In Infinity, Eternity Performs
by Thomas Provost

Here, nonetheless, lies a great drawback: there is no progress. [...] What we call “progress” is confined to each particular world, and vanishes with it. Always and everywhere in the terrestrial arena, the same drama, the same setting, on the same narrow stage—a noisy humanity infatuated with its own grandeur, believing itself to be the universe and living in its prison as though in some immense realm, only to founder at an early date along with its globe, which has borne with the deepest disdain the burden of human arrogance. The same monotony, the same immobility, on other heavenly bodies. The universe repeats itself endlessly and paws the ground in place. In infinity, eternity performs—imperturbably—the same routines.

—Louis Auguste Blanqui, L’Éternité par les astres (1872)
The Anthropocene — a yet-to-be-confirmed stratigraphic designation — speculatively demarcates the trace of a velocity; that is, it imagines the future trace of the rapid changes to the Earth caused by human agents and their harnessed, if unpredictable, forces. Given the incomprehensible scale of the earth, that the aggregate effect of human activity should alter the geology of the planet itself in only a few hundred years is a staggering realization; the consequences are dramatic not least because they offer a golden spike of reconciliation to the once divided languages of nature and culture.

But, in this now untenable divide between nature and culture, where human activity produces not only atmospheric change but also geological transformation, where does architecture appear? Can architecture enter the Anthropocene? As the construction of perspective, how will architecture frame the infinite by challenging the here-and-now quality inherent in contemporary modes of production. I contend that an architecture driven by the desire to radically inflect the perspective of the human with a geologic sensibility — through narrative, serial production, and atypical successions of scope and purpose phasing in and out of sequence — can begin also to connect to the cosmos. As Walter Benjamin wrote of the doctrine of antiquity, “They alone shall possess the earth who live from the powers of the cosmos.” Perhaps through an architecture of the Anthropocene, the powers of the cosmos might help us discover that to “possess the earth” we must first recognize ourselves as indelibly part of it.

Endnotes
9 Perhaps Chardin held a clue to satisfying the excessive spiritual absence of modernity when he criticized the common practice of reducing existence to the scale of the human in order to maintain a “here-and-now” mindset of one lonely century, one lonely century. As the era of the Anthropocene prepares to witness a dramatic warming of the planet, it seems necessary to at least recognize that the condition of the planet we have come to inhabit, or “life-as-we-know-it,” is a post-glacial affair. The longue durée of the post-glacial era is now a concern, a fear, and an open question.

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