

On the Power of the 'Non-Complete': Through Architectural Descriptions in Literature

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Abstract

Power, in architecture, is established by the preference for completion, stability, and unified objects and concepts. Reality, rather paradoxically, suggests partiality and discontinuity of space, experience, and conciseness. Unity, harmony, and finality compose the values according to which architecture is, traditionally, exercising its power. Fragmentary, ambiguity, ruin-ness, and infinity are referred to as *Non-complete* architecture. An architecture that sustains itself permanently in a *Non-Complete* state, neither a finished product, nor a complete disintegration, this condition is evaluated according to the power opportunities it can extract. In the paper we review descriptions of architecture in seminal examples of literature and evaluate them according to their *Non-Complete* attributes.

The paper opens with a discussion of the term *Non-Complete*, primarily in architecture; then proceeds to pointing out some relationship between architecture and literature. Following, the paper inspects works of literature by Franz Kafka for descriptions of space and architecture. The paper concludes with exploring the unique *Non-Complete* characteristics of descriptions of architecture in literature, and their power to both reconcile and resist. Reconcile realities paradoxical conflicts and tensions, and on the other hand the power to resist human nature to complete and accomplish. The paper evaluates the descriptions according to their power to sustain architecture in a state of constant becoming, a *Non-Complete* condition that neither rejects nor realize, exploring this as a special power to experiment, educate, and enhance creativity.

Keywords: Architecture, Kafka, *Non-Complete*

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Introduction

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Writers are enchanted by architecture, and architects are excited by literature. Writers that imagine and write of spaces and houses, feel the absence of the physical presence which they attempt to capture in the poetics of their writings. Architects imagine and build spaces and houses, feel the absence of a poetics which they attempt to capture within the physicality of the building. Architectural methodology focuses on building, but it draws upon other disciplines for inspiration and knowledge. In literature there are endless descriptions of the home, dwellings, the experience of living, architectural space, meaning of home, and the home as a metaphor. In literature there is importance for the description of the home as representing power, describing the architecture as stable, strong, protective, and complete. As such a home which is falling apart, detreating, a ruin, is coinciding with these traits in the individual, the family, or society. The Israeli researcher Nurit Guvrin Describes the structure and types of architectural distraction in literature, starting from the home sold, as representation of detachment from history and the past, up to the detreating house as a representation of moral and mental collapse of the person (Guvrin).

The paper opens with a discussion of the term *Non-Complete*, primarily in architecture; then proceeds to pointing out some relationship between architecture and literature. Following, the paper inspects works of literature by Franz Kafka for descriptions of space and architecture. The paper continues with exploring the unique *Non-Complete* characteristics of descriptions of architecture in literature, and their power to both reconcile and resist. Reconcile reality's paradoxical conflicts and tensions, and on the other hand the power to resist human nature to complete and accomplish. The paper evaluates the descriptions according to their power to sustain architecture in a state of constant becoming, a *Non-Complete* condition that neither rejects nor realizes. Exploring this as a special power to experiment, educate, and enhance creativity.

***Non-Complete* Architecture**

As the main aim of this paper revolves around the architectural descriptions in the writings of Kafka which are *Non-Complete* in nature, it is essential to begin with a brief explanation of the concept *Non-Complete* Architecture; in order to present the *Non-Complete*, a word about its counter force, the *Complete*, is called for. Architecture adopts a preference for completion, stability, and unified objects and concepts. Unity, harmony, and finality compose the values according to which architecture is measured. The tendency and the urge to create according to this value system, is referred to as the *Complete* (Bar-Eli, 2011). The idea of *Complete* is

fundamental in Western thought, it is so deeply inherent that it is directly assumed rather than proved. The fundamental notion that the whole has correspondence to the parts, and to the parts amongst themselves, and again to the whole can be traced back to early theoretical writings about architecture, such as those of Vitruvius, Palladio, and others (Wittkower, 1989, 1949). In Western thought, the tendency and preference for the *Complete* has remained central to this day in philosophy, science, and the arts.

However, architecture can suggest an opposing value system. Fragmentary, ruin-ness, and infinite – in this paper this value system is referred to as *Non-Complete*. The *Non-Complete* is not merely un-finished, but rather an effort in establishing itself in a permanent state of incompleteness. The core values of the *Non-Complete* are incompatible with the values of the *Complete*, such as centrality, unity, legitimacy of the centers of power and authority, and stability (Evans, 1995). The *Non-Complete* does not try to imitate nature or create a new firmness, but encourages a state of constant change, which opposes the possibility of achieving fulfillment or completion. The *Non-Complete* preserves its independence, without offering an end or a beginning, just constant change (Tschumi, 1996). The *Non-Complete* is partial, inconsistent, undone, variable, open-ended, unfinished, puzzling, and may be interpreted in a number of ways that differ from, and even contradict each other. The *Non-Complete* accepts the coincidental, the unfinished, the automatic, the unplanned, the random and the uncontrollable - as significant attributes. The *Non-Complete* accepts the unproven and the unknown as acceptable in the process of creation and thought. These attributes are celebrated, for example, in this poetic quote from the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa:

I've always felt that virtue lay in obtaining what was out of one's reach, in living where one is not, in being more alive after death than during life, in achieving something impossible, something absurd; in overcoming - like an obstacle - the world's very reality. (Pessoa, 2006)

Literature, by its nature, is free from the consequences of the built, yet it can portray the architectural object in a finite state, just as if it is built, all the while keeping it in a state of *Non-Completeness*, it has the ability to fix the object in a state of becoming; a forever pregnant moment. It opens-up an alternative way of evaluating, criticizing, and exploring architecture. The term *Complete* architecture hints toward the tendency of architectural endeavor to inject the built house with power, both in the sense of its physical stability and in the strength of its conceptual attributes. Reading through episodic literary examples, analyzed in the paper, it is noted that architecture is rather far away from this proposition. The descriptions of architecture propose it as a *Non-Complete* artifact that extracts its power not on positive terms but rather weak and minor traits. While these properties seem negative, they nevertheless propose a powerful influence by means of reconciliation, resistance, and educational experimentation in architecture. All contribute forcefully to architects ability to deeper understand the object of their profession and tune into the process of design with greater humility and respect.

Kafka – *Non-Complete* approach

So much was written about Kafka that there is always a sense that everything was already written or said, yet it is almost a duty to re-ask the questions again and join the discourse with your own reinterpretation. Reading through Kafka always conjures up a surrealistic feel, a strange atmosphere that been described as not-connected. Yet the descriptions are almost always realistic and familiar in an awkward way (Kwinter, 2011). Kafka's attitude toward life, as implied from his biography and his writings, is described as 'distancing', 'distancing' from power in all its manifestations: authority, commitment, religion, and most obviously father figure. The architecture researcher Sanford Kwinter writes:

Kafka most certainly did not turn away from life, even though he did turn away from God (the law, the father, significance)... this 'turning' is the powerful central motor of his work, and can be understood either in its positivity or not at all. (Kwinter, 2011, p.211)

Kafka's ambivalent relationship with power, authority, the family, the erotic, his submission, and an overall *Non-Complete* attitude, are central in his writings. These are manifested in his inability to come to terms with his mother, his body, and especially with his father; which is the main representation of power and authority. In Kafka's writings a main theme is movement without effect, this is mixed with a feeling of staying in the same place as if no advancement ever takes place. This useless movement can be both physical and mental (Kwinter, 2011). Closed doors, corridors of no apparent destination, closed off by blocks that are not only architectural but also mental and erotic. This sort of progression is constantly on the verge of fulfillment. Yet always end up in disappointment, dissatisfaction, and unfulfilled objectives (Mairowitz & Crumb, 2007).

In 1924, at the age of 41, Kafka died of Tuberculosis. He left behind him a rather large amount of writings in an unfinished state. It would be simplistic to understand this as a result of his inability to finish the work, but rather as a result of an internal will, which prevented him finishing the work (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005). This minor or weak attitude should not be understood as surrender but rather as a way to accept reality, to reconcile with its conflicting conditions. This weak form of force is expressed in leaving things in a state of *Non-Completion*, as stated by Mairowitz in a reference to Kafka's unfinished novel, "The Castle":

Once having started out on this labyrinthine path, the Writer in him, as well as the Dying Man, most likely never intended finishing it, or if he did, simply couldn't get there. What does it matter? Any "ending" would probably have spoiled this, one of the great literary "journeys" of our time. (Mairowitz, 2007, p.125)

In their research about Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari, define his writings as 'minor'. The research explores Kafka's life and writings, claiming their inseparability, and demonstrating that it is superficial to understand Kafka as writing out of weakness. Rather, they claim, he writes of different levels of weakness. He does this in a humoristic fashion and in a force that claims to reconcile with reality and reveal forcefully its inner workings of political, social, and mental mechanisms (Deleuze and

Guattari, 2005). Kafka does not find refuge in writing but rather a funny\sad path to endure an impossible conflicting world. Kafka's novels are not merely unfinished, they are *Non-Complete*. In the sense that he strives to reach a point that they cannot, or resist completion. This lack of success is a measure of their success. Deleuze words strengthen this:

[we] can suggest a kind of law (law which is not always valid, only in certain cases) ... 4) a novel becomes a novel also when it is not finished, also and in particular if it cannot be finished, (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p.79)

Kafka's writings meander in endless circles, trapped within their own ever conflicting logic. Israeli literature researcher Simon Sandbank refers to Kafka's writing as "The Way of Wavering". He analyzes the back and forth, ambiguous, conflicting, and paradoxical manner of his writing (Sandbank, 1974). A condition of incompleteness is sustained, rather surprisingly, stable and constant without ever reaching an ending, or resolve. This complex writing mechanism is a hallmark of Kafka and a representation of his dark humor:

"“you’ve come at a bad time.” “Wasn’t I summoned?” asked Block, more to himself than the lawyer. He held his hands in front of himself as protection and would have been ready to run away any moment. “You were summoned,” said the lawyer, “but you have still come at a bad time.” Then, after a pause he added, “You always come at a bad time.”” (Kafka, The trail, p.227)

Kafka's *Non-Complete* architectural descriptions

Given these complications and calculations, the act of building the burrow becomes an intellectual exercise rather than simply a domestic act. (Meljac, 2008, p.70)

The architectural descriptions in the writings of Kafka should be understood as having an intellectual construction that is as important as their spatial logic. This architecture has two unique organizational characteristics. First the architecture sequences are constructed in lumps, separate pieces that are constructed on a linear sequence that establish distance between each of them. In between those lumps voids remain that cannot be or are not filled (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005). This feature creates an unmeasurable distance between the lumps:

...the essential text in this respect is the short aphorism in which Kafka says that the neighboring village is in the same time so far that it needs more than the time of a single lifetime to reach it. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 135)

The other feature works in the opposite direction, each of the lumps has a back door which connects directly and instantly to another lump, which by other, conflicting descriptions, should have been far away, unreachable: "two points, located in opposite ends, are found in an odd manner to be touching each other." (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 130)

Kafka uses architecture descriptions in order to question the human condition in the world. He places his protagonist in a conflicting, ambiguous, and contradictory spatial conditions. These conditions oppose the usual dualistic approach of good and evil, of prize and punishment, of purpose that can and should be achieved. Kafka's architectural descriptions reject values of the *Complete*, such as harmony, unity, finite conditions, and constant improvement. He suggests conditions that are infinite, reject closure, and have no stable state; conditions that perpetually reshape, that cannot be completed or reach an outcome. These descriptions take apart each and every aspect of our perception of reality (Karl, 1977). The world Kafka portrays is not harmonious or stable, it cannot be put into order by our will, and it is not coherent. This statement by British mathematician David Steinsaltz emphasizes this:

(...) obsessive and circular, these works play variations on the impasses they begin with, and never come to a climax or conclusion, for all their discursive plenitude, they grind to a halt in quite literal incompleteness. A story once begun could never be organically whole and complete. (Steinsaltz, 1992, p.344)

The architecture in Kafka's writings is constructed in such a way that you cannot reach your destination, see your path, finish your task, arrive on time, or feel safe. If comfort or safety is achieved it is: temporary, not intended for you, or misunderstood in one way or the other. These architectural conditions are not ruins, in which case this can be understood, they are dysfunctional architectural spaces: the office provides an improper place for work, the bedroom is crowded, messy, and noisy, the opening is closed, the road leads the wrong way, the path is full of obstacles, the room is dark, the ceiling is ridiculously low, and the home provides no safety, comfort, or privacy.

Architectural characteristics in the writings of Kafka have all attributes of *Non-Complete*. If you think of architecture's purpose as offering: visibility, comfort, and ease of movement, this is not to be found in the architectural descriptions by Kafka. Visibility and light, which are a hallmark of good architecture, are always impaired. Darkness, fog, dust, hidden doors, openings are uncertain, too high or too low, objects constantly impair visibility, and proper experience in the space is obscured. Movement is never easy or inviting, it is confusing, unpredictable, and passages are blocked, hidden, illogical, and hindered by endless accumulating obstacles. Comfort is never attained. Spaces are cramped, places of work are not inviting, and work is done in bedrooms, which more often than not are messy and dirty. Rooms are overcrowded, too small for their purpose, stuffy, dark, and confusing.

Visibility

The *Complete* architecture aims at providing clear visibility, which allows safety, and flawless understanding of the spatial conditions. The writings of Kafka present a *Non-Complete* condition which is opposite to this. The vagueness created by impaired visibility is announced immediately in the opening lines of Kafka's novel "The Castle":

It was late evening when K. arrived. The village lay under deep snow. There was no sign of the Castle hill, fog and darkness surrounded it, not even the faintest gleam of light suggested the large Castle. K. stood a

long time on the wooden bridge that leads from the main road to the village, gazing upward into the seeming emptiness. (Kafka, 1998, p.15)

In the following quote a rather simple, realistic, everyday situation portrays the confusion created by compromised visibility, sound, and physical settings in space. All the daily conditions described seem to gather toward creating a sense of uncertainty and vagueness, a *Non-Complete* condition:

A large dimly lit room. At first, the new arrival from outdoors could not see a thing. K. stumbled against a washtub, a woman's hand held him back. From one corner came the sound of children crying. From another, smoke billowed, turning the dim light to darkness, K. remained standing there as if in the clouds. (Kafka, 1998, p.21)

Comfort – Hominess

This hominess feeling is discussed thoroughly by Kafka in both psychological (internal) and philosophical (external) terms. In other words, Kafka discusses the question of can we "be" at home psychologically? Can we truly feel complete and have a sense of accomplishment? Or does what reality has to offer us is constant fragmentary, unstable, illusionary, incompleteness? And in the philosophical terms the question posed is: what is our purpose in life? Do we have one? Is there prize and punishment? Is there a system of cause and effect? Right and wrong? True and false? Or is everything purely accidental and with no higher goal? (Levy, 2012).

The concepts of *Complete\Non-Complete*, as defined here, are very close to the concept of home in psychology. In psychological terms, home or hominess can be traced to the mother's womb, a place we both aspire to return to and the place we constantly journey away from. A place we are eager to locate ourselves in, and a place of darkness and primordial fear. A place we can never reach but also we can never completely leave (Levy, 2012). This issue of 'sense of belonging' runs as a thread all over the writings of Kafka. In a way if one is "somewhere" the question arises does he\she belongs there? Is it his place? Is it right to be there/here? What does it imply of the direction you advance or should advance from here? And back to what are you doing here in the first place? A clear vision of this condition is found in this quote from a short fragment by Kafka:

Not even casually could I indicate any claims that I might rightly advance in any direction. I have not even any defense to offer for standing on this platform, holding on to this strap, letting myself be carried along by this tram ... (Kafka, 1995, p.35)

The comfort which the feeling of hominess represents at its best is charged from every angle. It is basically not fitting in size:

Close under its ceiling it was surrounded by a gallery which was also fully occupied and where the people could only stand bent down with their heads and their backs touching the ceiling. ... Many of them had brought pillows that they had put between their heads and the ceiling so

that they would not hurt themselves pressed against it. (Kafka, "The trial", p.45,47)

Privacy, the fortress of the sense of hominess is charged and penetrated mercilessly, as is described in this quote:

At the inn he went straight to his room and lay down on the bed, Frieda arranged a place to sleep for herself on the floor beside it, the assistants had pushed their way into the room and were driven out, but they came back in through the window. K. was too tired to drive them out again. ... And in any case there wasn't much peace to be had in that little room, the maids in their men's boots often came clattering in, bringing things or removing them. Whenever they needed something from the bed, which was crammed with various objects, they inconsiderately pulled it out from under K. (Kafka, 1998, p.43)

If the sense of Home implying comfort, safety, warmth, and privacy, is somehow achieved, it means you either can't enjoy it, don't need it at this particular moment, or it belongs to someone else. As is described in this scene from "The Castle":

He slipped in. How extraordinarily warm it was in the sleigh, and it didn't cool off, even though the door, which K. did not dare close, was wide open. And there wasn't even any way of knowing if one was sitting on a bench, there were so many blankets, cushions, and furs; on each side one could turn and stretch in every direction and always sink down soft and warm. With his arms extended, his head supported by the abundant supply of cushions, (...) The thought that he would rather not be seen by Klamm occurred to him only vaguely (...). (Kafka, 1998, p.82)

The main objective of the home is to provide sense of safety within a spatial closure. In *Non-Complete* terms this can be simultaneously a trap and an illusion. Its existence has dual meaning, both home and prison, shelter and trap, solidity and uncertainty. In the short story "The Burrow", also unfinished, this is described in depth, for example:

But the most beautiful thing about my burrow is the stillness. Of course, that is deceptive. At any moment it may be shattered and then all will be over." (Kafka, "The Burrow", p. 356, complete stories)

Movement – Journey

The journey needs a clear aim, in a coherent and manageable way, assisted by some guidance, and obstacles are manageable. Kafka's descriptions of a movement are minor in character and revolve around simple, daily aims, such as reaching an appointment or delivering a message. Yet those seemingly simple tasks turn into infinite, incomplete-able measures that: have no clear path, distance and time are fluctuating and undetermined, the obstacles are infinite, assistance or guidance is never available, and above all the aim, in conceptual ideological terms, is never clear (Steinsaltz, 1992). This is demonstrated in this quote from a short story by Kafka:

The messenger set off at once; a strong, an indefatigable man; thrusting out now one arm, now the other, he forces his way through the crowd; where he finds obstacles he points to the sign of the sun on his breast; he gets through easily, too, as no one else could. Yet the throng is so numerous; there is no end to their dwelling places. If he only had a free field before him, how he would run, and soon enough you would hear the glorious tattoo of his fists on your door. But instead of that, how vain are his efforts; he is still forcing his way through the chambers of the innermost palace; he will never get to the end of them; and even if he did, he would be no better off; he would still have to get through the courtyards; and after the courtyards, the second outer palace inclosing the first; and more stairways and more courtyards; and still another palace; and so on for thousands of years; and did he finally dash through the outermost gate-but never, never can that happen-he would still have the capital city before him, the center of the world, overflowing with the dregs of humanity. No one can force a way through that, least of all with a message from a dead man. (Kafka, 1995, p.159)

The journey is a metaphor for the philosophical\psychological question of: what is my purpose in life? Or in other words: what am I destined to do and accomplish in this life? These themes, the home and the journey, are widely discussed in psychoanalysis literature from Freud onwards, and are understood as basic philosophical questions every human is entangled with during a conscious and self-aware lifetime (Steinsaltz, 1992). Steinsaltz affirms the state of the journey in Kafka's writings: "There are too many obstacles. The completion of the journey is a logical impossibility, not merely a practical difficulty." (Steinsaltz, 1992, p.338). It is of value to think about the relation between architecture and psychology. As the architectural journey takes place in time and in memory. It deals with issues and dualities such as inside\outside, public\private, contained\containing, enclosure, finality, sense of belonging and acquaintance, all are both pure architectural conditions and psychological conditions that can be, and are, dealt in both disciplines.

Finally as in some cases the circular, intertwining, continuous condition stops and a solution is offered, when this is the case it is always because it has become needless to do so. The protagonist is asleep and can't use the information, the task is no longer necessary, or as in this masterful example the purpose itself exists no more:

Everyone strives to reach the Law," says the man, "so how does it happen that for all these many years no one but myself has ever begged for admittance?" The doorkeeper recognizes that the man has reached his end, and, to let his failing senses catch the words, roars in his ear: "No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it. (Kafka, "Before the Law", p. 23, complete stories)

Conclusion – Discussion

Hope is used constantly to counter the disheartened conditions presented in the writings by Kafka. It never reaches a conclusion that home is not possible, or that the goal is unattainable, or that you have failed and have no possible means to accomplish or achieve your goal. You wake up refreshed and full of energy, the messenger pushes his way forward through the ever repeating obstacles, the man waits patiently by the door knowing it will eventually open. Every obstacle or hindrance is considered temporary or can be bypassed, one way or the other. Hope then maintains the plot, or the condition in a perpetual state of incompleteness, always 'pregnant' ever becoming, never being able to finish or reach a conclusion, always *Non-Complete*. It is easy to view Kafka's writing as conveying a pessimistic point of view. But this is a narrow critic of his writings. Quoting Deleuze on this matter:

"...it is so irritating, so absurd, to separate between Kafka's life and his writings, to assume that he finds refuge in literature for lack, weakness and powerless against life...escape path – yes, but in no way a shelter."
(Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, P.82-83).

Kafka questions the human condition in a complex and unstable reality. He attempts to reposition the human in the world not by offering a solution, an answer, or a conclusion, but rather via a constant state of questioning and search. In that sense it is honest, brave, and very optimistic. We have to remember that although "Home" is never obtained, and the "Journey" never ends, for that matter it is questionable if it ever began, yet it also fails to fail. It does not conclude in failure, only constant *Non-Completeness*. This reconciliation does not point toward any form of false tranquility but rather a way to keep in check both strength and confidence and on the other hand fear and weakness. Both powerful, the opposing forces remain active, yet neither takes over completely. The power of this indecision is in its weakness.

This point of view offers architecture a fresh and new possibility, not one that measures itself through achievement, success, and performance. But one that aims at reconciliation with reality's constant conflicting conditions. A possibility that aims at advancing by constant resistance to agreed positions, through known answers to known problems. Kafka presents us not a dim reality in which achievement is unattainable but rather a way to deal with reality which is always conflicting, fragmentary, ambiguous, and unclear. He does not suggest a triumph of the will neither a surrender of hope, but an honest, conscious, realistic approach to live in a reality that offers constant failure and triumph in an endless cycle.

We can use Kafka's writings as bases for architectural inspiration, reference, or enhance theoretical understanding of the built environment. This can be utilized consciously in architectural design process, and in design education. We can educate students to be humble, self-aware, honest, and prepare them for hardship and endurance. Most of all it teaches us to constantly resist and reconcile while never losing hope, understanding that both achievement and failure are both an illusion. Through Kafka, a deeper understanding of meaning of architecture can be achieved. A state of constant need for reconciliation and resistance can be gained, a condition that is *Non-Complete*.

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