

**COTAA**

**IN QUEST FOR *TRUTH*: RESEARCH IN ARCHITECTURE**

**1/2024**

**COTAA** stands for *collection of texts about architecture*.

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## *Premise*

In 1883, a 25-year-old painter arrives at the Paris Salon to present his debut piece, only to be rejected. A few months later, the opportunity for the artist to exhibit his work finally arrives. He chooses to display a painting about a group of people enjoying Seine's riverbanks during a sunny day. *Bathers at Asnières* was only the first of George Seurat's series of pointillist paintings. As a general approach, Seurat's canvases exhibit a smooth and seamless quality, portraying rather simplified figures of people and landscapes in an almost flat manner. Figures of people consistently face forward, or they show a perfect profile. Within this almost canonical representation lies a sense of serenity and calmness that makes Seurat's paintings remarkable. On an even closer look, one discovers a dynamic and infinite number of juxtaposed dots. Each dot has a different nuance, color, a different type of stroke, and a different direction, contributing to the overall composition. Sometimes, intriguingly, red dots may intermingle with green dots to create the illusion of a shadow, while other times blue dots appear among yellow dots to create the image of a meadow of flowers. Each dot assumes a specific role in a big painting. It is the distinctiveness of each dot that increases the quality of Seurat's paintings.

The word *pointillism* was not proposed by Seurat, or other neo-impressionist artists, but rather by the time period's art critics, as a form of ridicule. But the term persisted, without its ill-natured meaning, for it described the nature of the brushstrokes which relied on the viewers ability to perceive and blend the pieces into a whole – a collection of color, details and rhythm which assemble meaning into a new, unfamiliar, yet powerful format. The metaphor of pointillism and Seurat's paintings is employed here in order to express our aspirations for the COTAA journal. COTAA stands for Collection of Texts about Architecture and its ambition is to be just that, within times where everything – from text, to architecture, and to research in general – becomes a subject of interrogation, be it from self-reflection, or from technical advancements, such as those in the field of artificial intelligence. COTAA emerges from the desire to embrace change and to re-discover our discipline and profession through a more generous research community. Just like a Seurat painting, COTAA will take shape from the sum of individualities that are juxtaposed to form a cohesive entity.

This new journal wishes to become a platform for a diverse array of fields, and it encourages writing about architecture, as long as it brings a new idea to the table.



The topic of *TRUTH* has been chosen for the first issue of COTAA for a reason: if a new architectural research journal wants to come to life today, it should start with the awareness of its contemporary relevance and with a statement about its core values.

A mere observation of how much challenged the notion of truth is today prompts a question: how come that after so much scientific advance and extraordinary technological progress, truth has become an endangered species in the public sphere? This might have to do with the age of "social media," in which we entered twenty years ago. In 2004, *Facebook* was launched and what has emerged was not only a passionate diffusion of narcissism and triviality, but also an era of dubious "truths" and distrust. The distinction between facts and opinions was blurred. What was heard in the echo chamber of one's Facebook group became the universal truth. Science-based theories became experts' "conspiracy." The problem now is not that we do not have access to genuine information, but that it is much more difficult to cut through so much noise. Knowledge became diffuse. The decline of truth began with the democratization of its production.

What this diffuseness meant for the quality of public knowledge was famously described by Umberto Eco, just one decade after the advent of social media: the "drama" of the "diffuse Internet," he said, was "to have promoted the idiot of the village to [the status of] bearer of truth."<sup>1</sup> Eco has always been candid with his own fascination for occult "sciences," because, he said, he has been "always captivated by human stupidity." But he has been also intrigued by the extraordinary human capacity to build new realities that are based on myths and by the fact that a false theory can actually engender real phenomena – "falseness is what I am passionate about," he confessed.<sup>2</sup>

Ever since truth became diffuse, it has been disputed, seized and manipulated by specific interests aiming to make their own truth prevail. The most relevant thing about truth, which has been exposed through this recent democratization, is that it is a social construct: it is made (and made up too). It is an instrument of

1. Umberto Eco, "Internet, Social Media e Giornalismo. Incontro con i giornalisti al termine del conferimento della Laurea Honoris Causa in Comunicazione e Culture dei Media dell'Università degli Studi di Torino" [video recording], 11 iun. 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u10XGPuO3C4> (accessed February 2024)

2. Umberto Eco, "J'ai renoué avec mon enfance à 48 ans" (interview), *Psychologies Magazine*, Juin 2014, p.117

power, meant to change reality. In this context, it is now crucial for the traditional producer of knowledge – academic disciplines, which profess the principle of disinterested research and seek true knowledge for the sake of knowledge – to become aware about their own relevance. This is important precisely because during these last two decades, they seem to have lost their position of authority over truth production. And this is also the background against which, during the last two decades, architectural research has been confronted with a major challenge and renewal.

### A moment of truth for architectural research

Exactly twenty years ago also, an incident made architecture schools in Europe realize they had a major problem with research. In 2004, Cambridge University planned to close its School of Architecture because it was dragging the University ranking down: it was the only disciplinary field that underperformed in terms of research. Architecture wanted to be part of the University but was not able to keep up with the other disciplines in terms of a properly academic research outcome.

This was not just a problem of architecture's status among other academic fields. As Hilde Heynen remarked at the time, architectural research was "a contested domain" even inside the discipline itself. Some addressed architectural research in the universal terms of scientific codification, others claimed it should involve its specific "designerly" way of thinking, or even artistic modes of exploration; some envisioned it as part of the humanities and practiced the language of theory, others considered verbalisation to be a betrayal of architecture's true nature; some saw it objectively separated from professional practice, others saw it embedded into current architectural projects. Architectural research meant different things to academics and to professionals, and borrowed its perspectives, tools and codifications from many other fields.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, the main problem of research in architecture was not the lack of the academic mastery that guaranteed the truth of its newly acquired knowledge, but rather the lack of a clear knowledge about its own truth: there was no definite idea of what research in architecture truly was.

How was this problem solved in these last twenty years, since that critical moment of disciplinary self-consideration? As Heynen already remarked a couple of years later, the answer was to boost the development of PhD programs in architecture.<sup>4</sup> This has considerably

3. Hilde Heynen, "Research in Architecture: A Contested Domain", in: *EAAE News Sheet* nr. 76/2006, pp. 47-54, <https://www.eaae.be/wp-content/>

4. Ibid.

strengthened the disciplinary approach and the place of architecture in academia. However, the culture of academic research and its modes of operation has still not been completely internalized by the architectural domain. This is obvious, for instance, when measuring the value of research output through scientometry, and notably through citation indexes. A 2017 statistic report made by Elsevier/Scopus and cited by *Times Higher Education* showed that 69% of the research papers in the field of architecture that had been published in indexed journals during 2012 remained totally uncited after five years; it was the fourth lowest citation rate among all disciplines.<sup>5</sup> The citation culture varies enormously among disciplines and the discipline of architecture has one of the most underdeveloped citation culture: researcher-architects are not much inclined to read and credit each other.

But the answer to "what is truly architectural research" has not changed: it is still a plurality of genres; and maybe this plurality is indeed the true nature of architectural research. The diversity and richness of the architecture field seems to be widely acknowledged: a true consensus. This makes research in architecture difficult to confine: science facts, humanistic interpretations and artistic experiments (anything goes, if one looks at the PhD theses in Architecture (in Romania and elsewhere). The risk that comes with this breadth are countered by in-depth approaches of even more diverse specific research themes. To avoid being uninteresting, too general and obvious (i.e. trivial), architectural research topics tend to push the disciplinary margins even further, in quest of novel truths and genuine new ideas; and sometimes work at the limits of truth.

One may think that to explore the limits of truth in order to remain interesting and relevant pertains to architecture's humanistic side. But this approach lays actually at the core of scientific research. Scientific theories do not necessarily operate with truths only. As Karl Popper has shown, false theories are paradoxically even more useful for acquiring true knowledge; the knowledge value of a theory may reside in what and how much of it is proved wrong; the certainty of truth makes a theory quite uninteresting for constructing new knowledge in a field.<sup>6</sup> Challenging the limits of truth is actually what any good research does. There is a research area where architecture seems to have performed very well during these two decades:

5. Simon Baker, "How much research goes completely uncited?", *Times Higher Education*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/how-much-research-goes-completely-uncited> (accessed January 2024).

6. Karl Popper, *Logica cercetării* [1935] [The Logic of Research, a.k.a. The Logic of Scientific Discovery], Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1981 (pp. 36, 129).

the internalisation of the remarkable technological advance of computation. If we were to believe Mario Carpo, digital technology has changed not only the world in general, but specifically the position of architectural research in it. Not only that the digital technologies changed how architecture is made today, Carpo claims, but architecture "embraced digital change sooner than any other trade, industry or creative profession," and now it leads the way of digital research: "if you want to see our future in the making, the best observation deck these days is still in a school of architecture."<sup>7</sup> If only it were true for our school too!

7.  
Mario Carpo,  
"Repositioning,  
Having Ideas", in:  
Stoppani, T., Ponzio, G.,  
Themistokleous, G. (eds),  
*This Thing Called Theory*,  
Routledge, 2017,  
pp. 292-297

It is with these facts in mind that the present issue of COTAA has put together a series of recent contributions in architectural research that reflect upon the notion of truth in relation to their own topics and inquiries and are also relevant for the methodological and thematic diversity in architectural research – its unchallenged truth.

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#### History and Archives

Andrea Sposato (*Reading St. Peter's Basilica. Truth and Reconstruction*) reflects on how historians address the truth of buildings that no longer exist, but which have not entirely disappeared either. The paper uses the case of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome to expose the "dynamic truth" of these buildings, whose fragments are kept either physically, in the new buildings that succeeded and replaced them or in archived representations. The notion of "dynamic truth" describes a historical perception that deals with change, in this case a complex process of demolition-reconstruction, which remained recorded and reproduced in many representations, both textual and drawn. The paper exposes an overlapping of fragmented narratives that used different time perspectives – both retrospective and prospective – Michelangelo's forward-looking design and Alfarano's ideal reconstruction of the former basilica. Historical truth is revealed from a synthesis of many fragmentary sources and a "blending of temporalities," Overall, the paper is an excellent demonstration of a very subtle and sophisticated architectural historian's understanding of time and archive.

Mats Werchohlad (*The Fabrication of Reality. A relativistic account on the question of what the Bauhaus "truly" was*) critically reviews contemporary research on the Bauhaus from a STS (Science and Technology Studies) perspective, which relates truth to reality and considers the logics of science and epistemology as central for historical interpretation. Scientific truths and technical facts are also socially produced. One truth about the Bauhaus is that it can be seen as a network, and the research of this kind of reality – "its transmission by students and masters, through personal encounters," "global entanglements," exchange processes, interdependencies – is much facilitated by a digital humanities approach today. Another truth is that Bauhaus continually evolved and changed, from the romantic belief in absolute reality, to an empiric truth of objectivity and factuality. And not in the least, there is the truth of its white-male-western perspective of authority, which we expose with our preconceived ideas today. But then, Bauhaus was truly the epitome of its time, and maybe that is its ultimate truth.

Zenaida Florea (*The Veracity of Print*) addresses the "minor truth" of insignificant spaces of habitation and the use of marginal sources in historical research. She focuses on the residual spaces of the residential architecture in Bucharest in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, investigating them through the information published in newspaper advertisements – specifically in the newspaper *Universul* (1885-1950). This is an alternative historical perspective on urban dwelling, exposing a "fragmentary truth" of secondary importance for the history of habitation, found in sources of secondary importance as well: the minor truth of the *minor spaces* revealed by minor sources. Historical narratives do not have to be big to be compelling.

Truth may also be a product of state apparatus. Ileana Kisilewicz (*An Overview of the Research on the Preservation of Architectural Monuments in Bucovina done by the Central Commission in Vienna - 1853-1918*) chooses the ZK (Imperial Royal Central Commission for the Research and Preservation of Architectural Monuments) as her case study. The paper focuses on what we may call the bureaucracy of truth, the truth of the state. It is in the power of Empire to produce

an official history, through a top-down institutional control of knowledge production. The paper also stresses the importance of local archaeological research for collecting evidence, and the role of material facts on the ground in this context. Specifically for the case of Bucovina, faced with the all-embracing cosmopolitanism of the Empire, but also with numerous competing and contested truths of local communities and nationalities, the paper reveals historical truth as a complex issue, and in any case as a construct, where a disciplined method could guarantee scientific objectivity, while material facts could be subjectively interpreted.

### Discourse and theory

In a masterly conducted history of theory approach, Ilinca Pop (*The True Architecture and Truthful Architecture: Recovering a Critical Category*) addresses the concept of truth as attribute, in two of its declinations: true and truthful. Starting with the Enlightenment theories, she remarks architecture's oscillation between being faithful to its own truth, on the one hand, and the idea that architecture has to express higher truths, on the other. She remarks the coexistence of different ideas about truth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural theory and even the contradictions between various discourses (such as the cartesian notion of truth as an intellectual construct vs. Giambattista Vico's true understanding of the world through metaphorical thinking – one of the most enduring paradigmatic oppositions, between the poet and the scientist, in architectural discourses). With the Enlightenment theories, she remarks, "*truth* indeed emerged as a critical category able to produce not simply ideals of *truthfulness and true architecture*, but, more importantly, new and specific knowledge in an emergent field," Today unfortunately, she concludes, "criticism has lost the ability to operate with *truth* as a critical category."

In fact, Oana Filip (*The Methodology Generates Truth: A Study of Architectural Discourses from a Post-Structuralist Perspective*) proves that this is not entirely true – at least for critical theory. What she does is precisely to use truth as a critical lens, as a tool for testing her own method of discourse analysis. In a thorough methodological reflection, her paper

investigates architectural discourses and theoretical interpretations on the concept of "urban enclave," She relies on Foucault's concept of discourse and develops a post-structuralist perspective on truth as a discursive product defined within a specific context. "Absolute truth and objective reality are not actually accessible," she remarks, but by working with "fragments" and "small discourses" in contemporary theory we may reach a "plurality of truths," The ironical title – the assertion that research methods ultimately generate truth (like a kind of recipe for "truth") – is more likely self-ironical, an acute sign of methodological self-awareness.

Cathryn Klasto (*Truths, Ethical Speculation and Subjecthood: The LTH Fountain*) wants to prove the value of the truth exposed by free experimental writing, as opposed to the truth professed by academic writing. It is a provoking paper, which tries to challenge the normative structures of academic research and what is usually considered to be the "truthful academic writing" and the "singular objective science as the modality of truth." She raises an important question for research more broadly: what methods can be generated so that they offer space for multi-truths (and multi-voices, multi-times, multi-modes of address) in architectural and artistic research? The paper starts from a particular project and its history – the 1970 LTH Fountain (located in the campus of the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University) and the debatable truth of its failure. As opposed to a passive object being researched, the author engages in a dialogue with the fountain, personifying it. Eventually, the purpose of the paper is to expose the "diverse practices of truths."

### Design practice

Konstantinos Perakis (*The Dynamic Nature of Truth in Architecture: Unveiling Uncertainty through the Discourse of "Mistake" and "Chance"*) addresses the "dynamic nature of truth in architecture," "its fluid and evolving nature," and specifically its indirect production: the truth discovered by mistake and by chance in the design process. The paper tries to make a point about design practice as an exploration through trial and error, and it does so in the context of third-year design studio for architecture students at NTUA – the National Technical University of Athens. This

is a "pedagogical environment where mistakes were not to be feared or avoided but were instead seen as natural and necessary components of the design process." In the subjective and unpredictable design praxis, architectural "truth" is often the outcome of an intentional exploration of error and randomness; "truth in architecture evolves through practice rather than adherence to static, pre-existing standards."

Antonia Panaitescu and Angelica Stan (*Patterns of power in current Romanian legal framework of participatory urbanism*) address, on the contrary, the normative discourse of the law as a reflection of the true power relations in urban planning. The analyse of the discourse of the law reveals the normative truth concerning participatory urbanism. However, there is also the truth of its actual enactment and effects. The paper decodes the power distribution in the socio-political and administrative system, exposing its asymmetry: the unidirectional character of communication and the "incomplete, inaccessible or incomprehensible official information provided by the local administration." It exposes the excess of formalization and how exchanging information only in formal manners negatively affects the participatory process. In short, it reveals a critical truth, different than the one in the letter of the law, about power and participation in present-day Romanian urbanism.

Camelia Sisak (*Exploring Truths. Architectural Competitions as Research Endeavours*) addresses architecture competitions as research opportunities. The paper tries to demonstrate that competition is a true form of research in architecture, producing new methodologies of architectural exploration, stimulating interdisciplinarity, and disseminating knowledge in a specific way. A few recent competitions in Cluj have been selected as case studies. By analysing these cases, the objective of the paper is to test the "truth" of a design resulted from of a competition design, i.e., how much of its original intentions succeeded in becoming a built reality. Commercial interests, aesthetic preferences or political objectives, however, sometimes overshadow the broader societal needs and ideal values that are usually promoted by a competition design. Following a project throughout the journey from competition to completion, "truth" becomes its reality test.

**Aristotelis Kaleris (*Questioning Mapping as a Substrate of Architectural Truth*)** tries to demystify maps as reliable spatial data representations in architectural design. He questions the process of mapping and the nature of maps in the context of design, exposing the selective nature of truth in the cartographic practices applied in architectural projects. He shows that maps are never "true" accurate representations of the real spatial world, although architects guide their interventions in real space after them. The critique of cartographic practices focuses on their biased "powered-centric discourse," as all mappings are products of an "apparatus" and "all mapping apparatuses are equally "fictive," structuring their own "truth about a place." Nevertheless, mapping is also a basis for the creative invention of a new reality through architecture.

#### **Technological representations and the future**

**Alexandru Sabău (*To Know Your Future Dystopian City You Must First Know Your Past Architectural Avant-garde. Case Studies of Fictional Dystopias Depicted in Film and Video Games*)** addresses a special kind of truth, the truth of fictions. He discusses the credibility of dystopian visions of architecture, highlighting architects' role as potential world makers, their contribution in the creation of credible fictional worlds. He analyses two films and a video game (*Akira, Ghost in the Shell, and Cyberpunk 2077*), all in the *cyberpunk* genre – a thematic sub-genre of science fiction. He highlights the narrative qualities of dystopian works of architecture and considers architecture more than just a background for a filmic story, but rather more like a supporting-role character – secondary, but relevant. The paper tries to establish a relation between them and classic avantgarde architectures (Sant'Elia's Futurism, Tange's Metabolism and Soleri's Arcology). Eventually, these utopian/dystopian architectural representations are more like cautionary tales, rather than unachieved dreams about the future.

**Andreea Robu-Movilă (*Latent Representations: In 'Quest for Truth' between Mental Space and Latent Space in Architectural Design Process*)** addresses the Latent Representations of the Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs), that is, the (Latent) Space in the mind of the machine, which can be seen as an

analogue of the (Mental) Space in the human mind. The truth of algorithmic thinking through latent representations refers to how reality is projected and understood by artificial neural systems, how close or far these machine representations are from the factual objective reality. However, the paper stresses the importance of fundamental human attributes in these representations. It presents various theoretical perspectives on the leap from mental images and phenomenological representations in the human brain to the computational mind, explaining the hallucinatory nature of algorithmic imagination. The paper also critically reflects on how easily we have come to accept these virtual forms of reality as a source of first-hand *truth* today, although they are in fact only second-hand truth and a *post-truth paradigm*. Second-hand truth is a product of the tool-centric research in architecture.

Annabel Pretty (*Surplus Reality: GenAI and the Post-Truth Architectural Milieu of Representation*) critically reflects on the architectural representations of the post-truth age as well. She addresses "digital follies," "speculative-hyperreal" photographic montages, assemblages of "multiple-reality architectures," a sort of fantastical hyperreal hybrid imagery of architectural fictions, or better called "architectural hallucinations." The analysis is illustrated by the author's own experiments of architectural representations, produced with Generative Artificial Intelligence (*MidJourney*), which dreams and hallucinates. The human note, or at least "a degree of personality," is given by "glitches." The paper asks a relevant question about these representations, also relevant to the issue of "truth": what could be considered originality in them? Maybe "the glitchiness inherent in these images, which act as portals to new worlds," could be an answer. Another answer could be that "reality" is paradoxically enhanced. As "traditional boundaries dissolve, a surplus of reality emerges" – and this reality surplus is a potentially true reality. The author suggests the notion of "buildingness" as her contribution for describing the qualities that make such a representation gain the expression of an authentic building.

## Conclusion

What do all these perspectives bring about, in order for us to understand the present state of architectural research? Looking at it through the lens of truth has been a rewarding endeavour. We discovered a plurality of truths – dynamic, fragmented, minor, second-hand, fictional, experimental, discursive, contested, selective, authoritative, scientific, normative, official, a reality test, a discovery by mistake and chance, a glitch, a surplus, a post-truth, and eventually an excellent critical tool. In any case, *se non è vero è ben trovato*.

# Truths, Ethical Speculation and Subjecthood: The LTH Fountain

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## Keywords

public art; architectural research; experimental writing; subject-object; ethics.

## Abstract

The LTH Fountain is a broken fountain built in 1968. It lurks on Lund University's Faculty of Engineering campus in southern Sweden. Designed by architect Klas Anshelm and artist Arne Jones, the LTH Fountain is a 50x20 metre structure made up of eleven steel and glass basins mounted on eleven-metre-high columns. Similar to a champagne tower, the LTH Fountain was designed to cascade and funnel water into the basins and then down into the lake directly below. However, shortly after its inauguration in 1970, the LTH fountain began malfunctioning; it sprung multiple leaks, and the glass began cracking due to water and wind pressure. Maintenance costs were deemed too high by stakeholders and as a result, the LTH Fountain was turned off and left to enter into disrepair.

Some say the LTH Fountain is a disgraced emblem of design, a tragic victim of technological, mathematical and architectural failure and ambition. Others deem it a mysterious work of public art, a devious character that has successfully avoided destruction since its operational failure. Which is true? Both? Neither? What went wrong to call the truth into question and who is to blame?

The Fountain: An Art-Technological-Social Drama is a four-year funded research project (2021-2025) which has been investigating the network of truths produced by the LTH Fountain. Drawing on the truths uncovered, and the ideas generated in the project, this paper, as an experiment in writing, speculates on how the LTH Fountain may have mobilised this blurred context of truth to achieve a particular agenda, namely to reject its origins as a hybrid object of art-architecture in favour of emancipatory subjecthood.

*Dear LTH Fountain,*

*When I'm lonely, I love you only  
Where is the dream I once knew?  
Oh, please don't let me love you  
'Cause I know you'll be untrue.<sup>1</sup>*

## The Fountain: An Art-Technological-Social Drama

In October 2020, *Formas*, a Swedish research council for sustainable development, announced the ten projects awarded funding for its designed living environment open call held in collaboration with *Statens Konstråd*, the Swedish Public Art Agency. The call, totalling 40 million SEK, was the first of its kind to focus explicitly on the value and significance of architecture, design, and culture in the development of a living environment and sustainable society. *The Fountain: An Art-Technological-Social Drama* is one of these ten funded projects running from 2021-2025. Manifesting as a partnership

1.  
Lyrics taken from the 1949  
song 'Please Don't Let Me Love  
You' written by Ralph Jones.



Figure 1: LTH-fontänen. Photograph taken by Jan Carlsson, 1978. Copyright Jan Carlsson / Bilder i Syd.

between HDK-Valand Academy of Art and Design at the University of Gothenburg and Lund University, the project is led by artist Maddie Leach and supported by three co-investigators - artist researcher Mick Wilson, architect Lars-Henrik Ståhl and spatial theorist Cathryn Klasto.

*The Fountain: An Art-Technological-Social Drama* takes as its research focus the LTH-fontänen (The LTH Fountain) which is located on the faculty of engineering campus at Lund University in the south of Sweden.<sup>2</sup> The fountain was commissioned as a public artwork by the state in 1967 and was collaboratively designed by Swedish architect Klas Anshelm and sculptor Arne Jones. Built in 1968 and officially inaugurated in 1970, the fountain is surrounded by the six technical buildings which reflect the six subjects of the faculty and underneath it you can find a bustling walkway and seating littered with lounging students, marking the central thoroughfare of the campus. Structurally, the LTH Fountain was originally composed of eleven steel basins lined with thick glass sheets specially imported from Belgium. These basins were supported by eleven-metre-high steel columns. On either side of the first and last basin, there are two small lakes, the idea being that the water would funnel into the basins and then dramatically cascade down into both bodies of water.

The LTH Fountain was expected to be a technological and artistic spectacle, a monumental site which would reflect the forefront of architectural and engineering innovation that was being taught in the very buildings which looked out upon it. Yet sadly (or perhaps not) this was not to be. Instead, this modern utopian picture which captivated so many, was reduced to a dream hovering slightly beyond grasp - as shortly after it was installed, the LTH fountain began malfunctioning. Cracks began appearing in the glass from water pressure, leaks

2. Prior to becoming part of Lund University, the engineering faculty operated as an independent technical college called Lunds Tekniska Högskola (LTH). It is still colloquially referred to as LTH.

sprung, and water failed to flow correctly. The LTH Fountain found itself belittled and publicly ridiculed by local media, the butt of jokes as people were advised to take their umbrellas with them when passing by it.<sup>3</sup> During the 1970s, in line with the transfer of custodianship from the public art agency to a building management agency, the university made the decision not to take on the substantial maintenance costs to repair the LTH fountain and subsequently by the 1980s it had fallen into disrepair with no evidence to suggest it worked at all during the decade.

Gushing ahead to the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1996 - the day which marked the final run of the LTH fountain after the student union rallied to quench its thirst one last time. Looked back on as a sunny and joyous occasion for those in attendance, as confirmed by many colourful photographs, the LTH fountain did its very best to perform as a fountain, notably helped by some scaffolding. A poignant touch came from the speakers temporarily installed in the walkway, which rang out Verdi's Requiem throughout the event.<sup>4</sup> Not long after this significant moment, engineering reports quashed the two options that had been whispered about - that of restoring or removing - due to the financial burden, leaving stakeholders including the university and Sweden's largest property company *Akademiska Hus*, to settle upon marginally maintaining the bare bones left standing.

And so, the LTH fountain still stands, a shadow of its younger self. It has undergone amputation of the eleventh basin which originally jutted out over the larger of the two lakes (see Figure 1) as it was considered by some to be at risk of damage by slingshot.

Attacks by slingshot have remained a consistent rumour regarding the failed fountain, having stayed in circulation for decades. There remains some hushed commitment to the suggestion that slingshots were the initial cause of the cracked glass - supplying a somewhat humorous thought that something so childish makeshift could be the object to take down this technological monument.

The LTH fountain has witnessed the slow creeping growth of thick vegetation consume its lower limbs, has got used to the birds perching and chattering on the edges of the basins, and to the students pasting up posters on its central column. Right now, at the time of writing, the LTH fountain is seeing more action than it has in years, with the arrival of a new pipe running underneath it to link the two lakes and manage excess stormwater. The earth is being churned for the first time since the LTH fountain's arrival in 1968, unmasking shiny treasures of that distinctive green-tinged glass as well as much uncertainty for what lies ahead.

### 3.

A notable example is a clipping from *Expressen* on 11 October 1969. There is an image of a woman sitting underneath the LTH fountain and the caption when translated states: "people are supposed to sit on the benches under the fountain. But do as Lillian Johansson - bring an umbrella."

### 4.

Requiem is traditionally sung to honour the dead. Verdi's Requiem tells of the fate of the living who fear death and beg for deliverance. <https://houstonsymphony.org/verdis-requiem-an-opera-in-disguise/> (accessed 17 June 2024).

The research project, which is now in its penultimate year, has been an artistic and intellectual endeavour in which to interrogate this historical narrative and bring it into dialogue with present and future realities. Taking the LTH fountain as our protagonist, the project has raised broader questions and considerations regarding artistic and architectural legacies, destabilising the often unwavering assumption that authorship is everlasting and resists intervention. It has sought to uncover the potentials and problems which come when seeking to secure the afterlives of those public works of art and architecture which come with a good deal of knots. Importantly, the project has allowed us to be in critical conversation with others about what is required to secure these futures, the LTH fountain always being the glue to bind our discussions. We have encountered many truths, many stories, many histories - some of these echo one another, some of these rub up against others in conflict, and some dig further winding paths to walk down. Being in and with the project makes me think of the way designer Mindy Seu speaks about gathering - that it is the tender and thoughtful collection of goods which we aggregate with others after which we have the task of developing appropriate containers.<sup>5</sup> The project is currently stewing all of its co-gathered goods, fermenting the last few years, plotting the trajectory of a number of containers which sit on the horizon.

### Writing Truths as an Ethical Experiment

A key moment in the research project took place in September 2023, when the project held a three-day symposium entitled 'Fountains, Failures, Futures: The Afterlives of Public Art' at Lund University's Skissernas Museum (The Museum of Sketches for Public Art).<sup>6</sup> Artists, architects, academics, curators and cultural agents gathered together to think through "the fate of a heavily financed public artwork that disappoints" by looking to case studies of works of art and architecture across the world which also hold mysteries, fictions, rumours, contingencies.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps when it came down to it, we were just trying to find the LTH fountain some friends.

The symposium was an incredibly rich encounter instilled with that peculiar level of generosity which demands debate, disagreement and desire. In advance of the symposium, the project researchers wrote short working papers as critical prompts to offer those joining us - with the aim of giving them the opportunity to become familiar with the LTH fountain in all its splendid complexity. The paper I wrote theorises the LTH fountain as a hybrid monstrous figure which prompts the possibility of a move from understanding it as an art-architectural *object* to an experimental *subject*. This proposition forms the basis for this paper which can be understood as an exploratory extension.

5. Mindy Seu, "On Gathering," *Shift Space* Issue 1, 2021. Accessed 19 June 2024, <https://issue1.shiftspace.pub/on-gathering-mindy-seu>

6. For further information see "Fountains, Failures, Futures: The Afterlives of Public Art," accessed 21 June 2024, <https://skissernasmuseum.se/en/calendar/fountains-failures-futures-the-afterlives-of-public-art/>

7. A phrase offered by project leader Maddie Leach in her introductory speech to the symposium.

The task of this paper is twofold. Firstly, through practising experimental writing that embodies ‘contradictions, messiness and doubts’ it seeks to destabilise the notion of singular objective science as the modality of truth.<sup>8</sup> As architect Eyal Weizman and cultural theorist Matthew Fuller have succinctly articulated, in our contemporary technological condition where platforms establish mechanisms of truth production as a means of building power and capital, we encounter endless bubbles of ‘truth-like substances’.<sup>9</sup> Existing in a communicatory proliferation of truths, it remains politically necessary to remain suspicious of singular usages of terms such as ‘truth’ and ‘fact’ while also committing ourselves and honing our abilities to detect rigour through diverse practices of truths. As such, this paper is written from this standpoint, mobilising a mode of writing that seeks to hold space for polyvocal truths and in doing so, challenge and unsettle expectations of what normative structures accept as truthful academic writing. Feminist theorist and writer Mona Livholts made the argument that scholars can avoid experimenting with writing, notably writing characterised by unfamiliarity, discomfort and passion because they feel they are pushed outside of the boundaries of what is considered acceptable and rigorous academic publishing.<sup>10</sup> In response, this paper makes space for these characteristics as it argues that all three are useful ingredients to think through the proposition of the LTH fountain’s subjecthood more deeply.

Secondly, the paper investigates how one may engage in ethical dialogue with an object / subject-in-process. Subsequently, the paper enters a dialogue with the LTH Fountain by asking it a series of questions. These questions articulate critical points of tension about the multiplicity of truths we have encountered through the project and seek to help us understand more about how it may choose to subjectively position itself in the world. The responses to these questions take the form of ethical vignettes. By ethical, I am referring to processes of making situated relations, which, drawing on philosopher Alain Badiou, inherently contain a plurality of truths.<sup>11</sup> Many have pursued relations with the LTH fountain through particular situations, all of which are legitimate and contribute to its potential desire for object emancipation. To reflect the plurality of truths at play, the responses are written so that no singular truth can be identified or solidified - rather they are contaminated multi-truth, multi-vocal, multi-time responses. The purpose of critically examining the viability of subjecthood in this manner is to support a broader aim of the research project which is to consider and articulate what may be the ethical demands and considerations when taking up the role of speaking for a public art-architectural subject.

8. Mona Livholts, “Introduction: Contemporary Untimely Post/Academic Writings - Transforming the Shape of Knowledge in Feminist Studies” in *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies*, ed. Mona Livholts (London: Routledge, 2012), 1-24 (p.1).

9. Eyal Weizman and Matthew Fuller, *Investigative Aesthetics. Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth* (London: Verso, 2021), 21-22.

10. Livholts, “Introduction: Contemporary Untimely Post/Academic Writings,” 5.

11. Alain Badiou, *Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 3.



Figure 2: Klas Anshelm (left) and Arne Jones (right). Photograph taken by Staffan Hagblom, 1969. Copyright Staffan Hagblom / Bilder i Syd.

### ***Dear LTH Fountain, are you art or architecture?***

*Fontänen von Tänen (the fountain of tears), Laxtrappan (salmon ladder), Döda Fallet (the dead falls), Fontana di Träti (wooden fountain)* - you have many names. Anselm was the one to fix in place LTH-fontänen and his loyal followers have long since wanted to make sure the correct one is in use, rejecting the shorthand of *The Fountain* - as after all, there are fountains everywhere but only one LTH Fountain! All these names only intensify our desires to know what, or who, you are. Typically, when people talk, it is Anselm's name which rings loud, the architect who designed Lund's Stadshall (town hall), it's Konsthall (art hall). Jones is lesser known, always the sculptor, the artist *friend* of the genius architect. In the years of trying to categorise you as one or the other, a work of public art or a work of public architecture, and finally settle on whether it was Klas or Arne who came up with the idea which sparked your existence, the fundamental role of friendship seems to have been somewhat obscured. Yet we must not forget that you are a fountain of friendship - of a modernist friendship, nonetheless.

Art critic Isabelle Graw, upon reflecting on her own friendships, notes that there was a "common understanding of ourselves as comrades-in-arms, united in our fight for certain theoretical, aesthetic, or political convictions that were anything but mainstream at the time."<sup>12</sup> This is how it was for Klas and Arne, as they schemed ways to bring the south of Sweden into their modernist imaginary. They found in each other possibility, their friendship being the support structure to dream and construct such an ambitious design. To ponder how you would have been without this friendship engineered

12. Isabelle Graw, *On the Benefits of Friendship* (London: Sternberg Press, 2023), 12.

into your joints, is to imagine you cold and unfeeling which seems absurd!

The 1969 photograph which shows Klas holding Arne's arm with you looming in the background is a telling image. Often when architects have their photograph taken with their constructed designs at the moment of their unveiling, the design is at the forefront, the architect often dwarfed to give a strong sense of scale - the proportions and positioning working to direct our gaze to focus on the object of their professional achievement. In opposition, in this image, it is almost as if they stumbled across you haphazardly and agreed that you would be a pleasing background for a picture. It is the gesture of being held, simultaneously forceful and intimate. Should we understand Klas reaching out to hold Arne to be the physical linkage of architecture and art, his extended arm as a corporeal *en dash*?

It has been said that without this friendship you would have been simpler, more modest, functional - all the signs of good modernist architecture. As a singular object drawn at the office sober and alone, you wouldn't have failed but met expectations. You would have given Lund a tourist spot, postcards would have been printed with you in full colour, illustrating throngs of people in your presence - no doubt you would have convinced them to come from Stockholm, Copenhagen, maybe even Helsinki. After the excitement and the smug victory, you would have slid nicely into Anselm's portfolio along with that little fountain in Malmö that has been quite agreeable to maintenance and thus continues to spray its watery circles. You wouldn't have had to contend with the whispers of pity and the unavoidable chatter that claims you are a waste of public money, money which could have built much-needed houses or provided childcare.

As we both know now though, if this were to have become true there would be no room for continuous dreaming and friendship building in the threshold of the *en dash*: *art-architecture*.

***Dear LTH Fountain, are you dead or alive?***

It seems important to start by saying that walking through campus, I was struck by how handsome you are in the snow. If only they had agreed to put the steel sheets in place after the glass was removed maybe you would not seem quite so despondent.

It is impressive to be still standing at 54 years old - considering how public art tends to fair these days. If we are being honest, you are certainly worse for wear, although time is bound to take its toll; the decades of vegetation growth where you stand, which has now thankfully been removed to make way

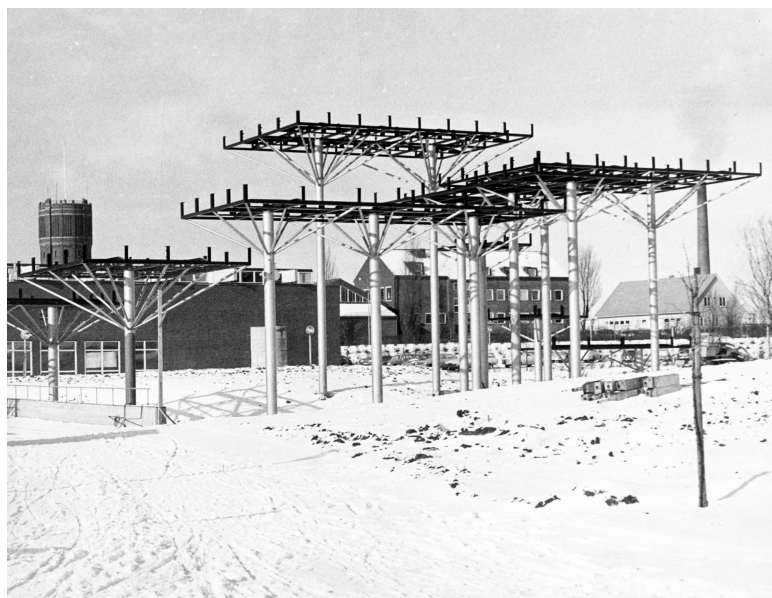


Figure 3: LTH-fontänen. Photograph taken by Björn Larsson, 1968. Copyright Björn Larsson / Bilder i Syd.

for the storm pipe, gave off this wild and unkept look about you - not to mention the traces of lichen and algae found along your painted columns which made us question who was responsible for your care. Through no fault of your own (at least that is what most people think!) you've had one steel column in the grave, a skeletal morbid body with no water supply. You have been, what architects Joshua Comaroff and Ong Ker-Shing would call a 'quasi-deceased body' which has resulted in some believing, as much as it pains us to write dear LTH fountain, you might be better off as scrap.<sup>13</sup> Yet, it seems drastic to set this into motion when you are quite harmless and hardly make any demands. Similarly, it is too expensive to attempt to make you workable despite the suggestion every once in a while - if you agree let's just put that idea to rest. But where does that leave you then, hovering in a state of limbo with no sense of direction?

After some investigation, this ontological oblivion does not automatically assign you the identity of a zombie. When consulting French musicologist Yves Saint-Gérard's intriguing book *Le Phénomène Zombi* or *The Zombie Phenomenon*, it becomes clear that *zombie*, a term stemming from the Haitian Creole word *zombi* meaning the living-dead, figuratively refers to someone without will or character.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, the zombie is reduced to the will of the *bokor* (voodoo sorcerer). Let's return to the word *will* as it is a rather cumbersome concept and stay with *character* for now. Character refers to the distinctive nature of something, the quality of an individual who possesses interesting and unusual attributes. Despite your ageing limbs and dishevelled exterior, it is quite clear that your character is intact. You have held strong in public imaginaries for decades; surely without character, you

13. Joshua Comaroff and Ong Ker-Shing, *Horror in Architecture* (Novato (CA): ORO Editions, 2013), 101.

14. Yves Saint-Gérard, *Le phénomène zombi: La présence en Haïti de sujets en état de non-être* (Toulouse: Éditions Érès, 1992).

would not have found yourself as the protagonist of a research project which began over thirty years after your inauguration and financed (yet again!) by the Swedish state. While you have maintained an alluring and charming character what could be said to have been lost, or what no longer remains true, is a singularity. Meaning, that you no longer only, or even at all, possess the modernist technological character first given to you by your originators. In your so-called failure (or is it disappointment?) and your absolute inability to meet mass expectations, you have surpassed that threshold of limitation. This has resulted in you entering a zone of multiplicity, a zone which permits an unbounded capacity to be alive, or at least to experience aliveness.

An example of this arose just the other day. A carefully spray-painted “FREE PALESTINE” now adorns your central column. Despite being far from the student encampment on Lundagård, someone has thought to include you in the intersectional fight for freedom. Upon discussion, this was not something surprising for us, for our LTH fountain has always invited engagement. This gesture of solidarity, a political and relational micro act, establishes your contemporary character. However temporarily, it establishes your capacity to remain in and of the world. This speaks to how cultural theorist Mieke Bal frames *contemporary* culture as *eventness* - i.e. something happening that is always temporally and spatially specific and involves the production of performative acts conducted by critical agents.<sup>15</sup> If your subjectivity is assembled through encounters of *eventness*, then you are, as philosopher Félix Guattari has theorised, made up of a polyphony of time which rejects dual and binary linearity.<sup>16</sup> Staying with Guattari’s theorisation, your *eventness* destabilises the modernist linear conceptualisation of the technological machine founded on universalist scientific rationality in the way that it crosses ontological thresholds. In other words, having *eventness* as your subjective matter allows for many modes of existing with and through your interactions with the diverse set of actors who stem from different times and spaces.

So, do remember dear LTH Fountain, that you are the iterative and multiple unfolding of *eventness* and thus, you cannot possibly be dead.

***Dear LTH Fountain, are you destroying or destroyed?***

If one looks carefully around the seating, railings and signs surrounding you, they might be lucky enough to find a sticker which is written in slime typography: RESEARCH AND DESTROY. This is the work of a student who has been distributing this phrase around Lund since 2007.<sup>17</sup> We found this sticker (see Figure 3) on a sunny July afternoon while wading through the rogue green thicket sprawling along your underbelly. Nursing scratches and mosquito bites,

15.

Mieke Bal, *Exhibition-ism: Temporal Togetherness* (London: Sternberg Press, 2021), 26.

16.

Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis an ethico-aesthetic paradigm* (Bloomington (IN): Indiana University Press, 1995), 15.

17.

For more information see instagram @research.and.destroy (accessed 25 June 2024).



Figure 4: Research and Destroy at LTH Fountain. Photograph taken by author, 2023. Copyright author.

it seemed almost plausible that this was a direct message to us, the research team, as we were quite literally on the untrodden research path - asking us to contemplate what we were destroying and what was being formed because of our destruction. What also seemed significant, not at the time but much later, was that this particular sticker, unlike the many others made with the same catchphrase, had the text written three times: first in blue, second in pink and third in white. This surprising subtle mirroring of the trans flag allowed for attention towards this fluxed state of becoming, thinking about what this position of modulation between destroying and being destroyed may mean for you, our LTH fountain.

You have been thought of, written as, and talked about as a monstrous figure. Not a monster in any frightening or fictional sense, but one which has the everyday capacity to haunt us and reflect our failures and shortcomings. I doubt this was your intention from the get-go but perhaps now you see its

value. Being un-dead means you are not a ghostly figure, which tends to arouse assumptions of legitimate haunting. Rather, you speak to the verb definition ‘to haunt’ meaning to be persistently and disturbingly present in the mind. Consequently, you frequent the mind often, and you worry it; questions of your destruction worm their way in and refuse to quieten. Are you being slowly destroyed over time as no one is inclined to be part of an assisted suicide? Have you, under the guise of engineering faults, weather miscalculations, or rebel slingshots (the former two at least could be viably true) intentionally destroyed yourself? Or was it always your intention to destroy the dream of modernist rational-techno utopia?

One could argue that you are always destroying and being destroyed. Please do take this as a compliment, a testament to your affective capacity to linger on via a stubborn desire for change. Alas, destruction is a necessary process for alienation and with this comes an invitation for you to orient towards horizons and territories of truths to come.<sup>18</sup>

***Dear LTH Fountain, are you willing or unwilling?***

We now return to the knotty concept of will. This seems imperative as you find yourself, once again, the site of intellectual and artistic investigation. To be transparent, there is a particular reason to think together on this; one element of this research project is to produce an artistic proposal which should, in some way, transform you. It seems polite, therefore, to ask if you are willing or unwilling to cooperate with us.

Will, and its ideological and theoretical histories, is something that feminist theorist Sarah Ahmed attends to in her book *Wilful Subjects*. When it comes to the context of you, what proves useful about Ahmed’s queer reading of will as a concept is that she does not construct it solely through human subjectivity. Instead, she draws on the scholarship of political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett who proposes that *wilfulness* is found at the “very heart of matter and thus dispersed throughout the universe as an attribute of all things, human or otherwise.”<sup>19</sup> Building on this foundation, Ahmed proposes that *wilfulness* describes the potential for the creation of a wilful subject and that it can be understood as a character trait on which subjects can assemble their will.<sup>20</sup> If we accept this queer positioning of the potentiality of will as a mode of subject becoming, then we could suggest that your *wilfulness* is made legible through your *eventness*. *Eventness*, if defined as multiple unfolding contemporary ethical encounters, functions as a time-space stage for you to make your will known. As you know, so many things have happened and there is much to come - and we must continue to ask ourselves if we can locate, translate, and comprehend your will. What kind of language is needed and how might our proposal articulate the fragile

18. Markus Miessen, *Crossbenching - Toward Participation as Critical Spatial Practice* (London: Sternberg Press, 2016), 106.

19. Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2001), 81. In her position, Bennett is in dialogue with the work of Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius.

20. Sara Ahmed, *Wilful Subjects* (Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2014), 12.

yet fertile ground holding firm between your *wilfulness* as potential, and your subjective will made solidified through legibility? What may be the benefit for you in doing this? Will it bring you closer to the future which you yearn for?

Ahmed writes of the *wilfulness* archive, a method of assemblage where traces, qualities, and attributes of wilfulness are followed and contained.<sup>21</sup> I suspect this is a task for us, to co-assemble your own wilfulness archive as a way of listening to you - do you agree? We have started by gathering all these stories of you which co-exist in the world, but now we must hold these carefully, turn them in our hands, to understand how they point to the myriads of ways you have rejected your objecthood in favour of something other. Psychoanalyst Anouchka Grose argues that 'listening promises to open up the possibility of both speaker and hearer being transformed'.<sup>22</sup> If we embed listening as a fundamental process of creating space for your subjective will, then our construction of the artistic proposal as something which transforms only you is challenged. Rather we must also be willing to become something other, to meet you at the brink of possibility. We hope to see you there dearest LTH fountain.

This paper has been a fleeting writing experiment in a multi-vocal, multi-truth, multi-time mode of address. Thus, it does not claim to be factual, truthful, fictionless or faultless in any singular sense. It has served as an opportunity to try and forge communication with the protagonist of our research project, and to establish the LTH Fountain as a critical subjective researcher as opposed to a passive object being researched on and about. Through ethical vignettes, the paper has sought to go beyond what information systems scholar Lucas Introna would call an ethics of hybridity, an anthropocentric ethics which constructs and binds objects as things-for-us, things that work on our terms and for our purposes.<sup>23</sup> Rather, it has presented the possibility of letting things be on their own terms, allowing them to self-unfold and reveal a self that is not at the behest of humans.<sup>24</sup>

This experiment with writing has been a way of posing an important question, not only for our project, but for research more broadly: what methods can be generated which offer space for multi-truths (and subsequently multi-voices, multi-times) in architectural and artistic research? This appears particularly crucial to engage with in the contemporary political moment whereby singularity and simplicity is readily accepted, the very notion of truth is disintegrating and dividing us, and who is understood and acknowledged as a valid subject in the world is made narrower and narrower. We could say that the LTH Fountain benefits from the unresolved blurry mess of truths that encase it, as it is this condition which provides it with the continuous opportunity

21. Ahmed, *Wilful Subjects*, 13.

22. Anouchka Grose and Robert Brewer Young, *Uneasy Listening. Notes on Hearing & Being Heard* (London: MACK, 2023), 7.

23. Lucas Introna, "Ethics and the Speaking of Things," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 4 (2009): 25-46 (30-31).

24. Introna, "Ethics and the Speaking of Things," 33-34. Note that Introna is drawing heavily on Heidegger.

to transform and respond through its *eventness*. Importantly, however, this is not something it can do alone. *Eventness* when done together, perhaps even with friendship at its root, is how co-existence is produced through ethical speculation in the process.

P.S.: What do you think the LTH fountain wants?