Architectural Work as Environment Making: Why Should Architects Acquire Tools Comprised by CDF, **t**he Constructive Developmental Framework?

Most professional practices are based on *expert* knowledge, thus rooted in logical or systems thinking. They are not only not talking to each other; they are also estranged from the social sciences, not to speak of bypassing social ontology. Like the empirical sciences, these practices establish closed systems for the sake of efficiency and control, just as commercial organizations do, and increasingly have come to be beholden to such organizations in the very way they operate and publicize results.

One might view this situation as an outcome of cultural inertia rooted in social forms established by those long dead, i.e., a predominance of social over cultural processes such that the latter are held in check by the former despite hotly advertised cultural 'change', leading to a situation where society reproduces, but never transforms, itself.

In people's thinking, such a situation leads to what M. Archer names *downward conflation* within the sociological equation of *Structure and Agency.* In downward conflationary thinking, human agency is viewed as not only constrained but determined by social structures, as well as by cultural structures sustaining the status quo. As a result, agency is bereft of its causal power to shape societal renewal. Acting from this mode of conceptualizing society, social agents' reflexivity and ability to develop their full (adult) emotional and cognitive potential is necessarily stifled.

Downward conflationary thinking, when practiced by a majority of people, has the further effect that technology and institutional and organizational logistics is able to reign supreme over interest in and capacity for developing human potential. The work people do, their 'Job 1', then tends to exclude their 'Job 2', of developing themselves as adults, a situation that has become the norm even at universities.

Thus, there is some justification for pessimism.

So far, the proposition that adult development over the lifespan -- which centers on gradually losing (one's) egocentricity (Piaget) -- ought to be seen and energized as a crucial factor of societal and cultural change has not yet had many takers. But for the reason that Agency is a causal power relative to Structure, that proposition ought to be well remembered.

In fact, viewed from the developmental sciences, especially their synthesis in CDF used by consultants and coaches, practitioners in organizations, institutions, and professions have begun to wake up to the importance of the Agency side of the sociological Structure vs. Agency equation, and thus also to the importance of their 'Job 2'.

The adult-developmental vantage point, especially when instrumented based on validated empirical data, as in CDF, helps direct attention to how professional egos are socially and culturally shaped, and how developmental interventions can gain a say in that shaping. CDF tools, once learned and made second nature, make it easier for professionals to withstand the suction of ideologically encrusted, closed-system practices, in whatever field of endeavor.

In short, on account of insights produced by the developmental sciences, a more equilibrated praxis regarding the Structure vs. Agency equation becomes possible.

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In his inaugural lecture upon assuming an architecture professorship at the ETH, professor Freek Persyn articulates new ideas that point in the direction here indicated. In this paper, I want to show that he is, in my understanding, groping for finding ways to position the field of architecture within what below I will call, with Bhaskar, the *Social Cube*. In addition. Dr. Persyn opens architectural reflection to dialectical thinking in the sense of Laske's Dialectical Thought Form Framework (DTF).

Initially, Dr. Persyn touches upon the mental constraints that keep architectural work confined to notions of pure design. He stresses the exclusion of social, cultural, epistemic, and psychological issues that being subject to such constraints entails. As he proceeds, he arrives at the conclusion that architectural work needs firmly to be put into a social context and furthermore emphasizes the social and cultural dialogues that successful architectural work presupposes.

In this way, he looks at what in cutting-edge (critical realism) sociology is referred to as the equation of 'Structure vs. Agency' from the point of view of a practicing architect, stressing the importance of antecedent social and cultural conditions of architectural work, on one hand, and the causal power of reflective human agency, on the other.

Emphasizing the relevance of antecedent physical and social structures that architects need to adapt to, Dr. Persyn sees it as a requirement to move, in one's thinking about architecture, from "design" to "environment making". This he does simultaneously with pleading for paying more attention to people's ways of dialoguing with each other, not only between professionals but between professionals and their clients.

He thereby indirectly touches upon what sociologist M. Archer has named people's 'internal conversations' on which conversations with others are based, and which she views as bridging Structure and Agency. As a result, Dr. Persyn comes close to the insight gained through the developmental sciences, that conversations with others are ultimately based on individuals' internal conversations. All that needs to be added to his views is to say that internal conversations have, as work with CDF shows, a discernable adult-developmental structure that one can learn to decode.
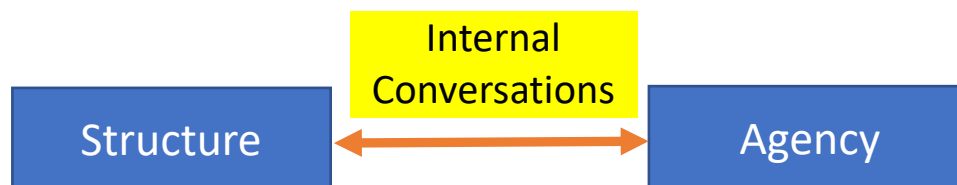

Fig. 1

Dr. Persyn also views architectural work as an expression of the causal power of humans' reasons for action that one finds in Roy Bhaskar's social ontology, saying:

> Design actions can be seen as interventions with a catalytic effect,
> creating leverage and impact. (Of the practitioner) this requires navigating
> back and forth between action and reflection in a continuous learning process.

He further imbues the notion of design with epistemic and social qualities of Agency when he writes about the collective nature of the design process as one of transformation:

> It (i.e., viewing design as a transformative process) is a challenge that
> can only be taken up if design is considered as a collective endeavor,
> in dialogue with others. It is about the positions you take as a designer,
> which are in part about the ability to collaborate.

From his vantage point,

> The integral perspective (on what architects do) starts when we not
> only look at patterns of space, but also start to include social and
> cultural patterns of practice, of dialogue, of collective problem-finding.

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In my sociological reading of Dr. Persyn's lecture, what he is trying to do is to put architectural practice and thinking into what in Bhaskar's social ontology is referred to as the *Social Cube*, shown below.

Bhaskar's Social Cube

1 Material Transactions with Nature

2 Social Interactions between People

3 Social and Cultural Structures preceding Human Agency

4 Social and Cultural Agents as Embodied Personalities ← Internal Conversations
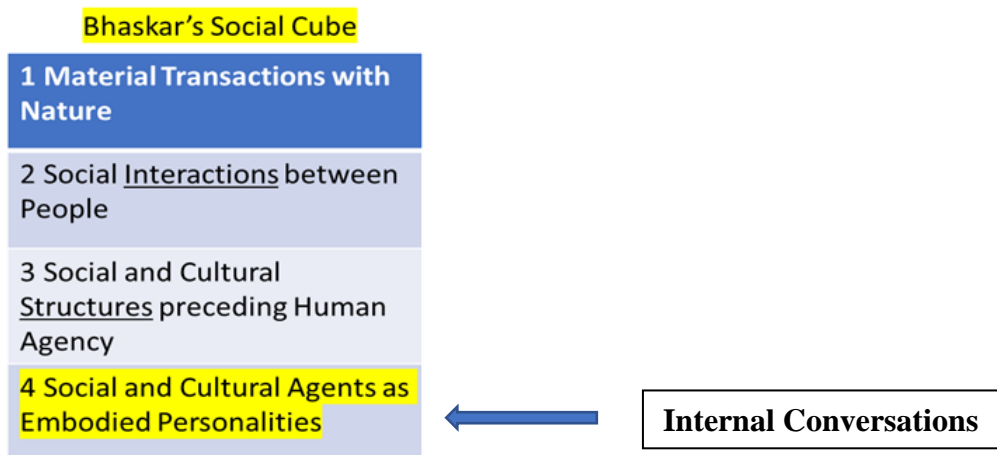
Fig. 2

The Cube consists of four mutually irreducible strata that – in their interactions -- are meant to capture how society works, with the prohibition to reduce the strata to each other so as to

safeguard their autonomy, thereby avoiding all kinds of conflation between Structure and Agency.

In his emphasis on dialogue, Dr. Persyn is, in my view, pointing to what is found at the Social Cube's Stratum 4 where (human) Agency is located, as a crucial ingredient of architectural work. At the same time, he emphasizes the need for a multi-perspectival perspective on architecture that encompasses both Strata 2 and 3 of the Social Cube (if not also Stratum 1, the reproduction of society itself in real time). It is here that he opens Architecture to society as an open system, and to agency as a causal power in its transformation.

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If understanding a social and cultural practice such as Architecture requires us to view that profession relative to a society as structured into four mutually irreducible strata whose transformations are strongly influenced by human agency -- then we should, as Dr. Persyn proposes, think of Design as social and cultural *Environment-Making,* and do so at the same time that we pay attention to the conversations between people, internal as well as external, that bridge Structure and Agency.
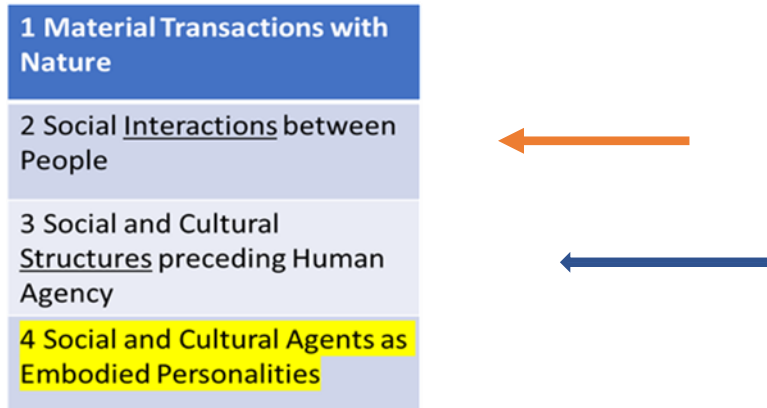
Doing so, we can ask: 'how is society not only reproducing but also transforming itself, given the interplay of the Social Cube's four strata, and in what way is architectural work a part of this unceasing transformative process by way of Environment Making?

And keeping in mind M. Archer's prohibition of conflating Structure and Agency (which amounts to bereaving both poles of their autonomy in their interaction with each other), we can then ask many new questions, both about architecture and society and people that do not artificially reduce the tension between Structure and Agency. Architecture as (mere) design then comes to be seen as one of those conflations brought about my human thinking in a misplaced effort to simplify social life.

What is more, we arrive at the conclusion that we need to think about Structure and Agency (and thus Architecture) *dialectically*, so that S&A are simultaneously kept as distinct as they are related, acting upon each other within a time delay in which what social (e.g., architectural) agents intend in reaction to antecedent social and cultural structures can analytically be separated from the – only gradually emerging -- unintended consequences of architectural (thus satisfying criteria of *dual analysis*).

When doing so, what moves to the foreground of attention are the processes that social agents engage in for the sake of 'remaking' social and cultural environments, which processes are located at Stratum 2 of the Social Cube.

Bhaskar's Social Cube

1 Material Transactions with Nature
2 Social <u>Interactions</u> between People
3 Social and Cultural <u>Structures</u> preceding Human Agency
4 Social and Cultural Agents as Embodied Personalities

When, in addition, we consider the antecedent social and cultural structures architects encounter when doing their work (Stratum 3), we achieve a *multi-perspectival* view of architecture. Architecture then appears as a manifestation of human agency (Stratum 4) that, when exerting its causal power, encounters, in the social interactions it engages in and fosters (Stratum 2), antecedent social and cultural structures that it both responds to and, with a time delay, alters.

This multi-perspectival (and potentially dialectical) view then leads one to say, as does Dr. Persyn:

> design is a collective endeavor, (happening) in dialogue with others,

with the further conclusion that it is a practice

> that not only relates to and integrates the work of several technical and engineering
> disciplines, but also operates as a social practice that
> consciously works together with other humanist practices: community
> facilitators, organizational coaches, artists and cultural workers, historians
> and ethnographers, social and political scientists.

A comprehensive concept of architectural work from the purview of social ontology, as implied by Dr. Persyn, leads to a statement like this:

> It (i.e., a multi-perspective view of architecture) helps to turn the practice
> of urban transformation into a more process-oriented discipline that actively builds on the
> social sciences to construct a design, proactively becoming sensitive to the meanings that
> emerge along the way.

What is implied by the term 'meaning' here can be further elaborated when we explicate Stratum 4 of the Social Cube (human agency) as made possible by CDF, the Constructive Developmental Framework.

Using CDF, we can take a multi-perspectival view of human agency itself, to understand more deeply its 'reasons for action' as causal factors forthcoming from its *internal conversations* by

which Structure and Agency are bridged, including the use of *thought-form dialectic*s at the cognitive stratum, as shown in Fig. 3, below.
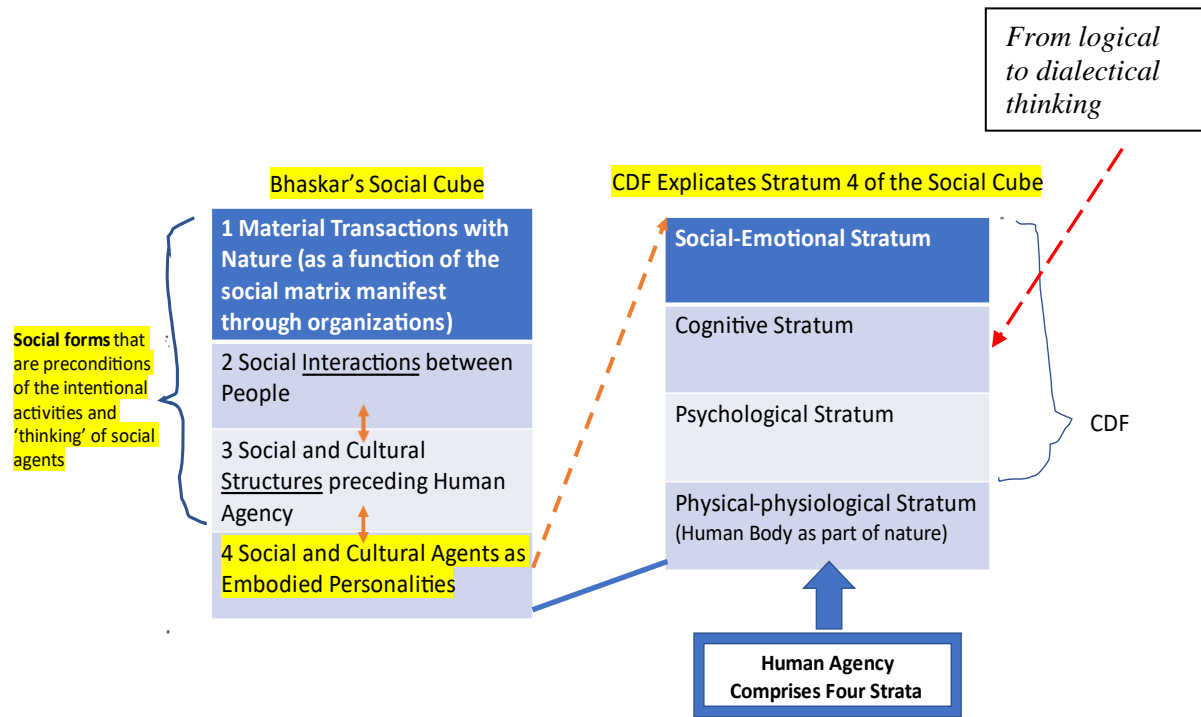

Fig. 3

Turning architectural design into a more 'process-oriented' discipline equates, ontologically speaking, to searching for deeper insights into, and more effective tools for engaging, human agency.

In viewing human agency developmentally, and boosting it by using developmental tools provided by CDF, professional practitioners acquire a big picture of the following three dimensions of social actors on Stratum 4 of the Social Cube:

1. social-emotional meaning making (ED)
2. cognitive sense making (CD)
3. psychological profile (e.g., at work; NP or 'Need/Press')

Taken together, these three profiles lead one to understanding the Reasons for Action (RsfA) which, according to Bhaskar, make agents' activities *intentional* and are constitutive of their causal power. In practical terms, they provide process consultants with the tools needed for undertaking effective organizational and institutional interventions.