



# Franois Roche

Yona Friedman®

A case study about  
by-product & radicalism

FallSemester

## **Yona Friedman®**

A case study about by-product & radicalism

### At cross-purposes

As multipurpose as a Swiss army knife, shunted back and forth every which way between art and architecture, he is at once an alibi, a foil, a spiritual father, a defeated ideologue whose scars are an atonement (the deafness, whether real or feigned – we'll come back to it later) and rather handy... a paper architect, an ideologue, the kind of brand that keeps on giving, still legitimized by the French establishment, that funny alter cocker Yona Friedman® with the slight Slavic accent that makes you smile, whose foibles everyone forgives, since they're so charming and "inoffensive."

Yona Friedman® is perfectly adaptable... inflatable balloons to mimic the Spatial City,<sup>1</sup> floating cartons filed with salon-utopian political phraseology, pathetic and pathological. You see them everywhere: GPS helicopters made for a militarized robot city<sup>2</sup>... everything in Yona Friedman® is good for something, and those who instrumentalize him don't see any connection with the anarcho-scientism underlying his thinking and production. Hardly a month goes by that some ideologically-challenged curator or architect in need of a pseudo-political installation doesn't revisit the Spatial City for his own purposes, plucking a couple of citations, out of indolent self-aggrandizement, from

a body of work he cannot understand and whose provocative intensity is beyond his grasp. We've seen his work used, too, at international art fairs, as a counterpoint, a cheap antidote to easily-monetizable narratives meant for the commodities market. Showing Yona Friedman® is an act of political/aesthetic name-dropping, a way to deck yourself out with a little utopianist hedge, a cool antidote that has the advantage and the privilege of not challenging the conditions of its utilization... In these little tributes the Spatial City becomes nothing more than a bunch of scaffolding sponsored by the manufacturer, with a few hastily positioned flowerpots to give it a false "improvised" look. The 2013 version of the Cloud at the Serpentine<sup>3</sup> was no exception to the rule. The original was not a garden folly<sup>4</sup> but a fragment of something larger, exhibit number one in the argument for the Spatial City where all human adventures would be tolerated and even suggested; here its purpose was slap the Friedman® label on an antiseptically elegant design and dissemble the artist's own intentions.

Has Friedman become, through no fault of his own, an icon for fakers, architects who reek of cheap – and lazy – political aesthetics? Perhaps his image could adorn a special bar of soap sold by art centers to raise money for the disadvantaged? It could be used for washing your hands of him as part of the collective amnesia, and take nothing from his work but the geometric inclinations and scientific and technological strategies that underpin his preambles, discarding the human, the stink, filth and comedy, to borrow a phrase from Artaud,<sup>5</sup> and seeing human beings as nothing more than decorative options on lopsided cardboard shelves awaiting visitors, an attempt to summon up a soupcon of improvisation, a utopian palliative!

What are we talking about here? A cultural and museological endeavor launched 15 years ago whose mission was to rewrite

history, specifically the radicality of the heroic post-war years – marked by architects like Lonel Schein and Yona Friedman – until the oil crisis and the postmodern reaction put an end to that chapter. Their brief was alluring, and historical work more necessary than ever to combat the willful blindness of the power-and-thought structure that had unceasingly ignored them in the 1990s. That work was well done, except for one thing, and no small thing it was: The architecture and the architects were stripped of all their combativeness and friction in the face of their society, against it and as part of it, and all that was retained was the cultural and instrumental dimension (see the exhibition *Non Standard*<sup>6</sup> at the Pompidou Center). Their work was expunged of all its pathogenic elements, the sources of disorder, incompleteness and political and social unpredictability<sup>7</sup> that were the very reason for its existence. No, Frederick John Kiesler's *Endless House* is not a scale model, an “exquisite corps” in a collection labeled “culture.” It was an attempt to dissolve the expectations that still condition architecture, to restage its premises and conventions in order to reconfigure its relationship with the world. Doing political architecture politically, to rephrase Godard, means using aesthetic strategies diametrically opposed to the Fine Arts models of thought and transmission, i.e., of objects without subjects.

The data was stored, but when this experimental architecture was resurrected, instead of confronting the world of today, it became nothing but a spectacle, a “lite version” for planetary dummies. The purpose of Michelet's subjectivized rewriting of the monarchical period was to serve the republic. The “culturization” of architectural radicality has had a perverse effect – that radicality has been taken captive by the museum. Thus architecture is reduced to a lovely object, painless, odorless and inoffensive, drawing its legitimacy from the experiments of the Sixties, not to interrogate their meaning for

today and their non-synchronicity with our times, their naivety and toxicity, but to use them as historical and cultural excuses, as a shield to protect its autonomy. A little faux-Friedman® goes a long way!

He himself went deaf to the world, literally, thumbing his nose one last time, like a mischievous kid or a kind of self-protection against abusive appropriation... A dialog of the deaf.

## SCIENCE + FICTION

Let's get back to this trademark question and see what's involved.

Right before our eyes / Geometric interlacing floating over the city, a precursor of the castle in Miyazaki's *Heaven*, but without the organicity, a geometric multiplication, a kind of checkerboard with strict square patterns and uncertain boundaries, an addictive and repetitive addition of squared circles, deliberately demonstrating perfect mastery in terms of their dimensional and structural logic and their mode of assembly, utilizing successive incremental and recursive combinatorial mathematics in a scientific system in which the architect uses descriptive geometry<sup>8</sup> as a Deus ex machina to control and dominate his subject.

This interlacing, a rational and well-ordered superstructure, is on standby, or, more precisely, suspended, in both meanings of the word. Literally, in that it hangs above the city whose aerial interstices it occupies, but also suspended pending a hypothetical human colonization, which, in contrast, is dedicated to the free will of one and all, the negotiated interfacing of individuals and groups that determine the modes of habitation and interrelation according to their impulses and moods, or in other words, to the disorder of human activities and the incompleteness of the desires of the multitudes.

That's exactly where the schizophrenia of the Yona Friedman®

brand works its magic. Precisely there and on two levels: a preliminary scientific exposition that anchors a constructive reality in the achievable, the plausible, the prehensible, followed by a narrative of its “colonialization” in the form of a political fiction about participative and collective habitability... without that human energy, that animal vitalism,<sup>9</sup> ever being worked out in any other field other than the ideological (I dare not use the word theory, so much does that word remain a mystery or even a hoax).

Here we can see the following consequences:

1) The control of the structures and combinations of polyhedrons, tetrahedrons and polytope extensions (trihedral-1955) underlying the geometry to be colonized is stated based on a “structuralist” mode of exchange in which each element (structure/colonization) is definable only by its relations of equivalence or opposition with the Other and the others. This ensemble of relationships is what makes up the “metabolic structure.”

The relationship between the mathematical enunciation and the anarchy of the modes of colonization generates a system of opposition that involves neither development nor correlation, nor organization in the sense of a co-functioning. It is not a symbiotic symbolic protocol, and there is no mutual affinity between the elements. The hierarchized chronologies of systemic-systematic permutations are not produced by the principles of contagion and epidemics<sup>10</sup> that would phagocytize and dissolve the previously established geometries. The contact and development of the disordered entanglements of the human, all too filthily human multitude does not metabolize scientific causality. Plato’s “solid geometry” retains its imprint

and its snot, indifferent to those they are supposed to invite.

In contrast, Constant's hypotheses developed for his New Babylon project starting in 1953 sought to face up to the ugliness of human incompleteness, human indeterminism, and privilege the aesthetic incoherences born of the multitude, the cannibalistic generation and degeneration of Rimbaud's Paris Commune, like swarming music that rustles, buzzes and teems.

2) The current abuse of the Friedman brand is based on this schizoid operatory mode, the ambivalence of the binary Science + Fiction (not to be confused with Science Fiction), like the production of antinomian and autonomous forms of knowledge. To be awarded the Yona Friedman® label, all that's needed is a few repetitive geometries (computation) and a link referencing its guru-genitor. Thus one becomes a member of the now hyped and has-been sect called radical architecture.

But what about the human dimension, the "cursed part"<sup>11</sup> so ardently desired by the brand but never really sought after, so present in the prologues but so absent in the procedures and generative aesthetics? Are human relationships so tricky to take into account that they have to be ideologized, idealized, carefully eschewing and excluding their excessive nature, the combinations of misunderstanding, conflict and resignation that produce meaning and thought at the price of the defection of the latter? As Lacan said, "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I think not." Is it possible to reactivate these ambiguous substances that lie at the origin of the relational modes, so that the science is not just an operational pretext but an object to be marginalized, cannibalized and broken down so as to metabolize its positivist principles and political arrogance?

# MISINTERPRETATION

Paris, 11 a.m. in 2011, in a laboratory basement,<sup>12</sup> a physiological experiment is being conducted.

“You are about to take a physiological test to determine the mapping of your future residence area. This will only take three minutes. Relax and slide your hand into this box. It will set a baseline by measuring your bodily equilibrium over the next 30 seconds.

“The procedure is simple. There’s nothing to worry about. Your body will become the vector of your emotions, and we’ll record it. Your body will react naturally to my voice. Let my voice soak into you. Don’t be nervous. Just let yourself feel it and react.

“During the test a kind of vapor will be released. It helps us capture the changes in your emotions without being intrusive. Let it flow into you, breathe it in. It can’t hurt you. I’ll be inhaling it at the same time as you are.

“The test is about to start.

“In front of you is a robot construction machine. It is simultaneously your guide and your emotional indicator, your dynamic portrait. Its movements are directly influenced and affected by the nano-particles you will inhale and exhale. Breathe deeply and slowly...

“But first we’re going to do a little exercise. You’re in your habitat, your future habitat, one that you desire without yet knowing what it’s like yet, but you can feel it and walk through it. You breathe in the atmosphere of this dwelling; you let it infuse you. You might feel more comfortable here or more



uncomfortable. Either way it doesn't matter. You let yourself go further, and be filled by the sensations it suggests, as you discover all sorts of details you never saw before and whose existence you didn't even suspect.

“First of all, your habitat is inseparable from the dizziness it made you feel to access it\_Acro\_(phobia-philia)\_ lost in a labyrinth of tangled ramifications and arborescences. You took pleasure in this vertigo. In an unstable, tenuous equilibrium... you felt this dizziness like something that is still inhabits you... the void is right there, under your feet. It's taking you over.

“But that's not enough to describe where you are right now. The family, your family, has become a conflict zone and you can no longer be in denial or calm things down. You'd like to be able to renegotiate the separations involved, for the distances between you to expand or contract depending on your mood. To get away from the deafening shouts of squabbling teenagers, the blaring TV vomiting the evening news coming from your next-door neighbor whose noise is ruining your life... Socio\_(phobia-philia)\_ and sometimes even remove yourself from the presence of others, other people from whom you'd like to negotiate a little distance in time and space... It seems that you've wanted to unalienate yourself from that community you're submerged and drowning in...

“It's not an illusion to believe that space can help you with that. Not that space has the power to reduce and absorb those underlying, exhausting, gnawing conflicts, but it can offer layouts that encourage the morphology of the moment, and offer you choices in your relationships...

“... to go along or withdraw into yourself\_Claustro\_(phobia-

phila)\_ to hole up there, protected in your box, all wrapped up in your singularity... autonomous...

“Or, on the contrary, to unfold yourself in space and time... to make the area where you live visible\_Socio(phobia-phila)\_exposing it, exposing yourself... a little proudly... and it shows... showing off your pleasure... a pure enjoyment, purely enjoyment... finally your habitat changes according to your impulses, or more precisely, it becomes their vector. Synchronized to your own body, your arteries, blood and genitals, to your beating organism... and you are a thing, an element amid that whole ensemble, porous, able to merge, respiring and aspiring to be your own environment.

“But that’s not enough to completely satisfy you. There’s something missing, something rare, you feel the lack of this thing without being able to say exactly what it is. It’s somewhere in you, an area of childhood, of its innocence and cruelty\_(phobia-phila)\_. But you’ve learned how to hide that, to make yourself believe that you can do without it...

“You may feel dizzy again... this time much more intensely than what you felt when you first started. There’s no need for the void for that. This thing envelops you... mixes of ugliness and beauty, obstacles and possibilities, refuse and efflorescence, threats and protection\_Neo(phobia-phila)\_, vitalism and animism, mechanical powers and natural forces, this body that unfolds before your eyes and that you inhabit.

“Here everything is knotted together and intertwined. It’s all there, in the process of becoming, in a movement in the process of becoming. Let yourself go. Don’t think. Just let yourself slip into this silky and strange sensation that terrifies and caresses you...

“That terrifies and caresses you...”

5 – 10 seconds, nothing

“Pull yourself together and don’t get up until you feel ready to do so. You might feel slightly confused for a few seconds while the nano-receptors are being expelled and reabsorbed. Techno\_(phobia-philialia)\_ So wait a little bit before coming back to space and time... Your body data has been recorded. You can take a look at your physiological report on the screen in front of you.

“The session is over. I won’t see you to the door; you know the way. Later, we’ll record your voice, on each of the suggested questions, so that the expression of your desires is the combined result of your physiology and its changes during the test phase, so that we can resynchronize your habitation request.

“Thank you. I won’t see you out. Please leave the way you came in<sup>13</sup>.”

-----

*Text by François Roche / Ghost writer Camille Lacadee*

(Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> For example, the tributes to the Spatial City, such as the installations by EXYZT, Philippe Rizzoti, Tomas Saraceno, ...among others.

<sup>2</sup> The objection here is not so much to the concept and the project as to the curators' analogy to the "brand."

<sup>3</sup> *Cloud*, the Serpentine Gallery, London, 2013

<sup>4</sup> A *fabrique de jardin* (sometimes called a folly in English) is an ornamental structure located in a park or garden. They usually served as stopping-place for strollers or to indicate a 'picturesque view' (Wikipedia).

<sup>5</sup> *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, radio play by Antonin Artaud

<sup>6</sup> The enterprise of 'Brainless' engaged by Frederic Migayrou in France, which opened the door to new Alphonse Bertillon (criminal anthropometry) and August Comte(positivism) confusing Science and Abuses of Science, tooling and ideology, parametric and computation, making possible the emerging of some stupid artifact as Patrick Schumacher and many other epigones.

<sup>7</sup> *Olzweg*, a co-prize-winning scenario written for the FRAC Centre art space by New Territories, based on the robotic principles of uncertainty and incompleteness. Very different than the petrified Turbulences made after an unbelievable second round, a kind of administrative prank.

<sup>8</sup> Descriptive geometry is the graphic resolution of problems regarding the intersection of geometrically defined volumes and surfaces in a space of 2-3-n dimensions. Developed by the mathematician Monge in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>9</sup> At MIT during the 1970s Friedman worked on making a computer capable of organizing the Spatial City democratically. The program asked individuals for their special preferences, and then analyzed and processed this data based not only on the desires of their neighbors, but also light, access to ventilation, etc. He finally abandoned this project because he deemed that his computer could not understand the twists and turns and complexity of the process of human decision-making.

<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, Paris, Flammarion, 1999, p. 69

<sup>11</sup> Cf Bataille

<sup>12</sup> *Expérience – ‘an architecture des humeurs’ /*  
New Territories / Le Laboratoire, Paris 2011

<sup>13</sup> The architecture of ‘humeurs’ decided to take the preliminary step of revisiting the contradictions within the very expression of these desires, both those that traverse public space because of their ability to express a choice, a desire conveyed by language, on the surface of things, and those preexisting and perhaps more disturbing but equally valid desires that reflect the body as a desiring machine (as Deleuze put it), with its own chemistry, imperceptibly anterior to the consciousness those substances generate. The “architecture of humors” is a way of breaking and entering into language’s mechanism of dissimulation in order to physically construct its contradictions. It means staging a break-in to the logic of things when language has to negotiate with the depths of the body, down to the bottom folds, like with Antonin Artaud and his compulsive catatonia. This physiological test (above) works like an emotion detector. It unleashes your corporal chemical reactions, principally molecules like dopamine, adrenalin, serotonin and hydrocortisone that feed us information about your animal reactions/degree of pleasure or repulsion, curiosity or disinterest, Consequently the formulation of desires in language is inflected by another reality, another complexity, that of the acephalous body, the animal body, so that it can tell us about its adaptation, its sympathy and empathy, in the face of specific situations and environments.

This physiological test helps us map the visitor’s future dwelling area. It only takes seven minutes. The protocol is simple. During the test, a sort of vapor (of nanoparticles) is emitted, so that we can detect the evolution of these emotions without noxious intrusion.

...The Science, the Neurobiology at the service of the collect of ‘Malentendus’ (mishearings-misunderstandings), between atavism and vitalism...

More on / <http://www.new-territories.com/blog/architectureadeshumeurs/>

**François Roche**, is an architect. His architectural works and protocols navigate and articulate real and /or fictional narration and physical production, and include scenario-based work and the development of apparatuses to transform situations. Although Roche originally trained and worked as a mathematician, he later graduated from the school of architecture of Versailles in 1987. He founded R&Sie(n) architecture studio in 1989 along with fellow French architects Stephanie Lavaux and Jean Navarro. Roche is currently focusing on developing technological experiments, from which they can create architectural 'scenarios'. These experiments are designed as forms of cartographic distortion or territorial mutations, transforming nature into a dynamic element of the design.

