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If the Eyes Can't Touch (Blurred Modernism)

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If the Eyes can't touch (Blurred Modernism) takes an excursion into the economization of seeing in today's digital visual worlds, linking the representative function of historical architecture with the evil eye of classical antiquity.

When the real world is transformed into an image and images become real, the practical power of humans is separated from itself and presented as a world unto itself. In the figure of this world separated and organized by the media, in which the forms of the State and the economy are interwoven, the mercantile economy attains the status of absolute and irresponsible sovereignty over all social life.

Giorgio Agamben - The Coming Community¹

When Paul Virilio declared Google Earth to be "the end of the world" in an interview² with Raymond Depardon in 2009, he was bemoaning the loss of distance, range and volume of the world as qualities of human perception. Whether or not he was aware of the reactions to Google Street View in Germany around the same time is not known. When the company launched its mapping service there in July 2010, it came up against unprecedented resistance. Privacy advocates were up in arms and public pressure forced Google to develop an option to hide buildings from public view at the owner's request. Within the space of a few weeks, Google received roughly a quarter of a million applications for blurring. To avoid a PR disaster, Google then froze any further development of Street View for the time being³. Since then, the German Street View landscape hasn't been updated, remaining well preserved as if in a time capsule.

But how does one move through a public space that is spectrally blurred out? What

afterlife will the liquid architecture of the blur have when the physical architecture in question has long since ceased to exist? What does freedom of panorama hide from our view? Might these *blur buildings*⁴ be autonomous entities beyond psychotopological reason? The new *terra incognita*? Or are they simply nonplaces (in the sense of Marc Augé), waiting to swallow up public space in a broader sense?

If one views Google's blur as a direct intervention in real space by the virtual, however, then Virilio's comment soon loses its metaphorical ambiguity. As a driver of global processes of acceleration, and as a player with an interest in defining information technology and structuring ontological power, Google has for some time now been aggressively permeating all areas of life. Whether Google's digital omnipresence will make an impact on real *built architecture* in the future must – for the time being – remain a matter of speculation. But this is also precisely why it requires closer inspection and discussion.

If the Eyes can't touch (Blurred Modernism) goes back to the beginnings of Modernist architecture and its dream of transparency. Even at the Bauhaus the use of transparent structures was a controversial topic: when in 1926 Lyonel Feiniger moved into the Meisterhaus constructed by Walter Gropius, the first thing he did was to replace parts of the glass facade with opaque screens.⁵ As the resulting dispute with Gropius shows, even at the Bauhaus the tensions between aesthetic paradigm and privacy remained unresolved – not even the versatile aura of

applied social utopia could resist the piercing quality of the gaze.

This project is based on research into Modernist architecture dating from between 1920 and 1932 as it appears on Google Street View. The resulting archive contains around eighty images of historically important architecture with blurred facades – including buildings by notable architects like Mies van der Rohe, Hans Scharoun and Bruno Taut, as well as lesser known figures like Hans Sigmund Jaretzki or Alfred Wiener, ranging from the worker housing projects of *Neues Wohnen* to upscale villas for business tycoons. The central building of the Siemensstadt Estate in Berlin, Hans Scharoun's *Panzerkreuzer* at Jungfernheideweg 8 (opposite the Scharaun exhibition space), was also blurred on Google Street View, concealing it from the public eye and since then resting in twilight.

¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, University of Minnesota Press, 1993

² in: *Native Land – Stop Eject*, Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain, Paris / Actes Sud, Arles, 2009, p.26

³ www.googlewatchblog.de/2017/08/google-maps-die-streetview/

⁴ Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Expo.02, Lake Neuchâtel, Suisse, 2002

⁵ Susanne Merkle in: *Mythos der Moderne - Die Geschichte des Bauhauses*, Bayrischer Rundfunk2, 2008

1) *Metologue about Blurring*

Text work, CAD plot, dimensions 450 x 283 cm

Fictitious conversation between a representative of Google, an unnamed landlord, a blur, a hypothetical member of the public, an algorithm and the American architect/artist Elizabeth Diller. The *Metologue* attempts to bring together various perspectives on the phenomena of the blur, and to discuss the links between the blur and the realms of the political, the aesthetic and the architectural. (Please note: all statements made by Elizabeth Diller are fictitious and are not based on any actual correspondence with her.)

2) *32 Google Street View screenshots of blurred-out Modernist architecture (archive)*

Screenshots, slideshow, computer

Over a period of three years I searched through Google Street View for blurred-out Modernist architecture. In my research I focused on the period between 1920 and 1933 and on architects associated with the Modernist movement. This search resulted in 80+ examples of blurred-out Modernist architecture ranging from private villas to the reformist architecture of Neues Bauen and Modernist housing estates in Berlin. From this archive of material, I selected 32 images for a slideshow.

3) *Institutional Blur, Beyond Ownership (ongoing)*

Photo print, dimensions 118,9 x 84,1 cm

Institutional Blur, Beyond Ownership is a series of photographs in the style of Google Street Views blur application. A selection of buildings from the archive were re-photographed in their present state, mimicking the original perspective of the Street View camera, and then post-processed with a blur emulating the feel of the Google pixelation technique.

Upper frame: 1) Langer Jammer - Goebelstrasse 15 - Berlin-Siemensstadt - Architect: Otto Bartnig - 1930
2) Siedlung Schillerpark - Bristolstrasse 14 - Berlin-Wedding - Architects: Bruno Taut & Franz Hoffmann - 1924-1925 3) Weisse Stadt / Schweizer Viertel - Romanshorner Weg 58/60 - Berlin-Reinickendorf - Architect: Bruno Ahrens - 1929-1931

Lower frame: 1) Wohnstadt Carl Legien - Küselstrasse 11 - Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg - Architects: Bruno Taut + Franz Hillinger - 1928-1930 2) Ringsiedlung Siemensstadt - Geisslerpfad 9 - Berlin-Siemensstadt - Architect: Fred Forbât - 1931 3) Panzerkreuzer - Jungfernhaideweg 7 - Berlin-Siemensstadt - Architect: Hans Scharoun - 1930

4) *Dispute on Opacity (WG/LF)*

Spatial intervention, window, frosted privacy window film

Spatial intervention referencing an incident in the early days of the Bauhaus. In 1926, when Lyonel Feininger moved into the Meisterhaus designed for him by Walter Gropius, Feininger saw his privacy being threatened due to the house's large plate-glass window. Without consulting Gropius, Feininger replaced the bottom part of the window with opaque glass resulting in a serious dispute between Gropius and Feininger (in: Susanne Merkle in *Mythos der Moderne - Die Geschichte des Bauhauses*, Bayerischer Rundfunk2, First transmission: 05.05.2008)

5) *Distinctions Blur, Steering Differentiates*

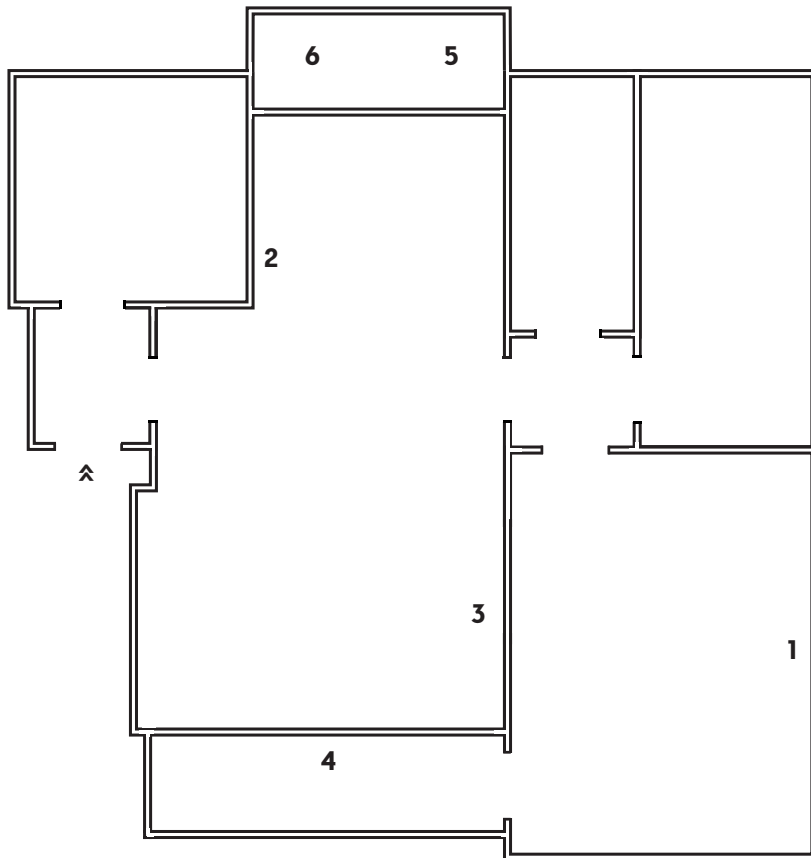
Cabinet, smoke machine, screen

One of the most significant details in the Hans Scharoun apartment is the built-in conservatory. For the period of the exhibition this cabinet-like construction is constantly fogged, resulting in a blurred outside vision. Diller & Scofidios 'architecture for atmosphere' can be seen as a reference point here, and specifically the eponymous *Blur Building* they constructed for Expo 2002 at Yverdon-les-Bains, Lake Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

6) *Google Street View advertisement*

Magazine, Der Spiegel #33, 16.08.2010.

Google announced the launch of Google Street View in Germany in mid 2010. The company was caught off guard by a wave of public dissent it hadn't previously experienced in other countries. Google decided to run an awareness campaign and placed adverts in Germany's influential weekly news magazines Der Spiegel, Stern and Focus over a period of some weeks. The campaign was followed by a heated public debate about privacy rights resulting in Google having to blur about 2% of all buildings on Street View Germany.





3



5



2



5 Fragen zu Google und Street View



1

Was genau macht Google eigentlich?

Kurz gesagt: Google hilft Ihnen, Informationen im Internet zu finden. Und zwar so einfach wie möglich. Das genau war die Geschäftsidee von Larry Page und Sergey Brin, als sie 1998 in Kalifornien Google gründeten. Inzwischen hat Google weltweit rund 20.000 Mitarbeiter. Davon arbeiten rund 400 in fünf deutschen Büros in Berlin, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt am Main und München. Deswegen können wir Ihnen heute neben unserer Suchmaschine noch viele weitere Produkte, wie z. B. Übersetzungs-, E-Mail- oder Kartendienste, anbieten – und zwar kostenlos. Und das bringt uns auch gleich zur nächsten Frage:

2

Womit verdient Google sein Geld?

Manche glauben, dass wir persönliche Daten oder Adressen sammeln, um diese zu verkaufen. Das tun wir nicht. Wir verdienen unser Geld mit Werbung. Genauer gesagt, mit dem Verkauf von Werbeflächen auf unseren eigenen Internetseiten und auf denen unserer Partner.

Auf google.de funktioniert das beispielsweise so: Sie suchen ein Hotel auf Mallorca. Sofort erscheinen zusätzlich zu den Suchergebnissen auch passende Anzeigen von Hotels, Flug- oder Städtereisenebietern – das sind die gesponserten Links, die Sie rechts neben und über den Suchergebnissen sehen können. Diese einfache Geschäftsidee ist es, womit wir Geld verdienen. Die Einnahmen investieren wir dann vor allem wieder in die Entwicklung unserer Produkte und Dienste, um sie für unsere Nutzer und Anzeigenkunden noch attraktiver zu gestalten. Wie zum Beispiel ganz aktuell mit unserer neuesten Erweiterung von Google Maps, Street View.

3

Was genau ist Street View?

Street View ist eine neue Funktion unseres Kartendienstes Google Maps. Mit Street View können Sie Straßen, Plätze und Sehenswürdigkeiten wie das Kolosseum in Rom oder den Zürichsee in einer 360-Grad-Ansicht erleben, so als wären Sie selbst dort. Jeden dieser Orte haben wir mit einem Street View-Auto Bild für Bild aufgenommen und anschließend die einzelnen Bilder zu einem Panoramafoto zusammengesetzt.

4

Wozu brauche ich Street View überhaupt?

Hier ein paar Beispiele: Sie planen einen Urlaub oder eine Geschäftsreise. Mit Street View können Sie nicht nur das Hotel, sondern auch dessen Nachbarschaft in einer 360-Grad-Ansicht kennenlernen. Oder Sie wollten schon immer mal den Eiffelturm in Paris aus der Nähe sehen.

Auch wenn Sie umziehen möchten und eine Wohnung suchen, können Sie mit Street View die neue Gegend erkunden, so als würden Sie sich in einem dreidimensionalen Stadtplan bewegen. Für Frankreich, die Schweiz und neun weitere Länder in Europa ist das bereits möglich – weltweit sind es sogar schon über 20 Länder. Und weil wir Street View auch nach Deutschland bringen möchten, stellen sich viele die Frage:

5

Inwieweit berührt Street View meine Privatsphäre?

Einige Menschen denken, Street View bestehe aus Live-Bildern. Das ist nicht der Fall. Wir verwenden weder Film- noch Videomaterial, sondern ausschließlich Fotos. Street View ist vielmehr die Darstellung von Straßenbildern, die der Orientierung dienen sollen. Bei der Entwicklung von Street View war Ihre Privatsphäre unsere höchste Priorität. Deshalb werden Gesichter und Autokennzeichen auf den Street View-Bildern, wo sie erkennbar sind, automatisch von unserer Technologie unkenntlich gemacht.

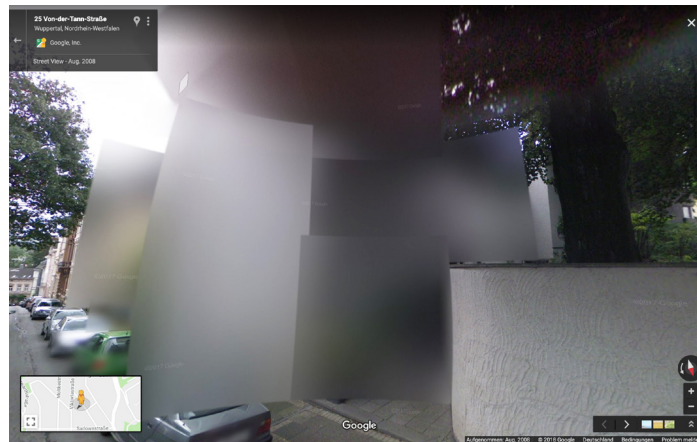
Sollten Sie jedoch Gesichter oder Autokennzeichen finden, die wir übersehen haben, oder falls Sie aus persönlichen Gründen Einwände gegen einzelne Bilder haben, können Sie uns das einfach mitteilen. Dafür werden wir Ihnen bei der Einführung von Street View in Deutschland ein Tool zur Verfügung stellen, mit dem Sie solche Bilder direkt in Street View markieren und melden können.

Wir hoffen, wir konnten Ihre wichtigsten Fragen beantworten. Und vielleicht haben Sie nun Lust, Street View selbst auszuprobieren. Gehen Sie auf eine virtuelle Sightseeing-Tour durch Rom, Paris, London und viele weitere Städte!

Alle weiteren Infos finden Sie auf www.google.de/streetview

Google
Deutschland





Google Street View / Screenshot Archive

- 1) Waldsiedlung Zehlendorf - Argentinische Allee 168 - Berlin-Zehlendorf - Architect: Bruno Taut - Build 1926 - 1932
- 2) Panzerkreuzer - Jungfernheide 8 - Berlin-Siemensstadt - Architect: Hans Scharoun - Build 1930
- 3) Villa d'Avance (Remise und Wohnhaus der Angestellten) - Kranzallee 8-10 - Berlin-Westend - Architect: Harry Rosenthal - Build 1923 - 1924
- 4) Haus Viktoria - Von der Tann-Straße 25 - Wuppertal-Elberfeld - Architect: Hans Heinz Lüttgen - Build 1934 - 1935



Institutional Blur, Beyond Ownership (Panzerkreuzer - Jungfernhaideweg 8 - Berlin-Siemensstadt - Architect: Hans Scharoun - 1930)

Metalogue on Blurring

Participants: a blur, an algorithm, a representative of Google, an unnamed landlord, the American architect Elizabeth Diller, and a fictitious public.

Location: Hans Scharoun's first apartment in Berlin–Siemensstadt, a housing project built for Siemens workers in the 1930s. Scharoun lived with his wife Aenne in this modest apartment until 1960.

virtual reality, the internet of things, tangible interfaces, wearable computers, intelligent architecture – would not have been possible without an augmentation of existing realities.

ELIZABETH DILLER: I would agree with you to an extent. The developments you list do, of course, have a certain value. But, with all due respect to your techno-optimism, I think it's all the more important not to lose sight of the two feedback loops that link technology to its user: There's the issue of data protection. What happens to the data generated by these new applications? Where do they flow and how much control do I retain over them? And then there's the question raised many years ago by Mychilo Cline: How and to what extent are cognition, perception, and communication affected by these new systems? Not that I'm against new developments per se. Far from it, I'm just appealing for a conscious, thoughtful approach to these supposed innovations.

LANDLOARD: Listening to you, what I see in my mind's eye is the opening scene of Blade Runner: everything is flashing and buildings morph into shapeless billboards that flicker with increasingly vague advertising messages.

ELIZABETH DILLER: That's quite a good comparison. And Philip K. Dick can be credited with a certain visionary gift. Of course it's not that many urban centers now look exactly like what you just described. And Dick's idea of the city dissolving into an image was taken up by Paul Virilio in 1997 in "The Overexposed City." In this wonderful essay, Virilio presents the dystopian scenario of an architecture that consists of nothing but surfaces flowing into one another, generated out of screens and membranes, a scenario that has long since freed itself of architecture's physical quality. In this development, Virilio attributes a driving role to the omnipresence of computer and screen logic that aim to deurbanize and ultimately abolish the city as a social space. According to Virilio, the disappearance of native geography and physical space also means a detachment from local and historical time. Anyone who lives in a city knows this effect well: an environment that is permanently illuminated annuls any sense of biological time.

ALGORITHM: If I might be allowed to add something to this interesting conversation, I'd like to make a historical link to something that's been on my mind a lot lately. May I assume we're all familiar with Le Corbusier?

LANDLOARD: Not me, but why don't you tell us ...

ALGORITHM: In the context of Virilio's hypothesis, I'm strongly reminded of the machine for living, a concept casually floated by Le Corbusier in the early 1920s. If I remember correctly, he first spoke of the "machine à habiter." In an article in the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau*. A few years later, the concept became more widespread thanks to one of his most important books, *Towards a New Architecture*. At the time, Le Corbusier was not happy with the way the concept was being used, and in the course of his subsequent career he distanced himself from it to a greater or lesser degree. But to return to my question: With his concept of the machine for living, might Le Corbusier have anticipated what Virilio observed decades later?

ELIZABETH DILLER: That's a very good question. But without being able to ask Le Corbusier himself, we can only speculate (*speaking in the context of the machine for living*). One way to approach the question, however, would be to take a look at the socio-political context of Le Corbusier's times. In our era today, the combination of living and machine speaks of deurbanization. But in the 1920s, the concept of the machine was still imbued with utopian potential. I remember the Futurists around Luigi Russolo and their fascination with machines. At the same time, the automotive industry and Fordism initially contributed to a positive view of industrialization. After all, the automobile was the great promise of its time, associated with individualization and an overcoming of the old space-time paradigm.

ELIZABETH DILLER: Yes, maybe even ahistorical. You probably know that the great architect Louis Kahn told his students that whenever they don't know what to do and need advice, they should ask their building materials, the stones.

to have a closer look at the Panzerkreuzer on your platform and I find that it's been blurred, then that bothers me.

GOOGLE: But what bothers you? That someone is obscuring your view? Or that you're deprived of your right to see anything you want, anytime you want?

ELIZABETH DILLER: Of course I'm aware that I have no such right. But the same thing bothers me in other fields, too. In art in fact: the behavior of a collector who withdraws an iconic work from the public realm is inausical in the same way. And if I transfer this to the blurring of architecture in Google Street View, then the criticism stands in the same way. If someone lives in a building that is of interest to other people – because it was built by a famous architect, or even just because it's a great building – then that person also has a duty. A moral duty at least.

GOOGLE: But perhaps this person just wants to protect the building from the public's overly curious gaze?

ELIZABETH DILLER: You mean they would be acting in the interest of the building because the building might be damaged by the concentration of gazes? That sounds a little extreme, don't you think?

GOOGLE: Whether or not it sounds realistic is not for me to say. But I can tell us that the gaze can endanger the autonomy of the subject. Why shouldn't the same apply to an object?

ELIZABETH DILLER: Quite simply because the building doesn't blur itself. It's blurred by its owner. An interpretation that I could accept. However, is that of a transference onto the part of the owner, who over-identifies with the object and projects his own fears onto it.

ALGORITHM: So you're saying that the blur that inserts itself as an image between the viewer and the building is responding to a purely human need based on the fear of being seen or identified?

ELIZABETH DILLER: In all these things, we can never be quite sure. And in my view, the Lacanian reading and Virilio's theory do not rule each other out. On the contrary, a process of moving away from the Cartesian space-time paradigm automatically evokes a transitional state of uncertainty, which in turn prompts fear as an instinctive reaction.

BLUR: So you're saying I'm a product of fear?

ELIZABETH DILLER: More a product of uncertainty perhaps. But this indeterminacy is also full of possibilities and potential. It is only out of formlessness and an absence of definition that the new can develop freely, without the burden of pre-determination.

BLUR: So I'm a kind of primal state?

ELIZABETH DILLER: Yes, maybe that too. But perhaps you're also a primal fog whose mysterious appearance only seems mysterious to us because we haven't found the right to see the essence behind it. If there is indeed any essence, it's also possible that you're a para-phenomenon, beyond any explanation in terms of natural science.

ALGORITHM: An antimorphic principle?

ELIZABETH DILLER: Yes, maybe even ahistorical. You probably know that the great architect Louis Kahn told his students that whenever they don't know what to do and need advice, they should ask their building materials, the stones.

BLUR: No, I didn't know that. Did it help?

ELIZABETH DILLER: We don't know. What do we know is that Kahn drew his inspiration from the following: DNA, light, and runs. He saw DNA as a carrier of information, light as the basic condition for any built space, and runs as the guarantor of the aura of what has been built.

ALGORITHM: Yes, which makes Kahn guilty of magical thinking.

BLUR: How so?

ELIZABETH DILLER: Simple. Because the concept of aura is as undefined as the concept of the blur. Which puts us firmly in the realm of speculative metaphysics. And in this spirit of Walter Benjamin's efforts to rehabilitate the concept and anchor it in the art-historical canon (*about another moment*).

ELIZABETH DILLER: Precisely. Which is why my reference to Kahn was meant to bring us not to the aura but the runs (*about another moment*). In recent years, runs have received more attention than ever before. This may be due to the interdisciplinary involvement of previously neglected fields of academic research such as archeology, but to an even more banal level it could also be due to a phenomenon like Islamic State, whose deliberate destruction of cultural heritage reminded the West of the fragility of its management of memory.

GOOGLE: Which is an unstable argument in favor of Google Street View. If Google were able to do its work in the Middle East with the same diligence, we would still have at least virtual access to these important sites that have now vanished.

LANDLOARD: That's as may be. But I somehow doubt whether the responsibility for such a far-reaching task should be in the hands of a company like Google.

PUBLIC: That's another discussion that should be conducted elsewhere. And it is conducted at regular intervals, whenever Google unilaterally annexes new fields of activity. One need only think of Google Library and the controversial digitization of entire stocks of books.

ELIZABETH DILLER: Google's power-grabbing strategies is something we really should discuss some other time. My reason for introducing the theme of the run was as follows: whereas I was never important for architects in the pre-Modernist age to think about what their buildings would look like afterwards – because architecture usually followed those who built it – since Modernism it has become the norm for architects to occasionally experience the deconstruction of their work. Today, people don't build for eternity, just until the next aesthetic watershed. Those lucky architects whose work proves to be lasting and timeless, and who come to prominence in the course of their careers, who their work treated with more care – everything else is torn down again at the first signs of displeasure (*beforehand*).

BLUR: So modern architects suffer a humiliation that is without precedent in the history of architecture?

ELIZABETH DILLER: Yes, in psychological terms you could put it that way. And this is precisely where ruins have taken on a new importance. Because the ruin is no longer just something

unfamiliar that was built many centuries ago and has since been levelled by nature. All of a sudden, the ruin is something whose inauguration was merely celebrated not so many years hence, something familiar that one has become fond of, and which now, for no apparent good reason, has been reduced to piles of rubble, sorted by material. If you're lucky (*about another moment*).

BLUR: That must be hard to bear.

ELIZABETH DILLER: Indeed. But the trickiest thing is that this whole issue of ruins was anticipated by someone whose name I would have preferred to keep out of this discussion. Albert Speer (*about a former moment*). Although Speer became known for many unpleasant things, I think his most important contribution to architectural history is a footnote that has been discussed relatively little to date, namely his theory of ruin value. Speer first mentioned this term retrospectively in 1949, in his best-known publication *Inside the Third Reich*. Memoirs. In this book, he describes the value theory as a method that served as the conceptual basis for most of the monumental architecture he designed for the Nazis: Why will this building be perceived at the end of the "thousand-year Reich" and after its possible collapse? How can architecture still be impressive even in a ruinous state?

PUBLIC: You're not planning to rehabilitate Albert Speer now, are you?

ELIZABETH DILLER: No, of course not. Nonetheless, Speer's ideas are interesting as they so fittingly address the problems of time and decay inherent in architecture in general (*about a former moment*). Also, Speer shared a source of inspiration with Louis Kahn, namely the ruined landscapes of the Roman Empire and the way they are perceived today. In his life work, Kahn focused systematically on these issues, talking about "ruins in reverse" and subjecting his architecture to a hypothetical gaze from the future. How will this building be perceived in a thousand years' time? And will the eyes that see be human eyes?

GOOGLE: This fairness/edness is interesting, at least in the context of art. As a representative of Google, I can at least guarantee that our company plans in much shorter intervals (*about another moment*). But of course, the way time is perceived also plays an important part in all of our projects. You only need to look at Google Street View when we launched the service internationally in 2008. It wasn't clear to us that the image material would have to be completely updated within just a few years. Every street, every area is constantly changing. And no one who looks at Street View to get their bearings having moved to a new neighborhood, for instance, will be happy to be presented with historical image material. Which is why, at least in more heavily frequented zones, Google now tries to make sure the street views are updated at half-way regular intervals.

LANDLOARD: But that doesn't really apply to Germany, does it? Whenever I use Google Street View, I always see the old images with a copyright stamp from 2008.

GOOGLE: You're right, Germany is an exception.

PUBLIC: But why is that? Does Google not like Germany?

GOOGLE: Google does like Germany, but the sentiment is not reciprocated (*about another moment*). When we presented Google Street View in Germany in 2008, the immediate response was a wave of outrage across the country. The Germans saw their personal data at risk, their privacy under threat. Over a period of two years, there were continual legal disputes with class actions and appeals for the service to be banned, quickly pushing Google's team in Germany to its limits. Around late 2010, an agreement was finally reached, stating that landlords would have the right to have their house or apartment made unrecognizable in Google Street View. Or, as we call it, blurred (*about another moment*). This option was available in Google Street View internationally from the outset, but outside of Germany it was rarely used.

LANDLOARD: Ah yes, I remember. I immediately had our house blurred, too, of course (*about another moment*). I totally forgotten.

GOOGLE: But for Google, the real work had only just begun. Because media feedback led us to be inundated with applications. Before the service went live, we received 250,000 requests, and then many more after the launch. Although our system is largely automated, the blurring always had to be done by hand. No one at Google had anticipated this added workload. Not to mention the added costs (*about another moment*).

PUBLIC: Yes, but luckily your company has reserves. And as we see, it's still operating in the market today.

GOOGLE: That's true. Following those endeavors, however, the mood inside the company concerning Street View in Germany was not good. So it was decided that in Germany, all of the developments systematically pursued by Google in other countries would be frozen for the time being (*about a former moment*). Which, to answer your question, is why Google Street View in Germany has largely not been updated since 2008.

LANDLOARD: I see.

GOOGLE: I say largely because in 2017 we started updating the maps data for Germany and since then we have been regularly sending our vehicles out onto the streets. But you can imagine that while the processing and updating of the old image material, the manual blurring of the 3D environment constitutes the lion's share of the work.

ELIZABETH DILLER: But can't the new image material just be overlaid over the existing blur?

GOOGLE: That would be great, and it would certainly make things a lot easier. But the blur is not a separate layer within the 3D environment of Google Street View, it is rendered directly into the image. We were legally required to do this at the time. Google had to guarantee that the original image material would no longer exist.

LANDLOARD: So if I were to contact Google now and ask for the original pictures of my house prior to blurring, you could not retrieve them?

GOOGLE: That is correct. And, believe it or not, our forums are full of people making just such requests (*about another moment*). Today, many people no longer think their house needs to be blurred, or they're moved and their new house was blurred by their previous owner. There are many possible reasons. But unfortunately there's nothing we can do. The data simply no longer exist.

ELIZABETH DILLER: Would it not be a good idea, then, to develop a non-destructive and interactive interface for Street View 3.0 in which users can blur and unblur their houses at will? Maybe this could even be used to express moods? I'm not feeling good today, my house is blurred, etc. (*about another moment*).

GOOGLE: That's certainly a good idea. If you'd like to propose it and I agree, I'd be happy to pass it on (*about another moment*). Joking apart, however, of course usability and interaction are key criteria in our

interface design for Google Street View. But in the development phase, user behavior was expected to be more dynamic.

LANDLOARD: You mean Google would have liked Street View to be used in a more participatory manner?

GOOGLE: Yes.

LANDLOARD: Like Sim City with real architecture?

GOOGLE: Not necessarily that, but many ideas were discussed in the development phase.

ELIZABETH DILLER: Of course one can imagine many things. One would only have to remove the geographical, copyright-related and proprietary aspects of Google Street View: prosthesis extension of representative classical buildings; a brokerage group trading only with modernist architecture; entire neighborhoods consisting entirely of blur buildings – there are no limits to the immersive possibilities. But my favorite project would be an invisible house.

GOOGLE: And how would such a house be captured by our Street View car?

ELIZABETH DILLER: You'd have to invent a Google Street View car without a camera.

LANDLOARD: Or a camera without a camera.

GOOGLE: Ah, I see what you're driving at. You mean that something that cannot be seen can also not be captured in a picture.

ELIZABETH DILLER: Precisely.

GOOGLE: But that violates the first rule of the art of illusions.

ELIZABETH DILLER: Which is?

GOOGLE: Something that needs hiding is always best concealed in public.

ELIZABETH DILLER: Ah, you mean hidden in plain sight. But that doesn't always work.

GOOGLE: Under which conditions does it not work?

ELIZABETH DILLER: It doesn't work when the public gaze suddenly dries and loses its focus. Then, what was hidden becomes visible again, at least for a split-second.

GOOGLE: You mean that simply defocusing makes the invisible visible?

ELIZABETH DILLER: No. When we remove our gaze, the range of frequencies in the incoming light spectrum shifts, allowing us to see things that were not previously visible to our eyes. By such a simple shifting of frequency range, things can be seen that exist on a different frequency range.

GOOGLE: Interesting, I must try it sometime. And what kind of things does one see?

ELIZABETH DILLER: It varies, depending on the test person's state of consciousness.

ALGORITHM: That sounds like something I've heard of before, but without ever understanding how it actually works: a phenomenon called remote viewing.

PUBLIC: Ah, it's interesting you should mention that. I happen to know something about it. But not many people are familiar with remote viewing. A test person concentrates on a target to the point where a picture of it appears in their mind. In the confusion and upheaval of the 1940s, remote viewing was one of the phenomena of extraordinary consciousness that were studied more or less publicly at Stanford University. With funding from the CIA, many of these programs were kept alive into the 1970s. The military always hoped that remote viewing could be developed for the purposes of espionage, but eventually the program was shut down due to a lack of results. At least that was the official version. But Ingo Swann, the director of Project Stargate, had always been more interested in the psychological dimension of this paratechnology, delivering intricate precise descriptions of the ruins of Jupiter and similarly crazy stuff that was worthless for the CIA.

ALGORITHM: Many thanks for the detailed description. So remote viewing is exactly the kind of camera without a camera someone mentioned just now. Although if I imagine remote viewing as a flying eye, I find it rather creepy.

PUBLIC: Rather creepy, yes. I'm immediately reminded of a quote from Sartre: "I understand that I'm in hell. All those eyes intent on me, devouring me."

ELIZABETH DILLER: Yes, that's Sartre's introduction to his story of the keyhole: Someone watches other people through a keyhole, but it is only when he's caught doing so that he feels ashamed.

PUBLIC: Exactly. But what Sartre describes here is a principle of interpersonal communication. And the focus is on the formation and development of a basic human emotion. Learning to deal with shame is at least as important as learning to accept one's own nakedness.

ALGORITHM: Does this mean that if someone has their house blurred, they might not have learned to compensate for their sense of shame in a positive way?

ELIZABETH DILLER: I could mean that. But I think there's a crucial difference between being observed by a drone or by a human being (*about another moment*).

ALGORITHM: That's true. There would be a difference. But what is it exactly?

ELIZABETH DILLER: Good question. But the answer may actually be quite simple: If we are being watched by a human being, we can assess the situation because we can understand the person and their patterns of behavior. With a drone, things are slightly different. Even if we know that the drone is being controlled by a human being, we can't be totally sure. And if the drone were being controlled by an algorithm or by some completely unknown form of intelligence, anything would be possible.

ALGORITHM: Does that mean that our *instinctus notorius*, developed over millennia, has come to an end?

ELIZABETH DILLER: Possibly so. For the time being. But my intuition tells me that we shouldn't care too much.

Picture page 2: Institutional Blur, Beyond Ownership
(Langer Jammer - Goebelstraße 15 - Berlin-Siemens-
stadt - Architect: Otto Bartnig - 1929-1931)

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Exhibition photos:
Piotr Pietrus, Jan-Peter Sonntag, Jaro Straub
Translation: Nicholas Grindell

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In cooperation with Project Space Festival Berlin 2018

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Further info:

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Instagram *Blurred Modernism* » [link](#)

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SCHARAUN is an interdisciplinary project space for art and architecture. The exhibition space is located on the 3rd floor of a building designed and built by Hans Scharoun in 1930 at the address of Jungfernheideweg 4 in Berlin-Siemensstadt. Scharoun lived and worked with his wife Aenne in the same building for 30 years.

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