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Architectures
Institutions and transformations of collective lives

Abstract

Which transformations does collective life experience, when nomadic people are systematically territorialized, settled for instance on the urban periphery of Ulan-Bator in Mongolia? Or which alterations does society undergo in the case of the rapid and massive urbanization in Central China today? The article is based on a sociological theory which argues for the socially constitutive potential of architectural artefacts: It sees architecture not as the 'mirror' of a given society, but rather as a *mode* of society itself. With this theoretical perspective, the article unfolds the methodological proposal of a comparative architectural sociology, contrasting four divergent architectural modes of collective existence. This comparative view, which is that of structural anthropology, aims to highlight the societal positivity of architecture (infrastructures and modes of settlement included), as well as current architectural changes of collectivities such as the urbanization of Central China, or the settlement of the Mongolian nomads. The article consists of four parts: In the first and second parts, the theoretical perspective and the comparative methodology are sketched. The third part contrasts four divergent architectural modes of collective existence, and the fourth and final part exemplarily discusses some architectural transformations.

Keywords:

anthropology; sociological theory; architectural sociology; comparison; global transformations

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ARCHITECTURES

INSTITUTIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF COLLECTIVE LIVES

"ARCHITECTURAL MODES OF COLLECTIVE EXISTENCE": INTRODUCTION

The following article introduces the reader to a comparative research program of architectural sociology – and is thus also meant as an invitation to collaborate on such a sociology of architecture. To this end, the article unfolds three related topics: On the one hand, it suggests using the *comparative method* of structural anthropology in order to enable a distant view of the relationship between architectures and collective lives, and in order to enable a symmetrical, as little as possible Eurocentric view of other architectural cultures and societies. At the same time, this synchronic, symmetrical or structural comparison is considered necessary to analyze historical or current architectural transformations of societies. On the other hand, this application of the method of structural anthropology in architectural sociology is based on a *theoretical* perspective, which stresses the constitutive role of architectures for collective life. This theoretical perspective, too, is not initiated by structuralism. For it is precisely the sociological theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss, according to which 'society' (or any collective existence[2]) is *culturally* or *symbolically constituted*. Among further systems of meaning (language, in particular), architectures represent less symbolic 'expressions' of an already given society than "modes of collective existence" (Delitz 2018) itself. Indeed, it is in this French tradition of sociological theory – which interrelates authors like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Marcel Mauss and Émile Durkheim with, for instance, Foucault, Castoriadis or Deleuze – that this article treats architecture as a "medium of the social" (Delitz 2010a): Thanks to the visual shapes of built environments and thanks to the affections, movements, postures and perceptions they generate, architecture creates particular modes of the territorialization of individuals, of social differences, of relations between nature and culture, or to the past. In architectural terms, collective existences are also continuously transformed (for instance through esthetic innovations of a cultural avantgarde, or through colonial politics, as exemplified by Bourdieu, Sayad 2020).

The article is composed of four parts: In the first part, the theoretical perspective is briefly outlined. Insofar as it unfolds a sociology with 'society', this theoretical perspective mainly follows the Durkheimian tradition within sociological theory (for a more complete picture, see Delitz 2010a: Chapter II; 2018) – a sociology which is interested in "constituted subjectivity" (Balibar 2005:10) rather than taking constitutive subjectivity as a point of departure. More precisely, the article applies a "postfoundational" theory of society (Marchart 2007) to architecture. In the second part, the methodological proposal of a contrastive comparative sociology is unfolded, followed, thirdly, by the comparative research program. For heuristic reasons, it contrasts four architectural modes of collective existence: *societies of cities, nomadic societies, societies of residential atomism,* and *societies à maisons creusées* or 'societies of underground houses'. These steps are the prerequisites for a fourth and final part, which analyzes architectural transformations of collectives, in an illustrative and provisional manner.

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2 The terms "society" and "collective" are used as synonyms in order to include non-national societies (for instance totemic collectives, which consist of both human and non-human beings). Both terms are based on a thoroughly non-essentialist theory of the social.

1 The theoretical perspective: Architecture as constitutive "mode" of collective existence

Architecture has always been a political activity, and any new architecture depends on revolutionary forces, you can find architecture saying 'We need a people,' even though the architect isn't himself a revolutionary. ... A people is always a new wave, a new fold in the social fabric; any creative work is a new way of folding adapted to new materials. (Deleuze 2000:158)

Based on a particular theoretical perspective, architecture is, in the following, not considered secondary in the representation of any given society or any given social practice, but is rather regarded as an *integral part* of such – as introducing "differences" in society (Delitz 2010a:11). The article stresses the social positivity of architecture, hereby using the term 'architecture' in a broad sense – including all built, woven or sewn artefacts and also including infrastructures, settlements, and spatial structures. The term is not restricted to the profession and discipline of architecture, but applied to all architectonic cultures. In this respect, the definition of architecture by Bernard Cache might be helpful, for whom all artefacts which allocate space, separate a territory and arrange bodies are referred to as 'architecture', including also infrastructural artefacts, for instance. Moreover, Cache stresses the particular *image* of the collective, which architectures offer, as well as the fact that architectonic artefacts introduce particular separations and connections of bodies, of movements and perceptions. In these respects, he defines architecture as the "basis of our social coexistence" (Cache 1995:23). Most importantly (and similar to Cache), architecture is not perceived as merely expressing a given society (its social structure, for instance). Instead, it is understood as a *mode* in which a social structure as well as a collective identity is *constituted* – and therefore also as a mode in which collective life is being *transformed.* This architectural sociology stands within a tradition of culturalist sociological theory, which dates back to Durkheim and Mauss, and which was decidedly reformulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Cornelius Castoriadis respectively (Delitz 2010a, 2018:43–47). As briefly mentioned before, this theoretical tradition could be referred to as a *sociology with society* or as a *sociology of the constituted subject*.[3]

More specifically (as also Marxist sociologies are sociologies 'with society'): Thanks firstly to the reformulation of the Durkheimian approach in the works of Lévi-Strauss, this theoretical tradition can be referred to as a *cultural* sociology. It understands systems of meaning as being constitutive for all social facts. And secondly, thanks to the reformulation of structuralist social thought in the work of Castoriadis, this sociological theory could also be referred to as being a postfoundational theory of *society*, interested in symbolically constituted *imaginations* of the collective – in the imagination of collective unity, identity in time; and in the imagination of its last values and origins. Both Castoriadis' theory of the imaginary institution, and Lévi-Strauss' theory of systems of meaning are non-essentialist theories of society. They both allow the importance of architectures as socially constitutive to be stressed. In its artificial shapes and spatial structures, a collective life is first and foremost instituted. In all these and any further aspects, architectural artefacts are regarded as effective – as structuring the daily activities of individuals, their perceptions of each other, as creating institutional effects (religious ones, for instance), relating nature and culture, human and non-human beings, past and present societies, gender and generations. In order to explain this perspective in a bit more detail, I want to briefly recall, first of all, the *cultural turn* featured in the work of Lévi-Strauss; secondly, Castoriadis' culturalist theory of

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3 For different sociological perspectives within architectural sociology, see Fischer/Makropoulos 2004, and Delitz 2009. For a sociological theory of architecture particularly based on Berger and Luckmann (which aims to integrate the sociological theories of Weber, Schütz and of Durkheim, respectively), see Steets 2016:99 ("a sociological theory of architecture which is both comprehensive and detailed", and which emphasizes the individual internalization and interpretation of buildings, or the 'knowledge' of buildings). For a sociological theory 'with society' based on Niklas Luhmann's theory of symbolic communication, see Fischer 2010, 2012. For STS-inspired approaches, cf. the works of Albena Yaneva and the contributions in Müller/Reichmann 2015. For a Bourdieusian-perspective on architecture and collective identity, see Jones 2006, 2011. Overviews on theoretical approaches and case studies referring to the sociologies of space (see also Löw 2017), of architecture or built environment are offered by Löw/Steets 2014 and Jones 2016.

society; and thirdly, I want to complement these two theories with the theory of hegemony of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001, cf. Marchart 2007, Delitz/Maneval 2017).

"Mauss still thinks it possible to develop a sociological theory of symbolism, whereas it is obvious that what is needed is a symbolic origin of society", writes Claude Lévi-Strauss (1987:21) in his 'structuralist manifesto'. Reformulating the theoretical concept of the late Émile Durkheim (Durkheim 1995) and of Marcel Mauss, this structuralist sociological theory maintains that it is in cultural systems – systems of meanings – that collectives or societies are *constituted (*rather than merely being expressed). It is precisely in this way that Lévi-Strauss is a founder of the *cultural turn*. Or, this structuralist theory could also be referred to as a "postfoundationalist" theory of the social (Marchart 2007), seeing the cultural as immanent to the social (and vice versa), rather than that an underlying social would only express itself symbolically. This postfoundational or cultural theory of the social is for instance unfolded in the interpretation of totemic classifications: Within a totemic classification, the "category of class and the notion of opposition" (of the natural species) are used "by the social order in its formation" (Lévi-Strauss 1991:97). Totemism relates two series to each other, whereby the differentiation of the species is crucial for the constitution of the social groups. More accurately, neither the first nor the second series is a primary one: It "is only the relation between the series as a whole which is homomorphic". Of the two systems of differences, each forms a constitutive "pole of opposition" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:224).

In the work of Castoriadis, this symbolic theory of society is further unfolded, stressing the importance of imaginations of the collective. For Castoriadis (1987:204), the social is the permanent becoming-another, "perpetual flux of selfalteration" – and therefore collective life is only possible as an imaginary *fixation*, or institution of a collective identity in time. Collective life is therefore only possible as imagined collective *unity* – 'society' always requires the imagination of a 'we' (Castoriadis 1987: 146). Furthermore, Castoriadis speaks of a last horizon of meaning, of an imagined ground, or of the "foundational outside" of the collective (Delitz–Maneval 2017). Any collective life is instituted upon a last or *central imaginary signification,* which is the "invisible cement, holding together this endless collection of real, rational and symbolic odds and ends that constitute every society" (Castoriadis, 1987: 143). This last or primary signification, is the imagined foundation of a society, denying its contingency. Such significations – for instance "God", but also the "Nation" (1987:148) or "rationality" (1987:156–160) – "*create* objects *ex nihilo"* and "organize the world" (Castoriadis 1987:361). Fully imagined, they "*denote* nothing at all, and *connote* just about everything" (Castoriadis 1987:143). It is here that Castoriadis comes back to Durkheim, who saw religion (or any ideas of something sacral) as the self-divination of society (Durkheim 1965:206–208, Delitz 2019).

According to Laclau and Mouffe (2001), the imaginary institution of society is never uncontested. It is always that of a particular position. As any form of consensus is the result of a hegemonic articulation, there will always be other possibilities to identify the collective's unity, identity and foundation. All the more as this last signifier is in itself empty (fully imagined), there is always another possible 'imagined ground'. The collective's identity and unity are constituted through negations of other possibilities, by difference. In this way, Laclau and Mouffe (2001, xviii) understand any collective identity as being based on a "constitutive outside". Hence, because of this "field of overdetermination", no society is "fully fixed" (Laclau–Mouffe 2001:111). Collective identity is im*possible*, but at the same time and for precisely this reason, its imagination is *necessary*:

> *The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations - otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning. If the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of a society, the social only exists, however, as an effort to construct that impossible object (Laclau, Mouffe 2001:112).*

So, according to these post-foundationalist authors, 'society' or 'collective identity' is re-defined in the

following way: Because the social or collective life is permanently in flux, and because it is always heterogenous, collective existence requires the *imaginary institution* of an identity in time; it requires the imagination of a shared identity of its members; and it requires the imagination of its necessity – or, society is based on a central imaginary, society always has an *imagined foundation*.

Now, any such imaginary significations are only real if they are symbolized, if they are visible, tangible, or audible. Symbolisms are constitutive for an imaginary instituted collective life. By the way, this significance of symbols has already been established by Émile Durkheim: "[I]n all its aspects and at every moment of its history, social life is only possible thanks to a vast symbolism", he writes in *Elementary Forms* (1965:230–231). And within the spectrum of symbols or cultural media of collective life, he also mentions buildings and architectural styles, namely in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (Durkheim 1982:58). But in this early work, he takes architecture only as reflecting already existent social norms. More intensively, Marcel Mauss studied architecture, as constituting the 'social morphology' of society (Mauss 1970). And in a far more sophisticated theory of society, but now only implicitly referring to architecture, Cornelius Castoriadis (1987:204) offers a thought which takes architecture, beneath other symbolic modes, as *constitutive for collective existence*: A society "only exists by providing itself with 'stable' figures by which it makes itself visible", he writes, and furthermore: The symbolic in general should be envisaged as defining "*the very way in which the [...] society*" is "institutionalized" (Castoriadis, 1987: 100, my Italics). If society is an imagined institution or fixation; and if therefore society always requires a particular symbolism – then architecture has to be taken not as merely being a mirror of society. *Rather, architecture is an activity through which societal life unfolds itself*. Or, architecture is a symbolic "mode of collective existence" (Delitz 2018) – beneath, and interwoven with other symbolic modes (discourses, bodily practices, images ...). Indeed, it is profoundly difficult to think of a particular society without having its architectural or its built shape in mind. Likewise, social and even individual actions almost always take place in architectural "assemblages" – in assemblages of particular architectural artefacts, which are connected to the living bodies of humans and of nonhumans, and which are traversed by particular discourses (see for the notion of assemblage Deleuze–Guattari 1987:88).

In what ways is a collective identity or a society constituted in architectures, then? Of course, at a given moment and place there is often a wide variety of buildings, from different epochs and social strata or social spheres. But even with a conglomerate of many different buildings, the architectural culture offers a particular *image* or *shape* of the collective life – it institutes a society, for instance in relating it to a particular history, or in instituting a society of functional differentiated social spheres. At the same time, every architecturally created space encourages (or discourages) particular *bodily movements*, perceptions, and affections. Architectural artefacts establish particular social relations between human beings, or between human and non-human beings – defining a particular mode of their organization. For instance, divisions of generations and of genders are related to architectures and to architectural interiors, in particular. Every society also selectively arranges a particular temporality and relation to its past by means of its architectures. Equally, the relationship between culture and nature is constituted by these artefacts, in the face of stark contrasts of the buildings to the natural environment on the one side, and their integration into nature on the other side. The affective intensity of institutions is constituted by the dimensions and surfaces of buildings; or, a society's chosen method of construction creates a particular mode of territorialisation, of fixation of the individuals on the territory (Deleuze–Guattari 1987: Chapt. 12, 14). Concerning the last signifier or the imaginary foundation of the society, too, architecture is a mode of its actualization. For instance, a society founded in 'rationality' is not merely 'expressed' within the purist aesthetics of classic modernism. Rather, it is (inter alia) *architecturally constituted*, for 'rationalism' is anchored in the daily routines, gazes, and affections of the users or the passers-by of these buildings.

2 The methodological perspective: Contrastive and symmetrical comparison

A – maybe the most effective – way of estimating the contributions of architectures to the imaginary instituted society is a comparative view on very different global architectural cultures (see for an overview Vellinga 2021, for the following Delitz 2018). Of course, any architectural culture is permanently in flux. This is true not least in the course first of colonization, and then of postcolonial globalization: Within the related process of urbanisation, global architectural cultures as well as societies and social interactions are often massively transformed. In order to analyse such *architectural transformations of collective life,* I now follow the comparative method of structural anthropology. This comparative method – which I want to reconstruct now first of all independently from the question of architecture – consists of three narrowly connected decisions: First, the method *contrasts* different societies or cultures, as in a way 'intentionally' opposed to each other. Second, it takes them as *synchronic* modes of collective existence – instead of following each other in a developmental sense. And the third decision lies in seeing all modes of collective existence as being variants or "*transformations*" of each other ('transformation' taken in a technical sense, *not* meaning historical changes).

Claude Lévi-Strauss himself introduced this comparative method most clearly – on the one side – in his interpretations of 'totemic' systems or of the classifications of natural beings in so called totemic societies (*The Savage Mind,* Lévi-Strauss 1966)*.* On the other side, the term of transformations or of variants of variants is in particular unfolded within his *Mythologiques* (Lévi-Strauss 1969): In order to avoid the Eurocentric (evolutionist) view which sees for instance societies 'without' history as 'archaic' precursors of 'historical' societies, Lévi-Strauss substituted the terms of societies *without* history with thoroughly positive terms: They are "cold" societies, or societies *against* history, in contrast to "hot" societies (Lévi-Strauss 1966:233f.). In this way, he not only aimed to acknowledge the ingenious character of indigenous societies. He also was interested in particular in totemic systems, for they form a *counterpart* to his own society. In the totemic classification of natural beings, and in the totemic myths a collective life is instituted, which 'denies' its becoming-another – and therefore stands in sharp contrast to a society which institutes historical sciences, inter alia. Hereby, both modes of collective existence are thought as being *contemporary* to each other. They are not ensuing from one another, but there is a "fundamental antipathy between history and systems of classification" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:232). In exactly the same sense, Pierre Clastres contrasted societies *with* and *against* the State, in order to avoid negative notions for indigenous societies, and thus an evolutionist concept of collective life. For such a concept, indigenous

> *societies are societies without a State. This factual judgment, accurate in itself, actually hides an opinion [...]. What the statement says, in fact, is that [these] societies are missing something — the State — that is essential to them, as it is to any other society: our own, for instance. Consequently, those societies are incomplete (Clastres 1977:159).*

In brief, the comparative method of structural anthropology is (firstly) the synchronic, and (secondly) the contrastive comparison, which rigidly avoids negative notions. Hereby, Lévi-Strauss more precisely wants to distinguish "subjective attitude[s]" of societies or collectives (Lévi-Strauss–Eribon 1991:124). Or, he also speaks of an ideal-typical contrastive method, for no society actually is fully 'hot' or 'cold'.

Third: Structural anthropology is the analysis of "transformations" (Lévi-Strauss 1969:2 or 13), which are not to be understood as historical transformations of a society. Within structuralist thought, a transformation means that a given collective life can be treated as a variant of another collective life. A society is the 'transformation' of others in the sense that it combines the same cultural elements, but in another way. At the same time and more important, the anthropological (sociological) knowledge is itself a variant or transformation of the society under study: Indigenous societies are the subjects of anthropological knowledge. It is in this sense, that Lévi-Strauss (1969:12) suggested to read his *Mythologiques* as a variant of, or "as the myth of mythology".

According to Philippe Descola (2016:41, cf. 2017), the analysis of transformations is the "basic principle" of the structural method. This third decision of structural anthropology is likewise important for this comparative method: With it, one sees each collective existence – including the anthropologist's own –, as a "variant" of "other variants" (Descola 2016:41). Or, with the term of transformation, structural anthropology aims to reach the "fairest form of symmetrisation" of cultures. Or, the aim is to be "as neutral as possible in relation to our own" culture (Descola 2018:412).

At the same time, Descola widens this comparative method: He compares not only two, but four contrasting modes of collective existence – unfolding a "matrix" of different modes of identifications of humans with non-humans: Humans can assume that the "physicality" and the "interiority" of non-humans are similar or different to their own. Precisely four contrastive social ontologies are possible (animist, totemic, naturalist and analogist ones, Descola 2013). Together with six "types of relationships" (e.g. giving or exchanging, Descola 2013:311), these four modes of identification of subjects define contrastive institutions of collective life. In a similar way – both following and radicalizing Lévy-Strauss – Eduardo Viveiros de Castro contrasts different ontologies in order to 'decolonize' anthropological thought. In this view, Amerindian perspectivism is juxtaposed

> *with modern, multiculturalist cosmologies: where the latter rest on the mutual implication between the unicity of nature and the multiplicity of cultures […], the Amerindian conception presupposes, on the contrary, a unity of mind and a diversity of bodies.* (Viveiros de Castro 2017:55)

As will be more clearly elaborated in the next part, this comparative approach is the basis of the comparison of architectural modes of collective existence: thanks to its *synchronic* comparison, which than allows historical changes to be brought into view; thanks to its *positive* notions, which aims to be as *neutral as possible* in relation to our own culture; and thanks to the ideal typical matrix of four divergent modes of collective existence.

Because this comparative anthropology provokes harsh critiques*,* these criticisms should be addressed first – before the architectural comparison is sketched. On the one hand, Descola and Viveiros de Castro are accused of having a "dehistoricized" account (Skafish 2016:67). With regard to that critique, Lévi-Strauss already tried to provide an answer. Sharing this argument, Descola (2013:388) additionally refers to Marc Bloch's retrospective history as the methodological idea of his matrix: Only the "knowledge of the structure of any phenomenon can make it possible to inquire relevantly into its origins", or, a "genealogy of the constitutive elements of different ways of relating to the world and to others would be impossible to establish before first identifying the stable forms in which those elements are combined". In other words: far from being "unhistorical", structuralism seeks to "concentrate first on the present the better to interpret the past" (Descola 2013:xviii). In this sense, the matrix serves as a "kind of snapshot focused on a collectivity at one particular moment", namely, when the collective presents an "exemplary paradigm", or an "'ideal type'" (Descola 2013:xix). In other words: The matrix is a heuristic tool needed to analyze *historical* as well as – as I would like to add – *current societal changes*. On the other hand and maybe a more serious problem, structuralist anthropology is accused of being *essentialist*. In stressing cultural differences, it seems a new *Othering* of other cultures, distinguishing anew the "West" from the "Rest" (Bessire–Bond 2014). In close relationship to this critique, in particular Descola is accused of subordinating all other relations between humans and non-humans to his own one. His matrix is understood as an "intellectual project of a conservative kind" (Skafish 2016:68). With regard to this criticisms and in contrast to them, structural anthropology sees its interest in extra-modern cultures just *as the only way not to be Eurocentric*: for an anthropology which considers any picture of the Other as an invention "of the West", and which understands every 'European' discourse on other cultures as ultimately self-interested,

is only the "ultimate stage of ethnocentrism" (Viveiros de Castro 2017:39f.).[4] A "veritable anthropology", in contrast, would *symmetrize* others and the own culture: Anthropology (and sociology) has only this possibility – posing different societies and their respective knowledge (or their respective architectural cultures) in "a plane of *immanence*" (Viveiros de Castro 2017:215, cf. Charbonnier et al 2017). It was in this way that Lévi-Strauss suggested to read his *Mythologiques* 'as the myth of mythology'. Descola, too, insists on this very point in defending his matrix, referring on his side to the notion of 'transformation': His own ontology (naturalism) is not the base of the comparative inquiry of ontologies. Rather, it is "only one of the four ontological variants" (Descola 2016:41, cf. 2017). Certainly, no comparative research program really "achieves a complete symmetry" (Descola 2017:32). Nevertheless, this is the aim of structural anthropology.

3 A Matrix of four divergent architectural modes of collective existence

In this way, the following matrix of four architectural modes of collective existence (cf. Delitz 2018:46ff) is thought as a heuristic tool in order to be 'as neutral as possible' to our own architectural mode, seeing it as *one among several other variants*. So, the aim of the following matrix is firstly to compare synchronic architectural cultures, hereby avoiding negative notions and stressing in contrast the positivity of every architectural culture. Secondly, the aim of the matrix is to provide a heuristic base for analyzing past or current architectural changes of collectives. Similar to Descola's book, a matrix of four architectural modes of collective existence is unfolded, with the difference being that it is not logically modelled (maybe there are more than four modes of architectural cultures conceivable). The matrix starts from the relationships of bodies to the earth, which are established by architectural artifacts (infrastructures included). It then contrasts four very different – or divergent – modes of 'territorialization' of bodies: Insofar as *societies of cities* essentially institute fixed and infrastructural relations of individuals to each other, they sharply contrast with *nomadic societies* which are permanently in motion. In as much as urban collectives are densely populated, they also contrast with *residential atomism*. And insofar as urban societies' architecture is mostly constructed above the ground, they contrast with *sociétés à maisons creusées*, too. In the following section, the four architectural modes are briefly outlined, in order to conclude – equally briefly – in the next part with some current changes of the non-urban, or better anti-urban modes (using case studies).

Societies of cities – fixed, infrastructured, urban societies: The 'environment' built from hard matter characterizes urban societies as well as their connections by infrastructures. Such modes of collective existence typically institute a hierarchical structuration of the collective; it tends to a functional differentiation; hard matter allows the narration of history or a collective memory. The fixed mode of architecture (with fundaments) territorializes the individuals and creates a 'striated space' (see Deleuze, Guattari 1987:223, for instance). The urban concentration establishes a differentiation between the collective's centre and the "hinterland". Furthermore, urban architectures tend to demarcate the cultural against the natural; an "artificial society" is instituted architecturally (Popitz 1995):

> *If it is an essential feature of the city to forget the dependency of its reproduction base, to let the sucked-in materials within the city appear in a different way, as they have appeared beyond its architecture, this certainly means a fundamental alteration of the perception of things. The material base is posed as contingent* (Eßbach 2011: 78, transl. HD).

Related to this sense of the contingency of social life, architectural culture tends to indulge in the search for new forms and matter; it is the artificial mode of 'hot' societies. Based on those general tendencies, different architectural movements in concrete epochs and regions are to be distinguished. For instance, in Ger-

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4 Furthermore, being only interested in "poverty and suffering", anthropology uses "as imperialistic universals as any" (Skafish 2017: 75).

man architectural discussion, the styles of construction or architecture following classical modernism, of *re-construction,* and of *deconstruction* draws a differentiated picture of the collectives, establishing contrasting histories, hierarchical structures, affections. Nevertheless, such architectural styles do not alter the structural features of an urban-concentrated, fixed and infrastructural mode of collective existence – they, too, institute a fixed mode of the social structure, a striated space, and a built history. In this mode of collective existence, architecture follows an ontology that sees artefacts as pure things, in contrast, for instance, to residential atomism (see below).

Tent societies – nomadic collectives: While the comparison between different urban collectives is enlightening in terms of both similarities and differences, it is very easy to recognize the specific features of fixed, durable architectures when we contrast them to completely different architectural modes such as those found in nomadic societies (see Delitz 2010b, with reference to Bernus 1981, Casajus 1987, Claudot-Hawad 2004, 2006). Unlike urban societies, nomadic societies have their own architectures. For instance, the collective life of the Tuareg is deeply related to the light, flat and movable tents, made of goatskins or palm tree leaves respectively, which gives rise to its own perceptions and affections. Despite the fact that the interior design rigidly separates the genders, there is virtually no visual or acoustic separation between them (nor between animals and human beings). Instead, social strata are based on the radius of activity, the speed and distance with which an individual is able to move. Concerning the shape of the imagined collective (the collective identity in time and its unity), the tents create a single storey figure of the collective. All tents are alike, their design is identical, clearly referring to different Tuareg cultures, differentiating them into those of the leather tents (*Kel Ahaggar*, although today leather is often substituted by cloth), and the mats tents (*Kel Ferwan*).[5] The Tuareg conceptualize almost their entire political life with respect to the tent. It offers the terms and images of the collective: The tribe as a conglomeration of groups is conceived of in line with the tent – each group is equal, just as every support of the tent is of equal length. The permanent movement of the whole collective, too, assumes a political dimension: in the territory of the Tuareg, the variable boundaries play a crucial role. These societies do have cities (Timbuktu, for instance); nevertheless, their history is of minor relevance and they are the sites of ancillary (economic, religious) functions, but not of the political life. Similar relations between architecture and society can be identified for Mongolian nomads: The round form of the yurt follows both constructive and cultural grounds: According to the Mongolian pattern of thought, it is only a round structure that will harmonize with nature. There is once again a rigid inner and outer spatial organization: A rigid order and orientation of the yurts (they never face the north) goes hand in hand with rigid norms of color and shape – all yurts are identical. Once again, the architecture mirrors a map of the society, which is deeply integrated into the landscape – a landscape which is believed to be inhabited by various beings, humans and non-humans, visible and invisible things. The social ontology of the Mongolian culture is an analogist and shamanistic one, thinking the landscape alive and assuming small differences between beings (Humphrey 1995). The traces of the yurt, tombs and border stones offer orientation within the territory. In the inner space of the yurt, life is intensely social. There is only one room, which is strictly divided. Manifold norms relate to the postures of the body (for things like running, eating etc.) and its gazes. Particular norms concern the sleeping body, for sleep is regarded as the passage between life and death, public and private. Norms also restrict animal behaviour (in fear of bad spirits, Lagaze 2003, fn. 30*)*. In sum, this architecture constitutes a *bipolar social order*, hierarchizing right and left, the public and the private, male and female and older and younger people (Lacaze 2006, 2012); and at the same time, it integrates human and non-human beings, nature and culture.

Settled, non-urban societies – residential atomism: Extra-modern societies of the south-American tropical forests are neither nomadic nor urban. These collectives – for instance, the Achuar (the indigenous collective on the border between Peru and Ecuador) – live in settlements of scattered houses, strictly arranged in

5 Anja Fischer distinguishes three architectonic cultures and collectives, see Fischer 2021.

such a way that a relation between them is maintained and water sources are nearby; the collective sees to it that the prescribed distances between the 'settlements' are respected. Their mode of collective existence is a "residential atomism", avoiding any demographical concentration (Descola 1996:8, 1982a:302). Or, else, it is a society close to a "zero-degree social integration" (Descola 1996:8), keeping collectives small and aiming to be autonomous. Here, each house "stands as the image of an autonomous whole, controlling its piece of territory with the illusion of free will that comes from the long practice of solipsism" (Descola 1996:135). It follows a *politics*. Furthermore, in architectural terms, a particular *social ontology* is constituted, using – equally prescribed – vegetative materials for the constructive elements and seeing the house as "the paradigmatic image of organic processes in general" (1996:121). These societies are based on an animist social ontology which regards all beings as (covered) humans, as endowed with an interiority, referring to a mythic past in which the human and the animal worlds, the celestial and the subterranean worlds have been undivided (cf. Descola 2013). It is the house which for the Achuar reflects this mysticism, namely a "former material continuity between the celestial, terrestrial, and chthonian worlds". Hereby, the house is thought as a "passageway" between these worlds (1996:121), updating the "old order" of things, which "was never fully effaced" (1996, 122). Furthermore, within the milieu of the tropical forest and since there is no other symbolism for the social group, the houses are conceived of not only as 'individual and independent centres' of the world (Descola 1996:4), but also as a key element of social stability. Only the house allows the imagination of collective identity or social cohesion (Descola 1996:11). In this way, the house functions as a complicated "spatial matrix" for both "inter- and intrafamily sociability" and the "nature-culture continuum" (Descola 1996:135).

Sociétés à maisons creusées – subtractive architecture: This architectonic culture is characterized by its entrenched nature, which is – according to the European visitor George Cressey (1955:263) – almost invisible. These 'buildings' are caves, negative or subtractive architectures, dug vertically into the Loess plateau around the Yellow River, connected to the surface only by a small ramp. There is no adequate term for such an architecture – as 'cave' in the European tradition connotes natural shelters, whereas these buildings are thoroughly artificial, constructed in a strictly codified, rectangular way, according to rigid rules and rites (feng shui). When viewed from above, these houses form a regular pattern in the countryside, while simultaneously, they do not rise above ground. No social differentiations are visible; there is no public space; all façades turn inward toward the space of the family. These *maisons creusées* (Loubes 1988, Loubes–Sibert 2003) isolate each and every activity both acoustically and visually. The subterranean construction relates culture and nature so that it is difficult to discern where one ends and the other begins. The orientation of the construction site, the arrangement of the rooms and of the architectural elements are linked to the cosmology or social ontology, which reforms (and legitimizes) the social positions of individuals every day, in particular the hierarchy of generations and genders that are imagined – as all other entities- alongside a continuum between nature and culture. The subterranean courtyard is referred to as the 'shaft of heaven', as relating the two cosmic forces humans have to keep in harmony (Loubes 1988, see also Zhang 2017). This architectural tradition is by no means a peripheral phenomenon. Rather, it is a local variant of Chinese Han culture, which focuses on imagined identity. Furthermore, in the 1990s, an estimated 40 million people lived in a yaodong.

4 ARCHITECTURAL CHANGES OF COLLECTIVE LIFE

Peasants are called werewolves because of their land tenure system and household registration system (Hukou), which divide people into rural and urban dwellers. They do not belong in the city; their villages are decaying. They belong to neither. In all this, architecture plays a key role, linking political and economic structures in China. (Wu 2016:6)

In the last part of the paper, we now very roughly want to discuss architectural transformations of collective life, within the cases of central China, Mongolian collective life, and the Achuar.

Since the 1980s, China has transformed both architecturally and societally in the wake of its massive urbanization, importing Western architectonic culture – that of a society of cities or the urban, infrastructure, fixed mode of collective existence. Whereas in 1960, 90 percent of the Chinese people were peasants, in 2014, this group constituted only 40 percent of the population; many yaodong villages were destroyed for mining or building new cities. In general, one million villages have vanished in China between 2001 and 2010 (Wu 2016:6). There are at least three transformations that have altered the region around Xi'an and the whole Loess plateau. First and foremost, the greatest part of the *yaodong* have vanished. Additionally, the remaining yaodong are now regarded as negative symbols of a traditional, namely the rural and pre-modern China. While some years ago, a good yaodong was the dream of any peasant family, and a bigger yaodong was considered a symbol of welfare, the inhabitants of yaodong are nowadays rated as old-fashioned and poor (ibid. 7). They are politically discriminated against, fixed to their rural territory by the hukou-system, and constrained to work in the cities, and the yaodong villages count among China's substrata (Sun 2014). Their villages are seen as "Inner Decaying Villages", where only elderly and children live (Wu 2016:13). These architectural transformations have caused several changes in collective life – for not only the shape of society, its visible functional differentiation and its inequality, are altered. People's relation to nature has also undergone a change as have daily routines, perceptions, practices, bodily postures and movements – the "techniques du corps" (Mauss 1973). With regard to the relationships between the generations, it seems that the hierarchy created by the yaodong is substituted by a rigid two-class-society today: the rural and the urban hukou (Wu 2016). At the same time, the yaodong is also preserved as a traditional heritage. It is a symbol of historical Han-China, and it is also preserved because of Communist history. From 1937 to 1947, Mao Zedong lived in a yaodong in Yan'an, the „Communist Revolution's holy city"; at that time, he declared the yaodong to be the architectural face of Chinese communism. Therefore, in the 1970s, new underground buildings – restaurants, schools or hospitals – were built all across China (Golany 1989). Furthermore, the "urban code of China" (Hassenpflug 2010), that is the right angle and the closed space (which is shared by yaodong as well as by other traditional Chinese architectures) has now expanded all over the territory, and in particular the territory of the Muslim minority, the Uigurs (Loubes 2015, Kobi 2018). It has meanwhile spread, above all, through the initially mentioned urban architectural mode: Urbanizing China, importing the US-American "Superblock", a "sinization" of the whole territory is under way (Loubes 2015).

Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union (and already before), *Mongolian* architectural policy has consisted in the settlement of the nomads on the fringes of the capital. While, in 1980, 80% of the Mongolians were nomads, they constitute merely a third of the population today. Alongside political (control) and economic aims (workforce for the mining industry), ecological reasons caused this transformation. Because of extremely harsh winters (*dzuds*) in 2002 and 2003, many nomads had to abandon their herds and their nomadic life. Settling in informal quarters on the fringe of Ulan-Bator, two thirds of the city's inhabitants are nomads today. Because of the lack of infrastructure, their settlements are heated with waste, making Ulan-Bator the most lethal city of the world (in winter). This motivates a massive transfer of European architecture and architects, eager to give up the yurt quarters and to transform the nomads into town dwellers. Once again, traditional architecture and its followers are seen as old-fashioned, and the rigid norms of behaviour are now regarded as uncomfortable

and useless (Lagaze 2012, cf. in contrary Humphrey 1974). The new, European architecture transforms the daily routines and therewith the gender relations. For instance, the TV set is now the centre of the room instead of the oven and the kitchen (Bertrand 2010:158). Nevertheless, the nomad traditions still continue to exist. A third mode of collective existence emerges: being neither fully urban nor fully mobile, the nomads keep their traditional kinship relations and far-distant-neighbourhoods alive. Many continue to live in yurts. „Even if they could be regarded as ‚immobile', they see themselves as ‚nomads' […]. Being a nomad is a complex identity, which is not restricted on a place; rather, the city appears as place where spatial perceptions and practices are mixed, regardless whether they are of sedentary or of nomad origin" (Bertrand 2010:152, translation HD). Additionally, here again, architecture is preserved because of touristic reasons, but also due to the idea of cultural identity (Humphrey 2002).

The Achuar have long been in contact with Europe. Since the 1960s, they have additionally been the object of Salesian missions. Since then, their collective life has undergone architectural transformations due to the settlement arising around landing strips. Many Achuar live in these villages today, the "Centros". They have not only abandoned their semi-nomad way of life, but also the mode of collective existence, residential atomism. In this respect, this society has been "irreversibly" (Descola 1982:314) transformed: "By shifting from a semi-nomadic and scattered occupation of an open territory to a nucleated settlement pattern characterized by sedentarization and the partition of land into individual plots, some Achuar local groups were led to a basic reorganization of their relations to the habitat" (ibid. 302). The Achuar substituted planting and hunting with cattle-breeding; and they also transformed their legal system (of land rights): They shifted "from a short-term appropriation of resources, justified by labour, to an exclusive and transmissible appropriation of parcelled land" (ibid. 316). The new juridical system "transforms rights into objects and objects into rights, since an individual now inherits from his father 'immovable' property (parcelled land and cattle) which necessarily fixes his residence in the same nucleated 'village' where his father lived. Inheritance will thus grant him the right to exploit the same resources used by his father". A "stable and localized principle of unilineal agnatic succession" replaces the "multiplicity of kinship principles", forcing "a greater closure of the nucleated nexus, since a young man will tend to marry within the village in order to ensure recognition of his rights (through continued physical presence)" (ibid. 317). In all these respects, Descola observes a "quiet revolution" (ibid. 318), the spiritual transformation of the war-loving Achuar into settled farmers. On the other hand, the Achuar are among the most resistant indigenous people. In the 1990s, Descola describes them as a vital indigenous society (Descola–Taylor 1993:14), which successfully maintains its traditions, its local languages and its political autonomy. These not voluntarily, but purposely isolated societies (Viveiros de Castro 2019) insist to "rexister" (sic!, Viveiros de Castro 2016): The Achuar insist on existing and on resisting as a dissipated society, also in as far as their architecture is concerned.

Conclusion

The paper aimed to reach at least two different, nevertheless strongly connected goals: On the one hand, it argued for the constitutive, or *active role of architectures* for collective life or for collective existence (and its structuring of subjects). On the other hand, the paper aimed to rehabilitate a *comparative view on societies* within sociology, following the methodological strategy of structural anthropology – as a strategy which wants to be 'as little ethnocentric as possible', and which offers a prerequisite in order to analyse current societal changes. These studies of current changes – of Mongolian architecture and collective life, of central China's architecture, settlement structure and collective existence, and of the Achuar case – could only be sketched on a very provisional basis. They now need to be deepened, through interdisciplinary research, together with anthropologists, and through interviews, ethnographic research and further literature studies. Hereby, again, structural anthropology could be a guiding perspective. Although Lévi-Strauss gave preference to other sym-

bolic modes of collective existence (marriage systems, myths and classifications of natural beings), he himself also stressed the significance of architecture – both for the institution of a collective existence as well as for its colonial destruction:

> *So vital to the social and religious life of the tribe is this circular lay-out that the Salesian missionaries soon realized that the surest way of converting the Bororo was to make them abandon their village and move to one in which the huts were laid out in parallel rows. They would then be, in every sense, dis-oriented. All feeling for their traditions would desert them, as if their social and religious systems [...] were so complex that they could not exist without the schema made visible in their ground-plans* (Lévi-Strauss 1981:204, cf. Lévi-Strauss 1936).

The same is true for the work of Descola, who represents the Achuar's collective life as depending just as much on 'the world of the house' (Descola 1996) as on a particular mode of 'territorial adjustment' (Descola 1982) – which both are deeply interwoven for instance with daily routines or bodily movements, with a particular juridical discourse and political mode, or a particular self-description of the collective.

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