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International eJournal
Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa

n. 5 | 2016

Special Number *Philosophy & Architecture*



edited by
Tomás N. Castro
with
Maribel Mendes Sobreira

ISSN 2182-4371

UNIVERSITAS

Centro de Filosofia
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www.cful.lettras.ulisboa.pt

Towards an intensive architecture: how do we compose intimacy, in architecture?

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Abstract

The present paper aims to define “Intensive Architecture” as an aesthetic category in the Theory of Architecture, stemming from the problem of sensation, understood mainly in the light of Gilles Deleuze’s seminal work *Francis Bacon: la logique de la sensation*, which allows therefore to understand how certain sensations are composed in space and sustained through time. However, sensations and senses should not be confused. A sensation has a direct impact on the nervous system, as well as every organ is a receptacle of sensation (and not only those of the senses) when a Body without Organs is fabricated (as the paper will demonstrate).

Moreover, as sensation is “the being of the sensible,” it always obeys to an aesthetic composition mastered by the artist or architect. We will look into some of the Adolf Loos’ works to inspect how the sensation of intimacy is composed, through which artifices, forms and matters of expression, and how, in its turn, it is hold in space independently of time and seasons.

Keywords

Deleuze; Intensive Architecture; Sensation; Body without Organs; Intimacy

In the woodcut “Encounter in Space,” by Edvard Munch, we see two figures - a woman and a man - floating toward each other in an abstract weightlessness space among sperm cells. The critics usually mention the erotic tension between these two figures whose physical proximity, implies, however, an emotive distance. The encounter happens in space, as the title refers, and Munch himself used to compare people’s lives with planets, appearing from the unknown to meet briefly and immediately disappear. Independently of the comparison, which in this woodcut is literal (the bodies float in a pure abstract dark space without gravity), we focus our attention on the space that these two figures create in between, which is, necessarily, a space of intimacy where the two naked bodies touch each other and a tension is mastered.

We witness a similar encounter in the film “Intimacy,” by Patrice Chéreau, specially during the first part of the film when the two main characters meet every Wednesday in an informal or shabby room of a London flat just to have sex without knowing each other, without speaking a word (which would potentiate a story to be known). We could understand these scenes like some critics mention the erotic tension on Munch’s woodcut, although they mainly express a moment of pure intimacy for which Chéreau removed any trace of romanticism or tenderness. Of course, during the film, the characters will know their stories, the intimacy will dissolve and blur into feelings, and, in the end, we are left with the emotional self-delusion of the characters.

These two examples, from different art expressions - painting and cinema - disclose part of our understanding of intimacy as an intensive encounter or moment between two bodies without resorting to a story or any representation of personal feelings or emotions. Curiously as well, in these two examples, the space where the encounter happens is the most indifferent as possible - a black surface and an informal room - as if the space was not important to represent, notwithstanding allowing to intensify the encounter and bring to the surface a pure intimacy.

In another film, by Woody Allen, titled “Interiors” in English and translated into Portuguese as “Intimidade” (“Intimacy”), we watch Eve’s (Renata, Joey and Flynn’s mother) suicide on a night when the family (their father and his new wife) were at the beach house. After the funeral, the three sisters return to the house and contemplate, through the window, the tranquility of the sea where their mother chose to die. The acceptance of death and the tranquility, the serenity it brings, are inscribed in the surface that separates the interior space, where the three sisters stand, and the landscape they contemplate. In the most intimate moments of the film (in several moments, confessions-like), Woody Allen places his characters glued to that surface which separates them from the exterior world, inducing us to think that the intimacy doesn’t limit itself to the interior, but it

happens precisely in that very limit between exterior and interior.

The meanings, attributed to the very word intimacy, do not clarify that difference, which undoubtedly exists, between interior and intimacy, which is not to be, solely, a difference of distance between the closer and glued to the exterior surface of the world and the more internal, distant or profound, similarly to the centre of the earth, which would be, that way, the absolute intimate space of the very world (never reached however). The difference is, above all, that of the degree of intensity (and never that of distance, which is always nullified in the intimate space), which transforms an interior space into an intimate space, which has the ability to attract, through its design and composition, a natural posture of the body, the I of the body in space, reminding us of the encounter between two embracing naked bodies. [Figure 1]

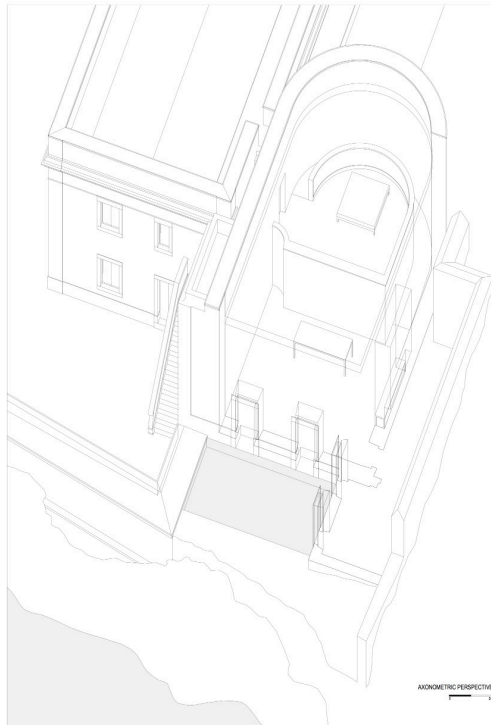


Figure 1

Axonometric perspective of the “Space of Intimacy,” project by SAMI Architects for the 14th Portuguese Representation at the Venice Architecture Biennial, 2014. Within the pre-existent Albarquel Fort, the project unfolds a sequential composition (antechamber - chamber or room - post-chamber, which Sami looked for in what is understood to be one of the first examples

of domestic architecture in Portugal, the medieval palace) that corresponds to a variation in intensity, through successive steps and boundaries (not only for the sequence in itself, which begins, inclusively, on the ground floor, but, above all, through the unfolding, or even the unveiling suggested by the two levels of the space of intimacy: a higher level, whose curve welcomes and embraces the bodies, and a lower one, with a double height ceiling, whose limit is rapidly undone by the ramp that leads to the faraway horizon of the sea, whose movement “sucks us into the landscape”, as the architects explain), of an interior space to an intimate space, embracing and receiving the exuberant landscape, which reveals itself naked before it, in its composition.



Figure 2
View from the Albarquel Fort onto the Sea.
Photograph: Paulo Catrica, 2014.

The question becomes, then, how to build a space which constitutes that difference, since an interior space isn't, necessarily, an intimate space and an intimate space, in turn, does not imply a separation from the exterior space either. On the contrary, there seems to exist a form of contemplation¹ from the inside to the outside, from the body to the lands-

1. At this moment, it's important to clarify what we mean by contemplation, which comes from Deleuze & Guattari's reading of Plotino: "La sensation est contemplation pure, car c'est par contemplation qu'on contracte, se contemplant soi-même à mesure qu'on contemple les éléments dont on procède. Contempler, c'est créer, mystère de la création passive, sensation. La sensation remplit le plan de composition, et se remplit de soi-même en se remplissant de se qu'elle contemple. [...] Plotin pouvait définir toutes les choses comme des contemplations, non seulement les hommes et les animaux, mais les plantes, la terra et les rochers. Ce ne sont pas des Idées que nous contemplons par concept, mais les éléments de la matière, par sensation. La plante contemple en con-

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cape, which makes the body, which inhabits the space, contemplate itself from within, when it fills itself with tonalities, variations, colours, water and scents from the landscape that stands before it. [Figure 2] The intimacy will always be that which the body is able to create or compose between itself and the space, reducing it to a sensitive surface, capable of receiving the infinitesimal variations of its qualities. The space of intimacy is a space where to sleep, lie, sit, look at the landscape become imperceptible movements, long unhurried pauses, where time stands still and the world is kept outside. And, nonetheless, it may occur also when the landscape emerges, unequivocally, as the Other to those who inhabit space, reducing the distance between the exterior and interior to a surface where the inhabitant is faced with his or her own nakedness (where he or she may feel intimate with the space they inhabit). [Figure 3]

But how do we compose this sensation of intimacy, in the work of architecture? At this moment, we ought to look into the object of study of Aesthetics, the being of the sensible, and find in Deleuze's approach (we will focus on the deleuzian aesthetics, therefore using its terminology) a practice named "body without organs"² which enlightens us about architecture's power to compose sensations or, in other words, to edify the sensible³. For Deleuze, a work of art is a bloc of sensations, understanding

tractant les éléments dont elle procède, la lumière, le carbone et les sels, et se remplit elle-même de couleurs et d'odeurs qui qualifient chaque fois sa variété, sa composition: elle est sensation en soi", Deleuze & Guattari 1991, 200. In architecture, we find its equivalent when a building contemplates the landscape where it stands, not through the openings onto the landscape (although these may also be part of the composition), but through its matter. The landscape is metamorphosed, its matters of expression are transformed into expressive qualities of the work of architecture, in its composition and hence a sensation is built.

2. The body without organs is a deleuzian experimental practice upon the body. It's an experimentation that every person undertakes whenever he or she desires and the unconscious begins to work and the body and its organs discover their own power to create sensation after their intense matter. As explained: "At any rate, you have one (or several). It's not so much that it preexists or comes ready-made, although in certain respects it is preexistent. At any rate, you make one, you can't desire without making one. And it awaits you; it is an inevitable exercise or experimentation, already accomplished the moment you undertake it, unaccomplished as long as you don't. This is not reassuring, because you can botch it. Or it can be terrifying, and lead you to your death. [...] It is not at all a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of practices," Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 166. Note: In the present paper, we use Massumi's translation of *Mille Plateaux*, because it's translated into English by a known deleuzian, although our interpretations and knowledge come from the original text in French, which obviously is more precise.

3. It would be impossible here to pormenorize all the different implications that come from the problem of the body without organs in Deleuze's own plane of immanence (or body without organs), and then in architecture. We may recommend the reading of: Susana Ventura, *O corpo sem órgãos da arquitetura (Architecture's body without organs)*. Lisboa: Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Tese de Doutoramento em Filosofia, especialidade de Estética (PhD's thesis in Philosophy - Aesthetics), Novembro 2012 (only available in Portuguese).

the sensation, the being of the sensible, as the difference in intensity itself⁴. It's in *Francis Bacon: la logique de la sensation* that Deleuze gives a precious insight into how a sensation is composed in the body without organs, the plane of composition of art⁵. Like philosophy needs a plane of immanence where the philosopher creates his or her concepts, the plane of composition is where sensations are created by the artist. However, some misunderstandings arose within this practice, as Deleuze's favourite examples report cases of physical bodies (sometimes even sick or drugged), like the masochist who uses his or her own body to create a plane that will only be populated by intensities. First, he or she ties the body parts with elastic bands or ropes and sew the orifices turning the body into a plain surface. Then, starts the flogging through whatever means are allowed, increasing and intensifying the pain more each time. Deleuze & Guattari, in *Mille Plateaux*, explain that the masochist doesn't look for pain or pleasure with it, but to populate his or her body with "intensities of pain, pain waves"⁶. The body without organs is the plane of desire defined by thresholds, populations, movements and speeds, that envelop a sensation of pain⁷. But

4. "C'est l'intensité, la différence dans l'intensité, qui constitue la limite propre de la sensibilité. Aussi a-t-elle le caractère paradoxal de cette limite: elle est l'insensible, ce qui ne peut pas être senti, parce qu'elle est toujours recouverte par une qualité qui l'aliène ou qui la 'contrarie', distribuée dans une étendue qui la renverse et qui l'annule. Mais d'une autre manière, elle est ce qui ne peut être que senti, ce qui définit l'exercice transcendant de la sensibilité, puisqu'elle donne à sentir, et par là éveille la mémoire et force la pensée. Saisir l'intensité indépendamment de l'étendue ou avant la qualité dans lesquelles elle se développe, tel est l'objet d'une distorsion des sens. Une pédagogie de sens est tournée vers ce but, et fait partie intégrante du 'transcendantalisme'. Des expériences pharmacodynamiques, ou des expériences physiques comme celles du vertige, s'en approchent: elles nous révèlent cette différence en soi, cette profondeur en soi, cette intensité en soi au moment originel où elle n'est plus qualifiée ni étendue. Alors le caractère déchirant de l'intensité, si faible en soit le degré, lui restitue son vrai sens: non pas anticipation de la perception, mais limite propre de la sensibilité du point de vue d'un exercice transcendant", Deleuze 1969, 305.

5. The body without organs disappears from the pages of *Qu'est-ce que la Philosophie?* when Deleuze & Guattari write about the plane of composition in art. It's long known that some concepts were more of Deleuze and others of Guattari, as we also find Guattari's doubts about the practice of the body without organs in his notes to *Anti-Oedipe* (Félix Guattari, *Écrits pour L'Anti-Oedipe*. Paris: Lignes Manifeste, 2004). In fact, the first known appearance of the body without organs (which is named after Artaud) is in Deleuze's work *Logique du Sens* (1969). Then, it appears in both volumes of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, and, finally, in *Francis Bacon: la logique de la sensation* (of course, it also appears in several essays by Deleuze). We only may speculate about its removal from the plane of composition in *Qu'est-ce que la Philosophie?*, but it immediately reappears in *Francis Bacon*, the major work of Deleuze on Aesthetics.

6. Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 168.

7. "A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate. [...] The BwO causes intensities to pass; it produces them in a *spatium* that is itself intensive, lacking extension. It is not space, nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree - to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced. [...] That is why we treat the BwO as the full egg before the extension of the organism and the organisation of the organs, before the formation of the strata; as the intense egg defined by axes and vectors, graphically

it's always about how the desire itself (the plane of the body without organs is the plane of consistency of desire) is composed and through which lines does the desire flow uninterruptedly, enveloping and enveloped in a *continuum* of intensities (we must advert that it happens only in a molecular scale, within the intense matter of the unconscious). Two moments are defined by Deleuze & Guattari when it comes to making a body without organs: the first requires the fabrication of the plane, which usually implies an elimination of clichés as well as of all relations subject-object⁸. There's no Self in the body without organs, only a series of becomings, as the two authors would later explain. Again, the masochist's body without organs is populated by a becoming-animal. The second phase happens when the intensities start to circulate in the plane of the body without organs, and, when a force is captured at a certain degree, to compose a sensation. The two moments happen simultaneously, otherwise the fabrication of the body without organs would fail or it would be an empty body without organs.

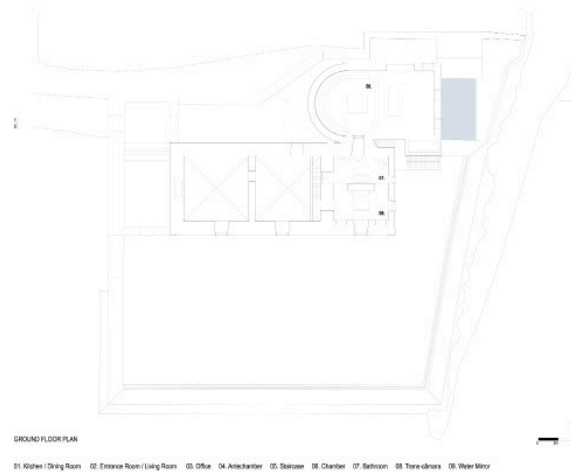


Figure 3
Ground Floor Plan of the “Space of Intimacy,”
project by SAMI Architects for the 14th Portuguese
Representation at the Venice Architecture Biennial, 2014.

dients and thresholds, by dynamic tendencies involving energy transformation and kinematic movements involving group displacement, by migrations: all independent of accessory forms because the organs appear and function here only as pure intensities”, Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 169-170.

8. “The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and significances and subjectifications as a whole”, *Ibidem*. This finds its equal in Loos’ approach to architecture: remove all ornament, remove all sentiments, remove the Family (as institution), the suicide note of the girl in the chest of drawers doesn’t have anything to do with the walls (designed by the architect).

Francis Bacon also makes a body without organs for himself. In his book about Francis Bacon's work, Deleuze definitely links the body without organs to the process of creation of a work of art. The phases are the same as described in *Mille Plateaux*, but, in this book, Deleuze goes further explaining how a sensation is formed in the body without organs as we start to be in the presence of several bodies without organs: Francis Bacon's body without organs, which vanishes away at the very moment the painting embodies the sensation, but whose trace is left in the bodies (Figures) painted, that detain, in their turn, the power to affect us and transform our flesh and nerve into that sensation or yet another, allowing us to create a body without organs for ourselves.

In architecture, we also find several bodies without organs or traces of them as their existence vanishes away at the very moment one has consciousness of its fabrication. For example, Peter Zumthor, without naming it, refers to its effects: "We know all about emotional response from music. The first movement of Brahms's viola sonata, when the viola comes in - just two-seconds and we're there! [...] I have no idea why that is so, but it's like that with architecture, too"⁹. The sonorous wave that affect us, transforms our body into a musical plane, planting ears all through it, in our stomach, in our lung, in our breast, as, in seconds, we dissolve ourselves (our organisation) to become a sonorous expressive matter, become birds and the cosmos. Zumthor is correct when he says that this happen in architecture too. In certain works, our bodies are forced to wait, for example, or to inhabit space with such postures or to walk around it following movements that awake the flesh and the nerve. We may recall all those postures of the body that Adolf Loos imprints in his houses, as if the inhabitants were Beckett's characters or Bacon's Figures, or the movements Lewerentz obliges the body to describe in space or the effects that light, as he composes, have in our eyes. In certain works, there is a preparation of the body simultaneously of elimination of remains and an intensification acting upon the body (upon its flesh and nerve), transforming, finally, the lived body into an intensive body. As Deleuze remarks: the body without organs is "at the limit of the lived body, it's the intense and intensive body"¹⁰.

However, the inhabitant makes a body without organs for himself or herself only if the work of architecture is a work of art that holds a bloc of sensations. Usually, when it comes to define architecture as art, and Loos himself denied this quality with the exception of monuments and graves, some authors immediately state that a building or an architectural space

9. Zumthor 2006, 13.

10. Deleuze 1981, 44. It's at this time that Deleuze criticises the phenomenological hypothesis as "it merely evokes the lived body. But the lived body is still a paltry thing in comparison with a more profound and almost unlovable Power [*Puissance*]," *Ibidem*.

must be used by people, being its main purpose to be inhabited. Nevertheless, what type of inhabiting may occur when a work of architecture, beyond functions and types, beyond material structures and techniques, holds a bloc of sensations? A work of architecture, that may be consider a work of art, must create within it an interval of an intensive body-space. It's interesting that Deleuze defines several art forms by what they create that is unique to them. For instance, painting is a bloc of lines and colours, cinema is a bloc of image-movement and image-time, music is a bloc of sounds... Deleuze doesn't give any definition of architecture (although he does mention that architecture is the first art expression, and art appears with the animal when it transforms the territory into a matter of expression, into a *plateau*), but, taking into consideration what has been written, we may define architecture as a bloc of body-space, where the two terms - body and space - which define the interval, in order for architecture to become a work of art, must become, in their turn, an intensive body and intensive space, both defined by the intensities that populate the interval that they define. A lived body that inhabits space must transform itself into an intensive body or body without organs, precisely when it inhabits an intensive space, a type of space that is defined by the sensations that it holds or creates, thankfully to its matters of expression or aesthetic composition. The architect, in a very Loosian definition, must occupy himself or herself of this interval. Zumthor, in his turn, denominates this intensive interval of atmosphere (or it would be more correct to say that Zumthor's atmosphere is what fills this interval).

Loos' houses are examples of what we call an intensive architecture: a type of architecture that holds an interval of an intensive body-space, occupied, filled, by sensation¹¹. In these, we witness, almost literally, to this interval's fabrication. First, all the clichés and symbols are removed from the plane of composition (it's curious that Karl Krauss named Loos the architect of the *tabula rasa*): family, power, subjectivity were removed to give birth to a space defined only by its pure qualities. Even the program is in part eliminated in the sense that it was built up through the "elevation" of space and the modulation of volume from which the program would naturally fit (if we separate into different levels, we immediately introduce a difference in their occupation, and a movement that may be slower or faster, or constrained). [Figure 4] Then, we assist to a clear definition of the body postures (the feminine and the masculine bodies) in space. And

11. "At one and the same time I become in the sensation and something happens through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other. And at the limit, it is the same body which, being both subject and object, gives and receives the sensation. As a spectator, I experience the sensation only by entering the painting, by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed. This was Cézanne's lesson against the Impressionists: sensation is not in the 'free' or disembodied play of light and color (impressions); on the contrary, it is in the body, even the body of an apple", Deleuze 1981, 35.

contrary to what some authors have been saying, these postures only have to do with the placement of the body in the space exactly whenever a force is exerted upon the body and a tension or a spasm is produced, coinciding, in space, with a maximum of intensity or a threshold, recalling curiously Bacon's Figures. Passing the door, the sensation changes.



Figure 4
The Raumplan of Villa Müller, Adolf Loos, 1930.
Photograph: Susana Ventura, 2014.

All these imperceptible movements, tensions and spasms of the body in Loos' houses depend solely of the composition of sensation which is mastered by the architect. The body enters into the plane of composition as a matter of expression, similarly to other elements. The body, its postures and declinations are part of the code of sensation, implying however an experimentation of Loos' own body and its transformation into a body without organs, where he was able to localise the precise limits and thresholds of the sensation. Of course, Loos had several artifices to compose sensations, sometimes of pure comfort (like the one that fills and swells all around Lina's bedroom of white furs and plush), other times of intimacy, others of pure desire (as in Villa Karma's bathroom or Josephine Baker's house), and all these sensations may even coexist and form a sequence which is, in fact, the difference of intensity of a single sensation or rhythm in itself (as Deleuze also explains). A sensation of comfort may correspond to a degree of intensity of the sensation of intimacy, as in Lina Loos' bedroom, for example.

Considering the sensation of intimacy as we've been thinking it, how
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did Loos compose it in his works of architecture? How did he transformed the difference between exterior and interior into a difference of intensity wherein each of the inhabitants is glued or merges with the space around his or her body? There is a nakedness in these intervals of an intensive body-space in Loos' houses which doesn't mean that the body is undressed or naked. On the contrary, Loos, just like the Easterners, is extremely aware of the importance of having several veils to temperate the very difference of intensity between private, interior and intimacy, as we find this sequence, as in the Japanese houses, in Loos' ones: it's a variation in intensity of a single sensation of intimacy throughout successive boundaries and thresholds, regulated by the postures of the body (including accelerations, tensions, spasms and speeds, that usually occur within permanence and under the body to recall Artaud).

Therefore, there is a clear definition and design of the boundary that separates the exterior and public space from the private space. We should notice that the private space, in Loos' houses, does not coincide totally with the interior as the social areas, as Beatriz Colomina has noticed, resemble a theatre box where characters inhabit space in order to see others, be seen or sometimes to become indiscernible, a fleeting silhouette in a dimness space. However, this later effect would depend on the light, to which Loos always paid much attention (from where it would come in and how it would enter into the room, depending also on the time of the day and of the room's materials, a darker wood or a lighter, for instance). We prefer an idea shared by Gravagnuolo, who refers to Loos' houses as Japanese boxes: there is a larger one and inside a smaller one successively, in order to control, exactly, the different degrees and the correspondent thresholds in the interior. The body, in its turn, is usually placed at the very limit, in the boundary, as it happens, for instance, in the woman's room at Villa Müller (one of the best examples of spaces of intimacy in Loos' houses). Mrs. Müller could choose to sit in the small sofa if early in the morning, and the light would come in from the side, creating beautiful warm reflects on the light wood panels specially chosen because the room is open towards the East. She's very comfortable, seeing who might come from the entrance or from the corridor (the one that access to her husband's room). Or she may choose to sit in the sofa placed just below the overture to the main living room and, once there, choose if she turns her back to the living room or if she prefers to keep an eye on both entries of the room. All these postures were clearly rehearsed by Loos himself, as he usually did while the construction works elapsed, and allow to determine those different degrees of intimacy.

The body occupies the boundary or the wall and the wall is a part of the body itself. They become indiscernible, as Deleuze would say. The windows, in their turn, are understood as pure light frames (usually they have

curtains to veil the exterior), whose main purpose is to mark the various places where the inhabitant must be or rest. This rest, in Loos' houses, happens almost always with a person's back to the window, as many authors denoted, but what becomes, in fact, very evident in the Villa Müller, for example, is that it requires a fixed position of the body upon itself and towards the interior space of the house. In turn, when a person wanders through the interior, her or his body are in constant torsion or if one directs her or his gaze towards the exterior, the body describes an unnatural position. It is inside the house, in the determined positions, that the body may coexist with space in an intimate relationship.

Finally, we find another Loos' artifice to create a spatial sensation of intimacy in the creation of a multiplicity of surfaces, equivalent to the multiple veils or boxes, by the use of multiple mirrors or reflecting surfaces. We find their use in the houses, but, curiously, it's in the American Bar, that they create mostly a space of intimacy. Here, the use of mirrors is usually justified to augment the space, due to its small dimensions, and create an effect of infinity. However, due to the chosen mirrors, to the carefully placed lamps, to the dark panels of wood furniture, Loos creates an effect of a *sfumato* generating an illusion of an intermediate inhabited space - the mirror itself - directing our attention towards above, when the intimate space is located below where two lovers may meet. The space of intimacy is always beyond our compromising attention. [Figure 5]



Figure 5
American Bar, Adolf Loos, 1908.
Photograph: Susana Ventura, 2014.

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