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# ARCHITECTURE OF SUBTRACTION

AN INVESTIGATION ON THE POTENTIAL OF THE  
CONCEPT OF SUBTRACTION IN TRANSFORMING  
THE DISCIPLINE OF ARCHITECTURE

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## ABSTRACT

The Anthropocene is a proposed term for the new geologic period in response to the dominant influence of human activities in the natural environment. It entails a complex discourse about climate and its expanded interconnection with socio-economic conditions. It is an unofficial geological epoch, but an understandable call to rethink the abuse and already irreversible damage to the planet. Architecture, with the medium of adding new structures and development under the construction tied building sector, bears a significant responsibility in this anthropogenic narrative. Architects are increasingly tasked with a reverse approach: retrofitting existing structures, building upon what already exists, and advocating for designs that minimize new construction. Architectural additions are negated through the pursuit of subtraction. The thesis stems from this premise. Architecture and its associations with addition make the transformation towards an architecture of subtraction a challenge. This condition also presents a paradox, as the concept of addition inherently resonates with the essence of architecture and the built environment. Yet, the very act of constructing buildings, infrastructure, and urban development involves simultaneous resource, energy, and land subtraction. Subtraction coexisted with addition. This thesis addresses this paradox with an emphasis on finding the component and specifying the subtraction that can potentially transform the discipline of architecture. By properly understanding subtraction and its capacity, architecture can effectively respond to the intricate dynamics of the anthropogenic phenomena.

In response to the paradoxical nature of the condition, the theory of affirmative dialectics emerges as a framework for resolution. Unlike traditional dialectics that rely on negation, this theory by French philosopher Alain Badiou operates through a positive affirmative he calls "subtraction." This offers a unique approach with an emphasis on subtraction while acknowledging the connection to addition without the need for synthesis. The framework guided the comprehensive review of related literature employing an organized search technique based on the main keywords of architecture and subtraction extending on associated synonyms from two online platforms and three libraries. This approach already found potentials for the concept and past architectural applications that are expanded into an example study. The research also included an empirical investigation of more recent manifestations of subtraction in the practice. It employs a qualitative approach leading to conversational interviews and thematic assessments. A purposive sampling strategy was also conducted in preselecting the architect participants. The list includes practitioners from the Philippines (Asia), Belgium (Europe), Port Elizabeth (Africa), Chicago (North America), and Ecuador (South America), spanning five continents. The four architects and one firm with diverse locations, genders, and knowing and unknowing practices of subtraction ensure a varied representation and perspective for the side of the practice.

The outcome addresses the gap in architecture tied subtraction discourses that are at present isolated from each other covering different interpretations of less, removal, and taking away. Along with the validation of already suggested potentials is a discovered core that explains consistency, nuances, and expandable possibilities of the concept of subtraction.