

# Once Upon the Autonomy of Words

Vera Bühlmann

One exposes oneself when one makes,  
one imposes oneself when one unmakes.  
When one unmakes, one is never wrong, in effect.  
I know of no better way to always be right.

Michel Serres

What does it take to engage with words by way of interest in the experience they seek to convey—not the rationalised meaning they are said to grasp? From the reality of experience, our words seem to keep only what has been rationalised of the experienced richness they articulate.

By urging for an autonomy of words, I am not talking about an autonomy of the aesthetic, which we are all too well used to position and reserve ‘there’, there on the other side to reason, intellection, and rationality. I would like to talk about an autonomy of words, which is to say I wish to speak of the silence which words make graspable. It is a kind of silence that is capable of giving birth to experience, and the thought I want to ponder is that this silence is constituted intellectually, architectonically. I am interested in a kind of autonomy that cannot be positioned against something, an autonomy where affirmation, as a certain kind of surrendering, sets itself, and the thing to which it surrenders, free. This sounds paradoxical, but if given the scope of passing time that affects the experience of a thesis that seems, on first impression, imponderable, in such a scope of passing time

within which multiple encounters are possible without stopping at an integral summation, paradoxes can very well be reasoned. It is just impossible to reason them exhaustively. Who would deny that even formulated paradoxes convey meaning in some way? Nevertheless, engaging with the autonomy of words is not something one can 'try out', one needs to *act in surrender* to it. As such, as an act, surrender is whole and real or it is not at all. We need to surrender to the words which we have, and to those which we don't have—not only those of which we accept that they do or might well exist even if oneself does not live with them, does not hear their talks in one's thoughts, but also to those of which we find it hard to grant even this. The words of a language can always say 'it' all, they are not right or wrong—they *can*. They are of a sensible and intelligible *puissance* that is intransitive, like the action which we are used to grant to certain verbs only, as *to snow*, or *to rain*, or *to exist*. Intransitive words are impertinent, they manifest a leaky kind of withholding power.

What does it take to engage with words by way of interest in the actual experience they are capable of conveying, and how to think about the domain of 'experience'? Where can experience 'live'? Where does one find oneself, when the act of surrendering to the autonomy of words sets us free, in a manner we all know well from things of which we say that we *know about them from experience*, that is intuitively and positively but not fully rationalised, without knowing how to convey it adequately?

To surrender must be an act, it cannot be tried out. But this is only if we kept this act in the domain of pure time, where all this act can ever produce is consequences, something that follows from it, and hence is derivative to it. An act of surrender in time cannot provide emancipation, it inevitably yields subjugation. But can one think of an act of surrender in space? I don't mean in the theatre, on a stage, protected by an 'as if' in an unambiguous location. With autonomous words I am not talking about action words (verbs), I am talking about words standing still in the active space wherewithin action words take place and do what they do (have impact, affect things). In space, the act of surrender does not meet with consequences, it meets with contingencies. Literally speaking, from Latin *con-tingere*, an act of surrender in space is not being followed by anything that would originate in this act, rather it is being *touched upon by what has already been there*. It is a kind of emancipation that comes at the cost of paying the price of not laying claim to being 'original' and 'creative'. Asking for how one could think the act of surrender in space is asking if there can be a

*form* to the act, if there can be something impersonal about it. Can there be something general at work in an act? The motivic interest hereby is to prompt formally how something can be touched upon by what is already there. What follows is a chain of tropes, each seeking to grasp, through providing aspects of what such an act conveys, namely an unlikely kind of likelihood.

The following tropes are neither meant to be lyric nor prosaic, they are meant to accommodate communicatively, by conversing with one another in impertinent manner, through quantum entanglements between locality, globality, and generality as different abstract aspects of one and the same actuality—an actuality, as I imagine, where natural affairs of any sort have long been breeding, breathing, and inhabiting.

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Local. The Talk of Things in Statuesque Words  
(Words that Are Written)

How can one think  
how can one be in thinking,  
comprehended within  
an act of surrendering in space?  
One would have to listen  
exclusively,  
without picturing anything,  
to an act's actuality.

All would depend upon  
not being captivated  
by what the act's decidedness  
appears to entail in the countable time  
that one keeps in the imagination.

For one cannot see an act in space.  
Bare of time, the form of an act is pre-specific.  
And one can also not locate it,  
being pre-specific,

the form of an act is also pre-topical.

If one were to think the act of surrender in space

one needed to think the act's form.

Action words are of a magnitude of their own

they are not just passing in time.

What is the *sine qua non*—the pedestal—for an act in time

(namely to be whole and real, entirely decided, or not to be at all)

is precisely what *lacks for itself* what it is to give in space (namely support).

Can this lacking, this incapacity to support,

this impertinence proper to action as a magnitude,

be collected?

Is there a way to collect this leaking

in a kind of reservoir, within a mould,

for encyclopaedic, or perhaps better, entropic and lake-o-paedic

pre-topicalities and pre-specific subject matters?

A glyptothèque of statues,

standing stills of experience under water,

named by words only when speaking

in their silently autonomous terms,

each rendering presents something that has been,

is no longer and yet still lasts, 'here'—

leaking through the transparent and distortive plane

of a water surface that is never really entirely 'still'.

Encountering the autonomy of words does not make one capable of

*presenting* what they grasp. Surrendering to it means *giving them up*. It

means crossing a line. It means 'to deliver over', also 'to render', that

is, 'to give back' to the words what one thinks it is that they grasp and

keep through time. Respecting the autonomy of words is to give them

back what has always already been, apparently, their proper content.

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Global. The Cosmocratic Speech in a Quantum City

A form is what has autonomy  
all by itself.  
Forms know how to convert  
the necessary into a virtue.

This is why forms don't live in time.  
They articulate space by facilitating roundabouts,  
rotations, through which they project  
from the plenitude of time into space,  
by organising and containing  
something that is capable of ageing.

Forms breathe into extension what is about to take place.  
They contain massive tension  
by way of rendering it exterior and lasting,  
like words contain vibrating breath in an exterior manner  
by way of sounding and articulating this breath.

Can one perhaps think  
an act of surrender in space rather than in time  
through granting words decisiveness,  
a referential illustriousness,  
a formal kind of autonomy that is to be  
—by apparent paradox—entirely their own?

Can one engender through thinking  
instruments that are capable of sounding  
the domain of exteriority which words engender?  
By assuming it is the same domain of extension  
into which forms breathe their massive tensions,  
– can we sound the world in which words are real  
and silently live a ghastly life of their own?

What if only the autonomy of words,  
on condition of being credited, recognised,  
were capable of informing the act of surrendering in space,  
and thereby providing this act with an aspect of form  
that sets it free?

If there is formality to an act of surrender,  
then perhaps words can present themselves for the first time  
in a manner that can be *adequate* for words.  
They would be *anarchic* and yet *civic* acts—  
acts of building, not developing.

Architecture is where adequacy  
is always already coded cryptographically.  
Therefore adequacy here is always at once  
decisive as well as referential,  
and it is inexhaustible,  
the source as well as the means  
of all acceptable measures taken or given.

In time, an act cannot be tried out.  
It needs to happen or it is not.  
In space, an act cannot be anything else but a trial,  
because it must fulfil itself.

But what does it entail to say  
that an act is to fulfil itself in space  
in order to incarnate autonomy through time,  
rather than to realise itself fully in an immediate present?

If an act is to fulfil itself in space  
through articulating a void  
its subject needs to comprehend itself anew.

In space, an act is not followed by consequences,  
it is being touched upon by contingencies.  
It is facing up, not looking up,  
to the autonomy of the words which it surrenders to.

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## General. Architectonic Form, Action as a Magnitude

Architecture is *fulfilling*, paradoxically, through articulating voids. It articulates voids by conjugating an interplay between six words in a delicate balance, as if in the contrapposto pose of a statue—yet one that is lacking its pedestal, its elevated means of support. Let's say each of these six words here is not a statue but its inverse, and let's say that the inverse to a word is a concept (*ein Begriff*, in German). The six concepts then are algorithms that work upon data that constitute syntactically how a lively experience can be kept in memory. With its conjugated interplay, architecture strives to meet as well as it can an invariant and tripodic aim: namely to educate and temper the insatiably active (because consumptive as well as gratifying) fulfilment of three cryptic civic values: *utilitas*, *venustas*, and *firmitas*. These cryptic values become cryptographic articulations of cosmocratic speech that strives to be *adequate*, in singularly composite ways, to each particular building project. Those six concepts, which were put into the spotlight for the first time by Vitruvius (or so the legend goes), render aspects of an act in space. They are concepts and not words because they treat of the act in general. They are the following:

### *Eurythmia*

The building must be of rhythmical order,  
well proportioned.

Under this aspect, a building must relate four quantities  
in harmonious manner.

This aspect of the act gives *grace* to a building.  
Proportion is reasoned here  
in terms of harmonic means.

### *Ordinatio*

A building must translate  
the harmonic (*eurythmia*)  
to the geometric.

What this aspect of the act refers to  
arranges the rhythms  
of the harmonious proportioning  
in a constellation,

by indexing the rhythmic movements  
of an abstract order  
capable of expressing the constellation.

This aspect of the act *builds upon proportion*  
and it *results in symmetry*.  
Proportion is reasoned here  
in terms of arithmetic means.

#### *Dispositio*

How *ordinatio* and *eurythmia* in a building  
are to result in symmetry  
is to be pictured and planned  
in the disposition of a building's parts,  
by simulating its dimension.  
This aspect of the act that constitutes a building,  
listened to as an act of surrender in space  
is to give a building *elegance*,  
tastefulness and distinction.  
Proportion here is reasoned  
in terms of geometric means.

#### *Symmetria*

This aspect of the act consists in dimension.  
It incarnates the *ordinatio*,  
and also the *dispositio*, and *eurythmia* aspects of the act.  
By its results the act maintains itself in a delicate balance,  
a contrapposto pose with no support exterior to itself  
in the cryptic but rational  
*organisation* of all parts.

#### *Decorum*

This aspect of the act refers to the propriety of the symmetry,  
to how the incarnated cryptic rationale comports itself  
through the passing of time, autonomously.

Autonomously, that is to say  
either by keeping discretely with  
proportion considered as analogy  
either to nature as an organic whole  
or to the cosmos as an ordered whole.



The *comport* of itself by means  
of keeping discretely apart from  
but also with the temptingly promised  
continuity of an analogy  
is to respect by challenging forth  
the established customs and morals.

Such comporting of a building  
depends upon  
metaphysical gestures.

*Distributio*

This aspect of the act of surrender in space  
that constitutes the architectonics of a building  
is also called *oikonomia*.

It refers to a reasonable balance of costs and yieldings  
for the particular building project.

*Distributio* conjugates the domesticity of a building  
with its public persona, its visible face in the quantum city.

