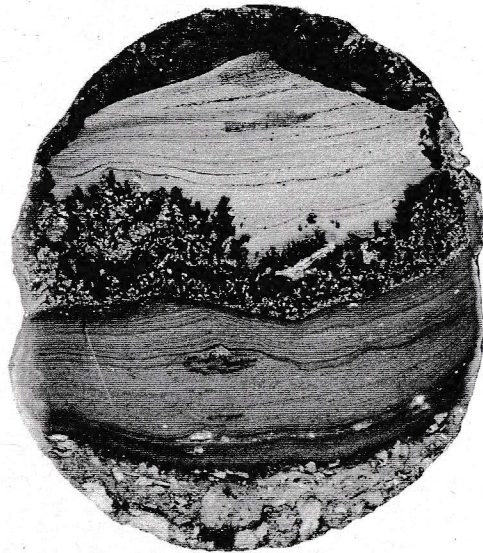


from **KISSING ARCHITECTURE** (2011)

by Syvlia Lavin

proposed by Laura Hermann



"Peak," Landscape agate (Mexico 92x80mm)

A kiss has been many things in many places. In the seventeenth century, Martin von Kempe wrote more than a thousand pages on kissing. But even von Kempe could never have imagined that kissing would serve as a theory of architecture. The kiss offers to architecture, a field that in its traditional forms has been committed to permanence and mastery, not merely the obvious allure of sensuality but also a set of qualities that architecture has long resisted: ephemerality and consilience. However long or short, however socially constrained or erotically desiring, a kiss is the coming together of two similar but not identical surfaces, surfaces that soften, flex, and deform when in contact, a performance of temporary singularities, a union of bedazzling convergence and identification during which separation is inconceivable yet inevitable. Kissing confounds the division between two bodies, temporarily creating new definitions of threshold that operate through suction and slippage rather than delimitation and boundary. A kiss puts form into slow and stretchy motion, loosening form's fixity and relaxing its gestalt unities. Kissing performs topological inversions, renders geometry fluid, relies on the atectonic structural prowess of the tongue, and updates the metric of time. Kissing is a lovely way to describe a contemporary architectural performance.

Kissing is also a gentle way to say goodbye to an old architectural drama in which architecture is inevitably cast as a tragic figure, sometimes victim sometimes villain but always closer to failure than to success. While architecture's sense of disciplinary inferiority ultimately derives from the antique pyramid of expression that placed language and poetry at its lofty apex and building down amid the mud and toil of the ground, architecture's Sisyphean effort to achieve elevation only became more futile with the development of modern capitalism on the one hand (to which architecture is inevitably attached) and avant-garde strategies of opposition on the other (to which architecture is attached not inevita-

bly but by desire). Architecture's original sin was that it could not tell stories in the manner of poetry and painting, although it has certainly tried, offering up such gestures of atonement as *architecture parlante* and postmodernism. Abstraction solved that problem, because by at least the nineteenth century, painting and all the typically figurative and narrative forms, from graphic design to the novel, were no longer interested in telling stories, and therefore the promise of parity between architecture and the other arts seemed almost in reach. But the very abstraction that made it possible for painting to define itself no longer in terms of the literal content of its images also made it possible for capital to seemingly float free from the literal labor of its production — capital that most obviously, more obviously than in painting, was needed by architects to build. Different mediums understood and exploited the apparent freedom of this world (which Marxism called the superstructure) in different ways, but for architecture this fantasy freedom became just another source of envy and a new form of cultural privilege — the glorious stance of the rejecting, angry avant-gardist in need of nothing but a paintbrush — to which it did not have access. Consider this irony: abstract expressionism is historically coincident with the invention of corporate architecture.

One important strain in contemporary architectural discourse is defined by the net result of these convergent histories of capital and culture. Today the discipline is crippled by a futile debate between those who hold that architecture has failed to establish autonomy and those who contend that architecture has failed to develop adequate means of engagement. During the past thirty years, some have even argued that architecture's most important social role is to reveal and repeat this symptomatic hopelessness. As a result, the field has generated a plethora of responses to this double bind, referred to variously as postmodernism, deconstruction, or the neo-avant-garde, that have in common the pursuit of devices for admitting, articulating, describing, mapping, and representing architecture's cultural paralysis. Today, I would say at last, this disciplinary Tourette's syndrome, where suddenly and even in the face of tremendous productivity architecture still blurts out a sense of shame, is starting to be understood as self-imposed and more likely to prolong paralysis than move the discipline further. It is precisely release from

architecture's suspended state of repeated mea culpas that kissing offers.

Andy Warhol once wryly remarked, "Two people kissing always look like fish". Now, however much Elmo the Muppet loved his pet goldfish, fish are not generally known for returning such affection. To turn kissers into fish is therefore to call into question not only the romantic tradition of the kiss as expression of love but of the kiss as expression of any traditional set of emotions. Warhol's comment does not eliminate the force of kissing, as he ascribes to it an utterly transforming capacity — it takes a lot of something to turn a person into a fish — but it does interrupt the chain of signification into which kissing is historically locked. "Two people kissing always look like a fish" makes it possible to argue that kissing does not *a priori* signify a particular set of emotions but rather produces sensation and affect that are subsequently named *a posteriori* and variously by culture, language, and disciplines.

Warhol's comment had to be about fish. First, fish are cold-blooded and therefore a good species to use to evacuate feeling from flirting. Second, fish do not have faces. Sometimes, they even have both eyes on one side of their heads. It's hard to feel dreamy looking at a flounder staring at you from two adjacent globules, and a far cry from looking longingly at the big-eyed, small-nosed, pouty-lipped visage of, say, an overly catched Disney rodent. Kissing cold-blooded fish not only divorces the kiss from traditional notions of emotion, love, and death, but kissing gets in the way even of the language and apparatus we use when we do want to express such emotions. No one can speak when kissing. Kissing is distorting and obstructing to the mouth. In short, kissing interrupts how faces and facades communicate, substituting affect and force for representation and meaning.

If fish don't love you, they don't hate you either. Fish are not like the traditional psychoanalytic mother, of which it is said that there are two kinds, critical scolders and idealizing kissers. Even if alienating and deforming, kissing cannot be critical. A critical kiss is a bite, not a kiss. And kissers, whether or not they like each other, inevitably lack the separation needed for critical distance and opposition. Kissing fish are also not

like the Lacanian mother through whose gaze the infant's uncoordinated body becomes a legible face, because kissing aborts the regime of faciality in toto. In the middle of a kiss, there is inadequate space for any of the things that are needed for a face to appear as a face, and certainly no room for the mother's detached gaze to give the infant autonomy. Bringing architecture and kissing together is therefore not only to reconsider architecture's relation to other mediums but to think beyond prevailing modes of the critical. Because architecture has served long and well as a model of failure, disaster, and complicity, it now really deserves a kiss, needs to kiss, needs a theory of kissing.

WHISPERING

JG SAYS: "THE LANGUAGE OF LOVERS IS NOT WRITTEN DOWN, IT IS WHISPERED INTO THE EAR AT NIGHT IN A HOARSE VOICE."

TWICING

CLAD TEXT WITH ITS DOUBLE AT THE DISTANCE OF A LINE.

THAT IS, WHILE READING, SPEAK TWICE EACH LINE.

IN GROUPS OF 4-6, ONE READER EACH HER PARAGRAPH. LECTERN VOICES.

IF I DIE ON THE ROAD

IF ON THE ROAD I DIE

READING OUT LOUD & UNTOGETHERLY. GARDEN VOLUME.

BRACKETS

WHILE PARTNERED; LET PROXIMATE THE HAND TO HAND (BY BACKS). AT THE SOUND OF LIPPING PALMS, CHANGE SPEAKER.

NEGOTIATE THE PLAYING OF ROLES. SPEAKEASY VOICES.

STROBE

TEXT WITHDRAWS (COYLY).

READING OUT LOUD & TOGETHER. WITH CONTESTING DILATION AND QUIVER-PUPILS. ARCADE VOICES.

BACK TO BACK

SITTING BACK AGAINST BACK (NOT NECESSARILY SOLITUDE) AND READING IN ONE'S HEAD; IN THE STRANGE THICK OF READING BY ONE'S SELF.

PLEASE, PLEASE LEAVE AS YOU PLEASE