as the desert megaliths. No wonder its architect, the high priest Imhotep, was also known as "Chief of the Observers." Despite the objections of incorrigible academics who maintain flimsy tomb theories, the pyramids were almost certainly built as resurrection machines for returning the spirit of dead kings to their undying astral homes. They were interstellar consciousness cannons.

Pollan appears to describe the Pharaoh's journey when relaying the quintessential trip on "the Everest of psychedelics," 5-MeO DMT: "I was shot out into an infinite realm of pure being . . . I didn't know what infinity was before this. But it was a two-dimensional realm, not three, and after the rush of liftoff, I found myself installed in this infinite space as a star."<sup>41</sup>

So, just as the rebirth of starchitecture in Bilbao attracted the automatic ire of Vitruvians, nonarchitects may have deciphered the occulted evidence that architecture has always been stellar. On both fronts, by 1997 it became undeniable that starchitecture is precisely what has always been intractable to the Order.

Iconic form and celebrity worship are just a distraction. Real starchitecture, *all* starchitecture, complements set and substance with the setting for ritual attunement with sources of cultural innovation. The subjects of starchitecture don't dwell, they travel. Starchitecture makes UFOs of minds. In a twist of Arthur C. Clarke's famous third law, it reveals that many sufficiently advanced technologies are surrogates for forgotten magic. While the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was contemporaneous with the first cloned

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<sup>41</sup> Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*, p. 275.

mammal, Dolly, and the first artificial intelligence to beat a grandmaster at chess, Deep Blue, what the Order misses is that it has more in common with another gift of 1997, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Starchitecture is a magical technology for altering the consciousness of masses.

As Gehry's design, process, and product have been progressively shoveled into the pit of "digital archaeology," the real story of starchitecture has ironically expanded in space and time. An astronomically aligned pyramid dating back around 25,000 years has been found in Indonesia, while the once laughable field of astrobiology has slipped the ideas of cosmogenesis—the extraterrestrial origins of life—and exo-evolution—space-born extremophilic bacteria, fungi, and retroviruses mixing with our terrestrial ecosystems and genetic codes—into the scientific mainstream. For the latter, UFOs were not the big disclosure of 2017, it was 'Oumuamua, the cigar-shaped interstellar visitor that may not be a mechanical alien spaceship but is certainly covered in organic matter.<sup>42</sup> As White calls it: "Heads it's aliens, tails it's aliens."<sup>43</sup>

This is all to say that the days of the Vitruvian Order are numbered.

Chaos and magic have infected every aspect of a world terrorized by President Trump. The self-described best student of Reverend Norman Vincent Peale's normie-magic school of positive thinking was also the chosen candidate of the Cult of Kek, the alt-right coalition of young meme magicians, and now of the QAnon conspiracy movement. With hipster conjurers and Lana Del Rey hexing them all through social media, a millennial war

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<sup>42</sup> "Alien Object 'Oumuamua Was a Natural Body Visiting from Another Solar System," *Phys.org*, December 18, 2017, <https://phys.org/news/2017-12-alien-oumuama-natural-body-solar.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Rune Soup podcast, "Talking Panspermia with Dr. Chandra Wickramasinghe" (January 2018), <https://runesoup.com/2018/01/talking-panspermia-with-dr-chandra-wickramasinghe>.

of witches has broken out across America. As the mic-dropping final issue of the always divinatory K-Hole whitepapers asserted on behalf of its generation, "we need magic."<sup>44</sup>

The exhibition *Architecture Effects* presents works sufficiently haunted by the building that harbors them to deliver precisely the magic we now need. They revisit a pre-Vitruvian language of form and bear the scars of modernist neglect. They hold the space for tuning up the deep self and cut the electromagnetic noise for tuning into the psychic signal. They remind us of luxury in dying, and like Daedalus, the archetypal Greek architect, they inspirit the inanimate, allowing it to speak for itself in a way that challenges the very idea of a voice. Together they evidence a cultural transformation that will live up to the standard of starchitecture.

Bilbao didn't just open Pandora's Box; it left it open long enough for hope to slip out. As the Vitruvian Order dies off and the enchanted begin to outnumber the encumbered, an old wave of architecture will be reborn with all the toys of the contemporary world. Its effects will be special.

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<sup>44</sup> K-Hole, "K-Hole #5: A Report on Doubt," 2016, <http://khole.net/issues/05>.