Forever After

Or, The Work of Architecture in the Age of its Chronological Superfluity

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Circa 2018, architecture’s favorite habit is to name itself *after*. Its conventions for self-designation come always with a prefixed stress on the past: it is post-digital, post-medium, post-post-modern, not to mention the late’s, the after’s, the meta’s, and all those other four- and five-letter anachronizers. Although it is tempting to “just get over it” and be contemporary, this risks ignoring the near total consensus that *after* is in fact an accurate encapsulation of our present and of our immediate future. [[1]](#footnote-1) *After*, after all, may not be the name of a time that fits neatly into a linear periodization of history, bracketed by something that came before and soon to be replaced by The Next New Thing. Instead, it may be the totalizing and de-facto condition of possibility: a chronological nether-region wherein forward and backward, progress and retrogression, even the relational “toward” and “away from,” are no longer viable terms for plotting the output of the field *precisely* *because such movement has already occurred*. This is the *after* of an after-party.[[2]](#footnote-2) It’s not a reaction *per se*, but it *is* characterized by the acute awareness of occurring in the wake of what came before.

The problem in this situation is not epoch-naming. That work seems to have already been done by popular acclamation. Rather it is to supply *after* with a positive theory of its own. My interest here is not in a generalized model of architecture’s historicity, or, god forbid, of time itself.[[3]](#footnote-3) I would instead like to offer a guide for the production of work under the present conditions, where it seems a question of available models. What kinds of work can we do after the work has already been done? And what would stimulate this work if we are to labor under the persistent sense of activity already having drawn to a close? Answering these questions requires abandoning the messianic expectation of a future after *after* in favor of mustering enthusiasm for a present that may last forever. Because architecture is a perennially future-focused endeavor founded on the ability of its practitioners to deliver fresh starts and clear slates, this requires new motives.

An example of this variety of after-ness—one that stands on its own rather than as a lamprey-attachment to its successors and predecessors—can be found in the exchange between rococo design and its critics in the first half of the 18th century. As a period, it was brief: the style emerged almost exactly at the turn of the century and by 1750 was on its way to being out of favor at the French court. Despite this short lifespan (where one might assume the object of criticism would be the novelty of its brief flash), the rococo was in fact criticized for not being new enough. In their *Encyclopedia of World Art* entry on the rococo, Hans Sedlmayr and Hermann Bauer characterized the prevailing critical opinion:

The new style neither developed theories of its own nor named itself. The best definitions came from the opposition…In 1754, in an attack on the new style, Charles Nicolas Cochin (Cochin the Younger; 1715-90) summarized the academic opinion when he stated that nothing had been produced since Meissonier that was not already present in the germ of his works. [[4]](#footnote-4)

Meissonier here refers to Juste Aurele Meissonier, a decorator, silversmith, and architect favored by Louis XIV. One imagines that Cochin intended this “nothing had been produced…that was not already present” to land as a quick and sweeping dismissal of a huge body of work to which he was ideologically opposed, the kind of brush-off a critic delivers with an imperious “it’s all been done before” hand-wave to a popular or institutionally-sanctioned practitioner. An accident of biographical trivia, however, contravenes this reading. Meissonnier was born in 1695 and died in 1750, which means that his lifespan was almost perfectly superimposed on the duration of the rococo itself. There was effectively no rococo before him. This begs a more radical resaying of Cochin’s critique that detaches “after” from the stress of chronological sequence: the rococo was fully formed and closed to future development from the moment of its first appearance.

Meissonier’s importance in this scheme is less a fact of his existence as a person than in the way he is analogous for Cochin to the “party” in “after-party,”[[5]](#footnote-5) or to any of the nouns in “after-shock,” “after-hours,” or “after-the-fact.” He is a name for the kind acute awareness—the party, the shock, the fact—that pervades and defines the stillness of his moment. In his output we can see three mechanisms that construct this awareness and permit activity (even pleasurable activity) to continue in a field that is in some sense already bounded and impervious to development. The first has to do with a generalized sense of familiarity and reappearance that characterizes the rococo. The second and third have to do with the collections of objects that appear, or what we might call the heuristic availabilities that allow things to be think-able as denizens of his pictures.

First, consider one of Meissonier’s little decorative scenes that frequently appear in the *Oeuvre* alongside his designs for major commissions. *[[6]](#footnote-6)* It contains an entire roll call of ways to play one of the rococo’s favorite games: reminding us that we are looking at a picture and seeing things that are only possible inside that space. The giant pilaster at center becomes a frame that brackets off the upper-right quadrant of the scene as a picture-in-picture. A short run of stairs reconnects this inset fragment to the rest of the scene and makes a circular puzzle of entering and exiting picture-in-picture space. Figures, undiscernible as sculptures or representations of actual people, all look away, with the exception of one woman who may be staring directly out from the page, meeting the gaze of a viewing who is presumably staring back. Trickling, running, sprouting, and otherwise animate matter makes appearances as multiple objects, like the burbling substance cascading underneath the figure at right is both foam and shell for a moment at the point of contact between the two. The small decorative hole between the two stairs vanishes into a swirl of immeasurably deep space, while the apparently much larger gap underneath the monumental arch behind is so flat and devoid of atmospheric perspective that it is almost miniature. A single Meissonier drawing of is such a dense storehouse of ideas for how to evince awareness of picture-viewing that other instances of the same devices are, at best, patterned *after* it.

Beyond the simple density of ideas, there is a complication to the engraving that creates a generalized sense of familiarity or *paranoid repetition*, where the suspicion of reappearance persists even without evidence to support the existence of an actual copy. Modern viewers delight in discovering the evidence of self-awareness in pictures, pointing back to so-called “problems” of representation more generally, but it is unclear if we are actually able to see and isolate these instances as features or if they are simply phantoms produced by the collision of subject matter and medium. The objects on display, are, after all, fairly banal. If these ruins and fountains occasion meta-thoughts about the status of the picture, why any old ruin or fountain? Artifacts of the print and the translation of drawing-to-print redouble this suspicion of a creeping generality. The moment where water transmutes into shell could be merely the residue of cross-hatching, where the strokes conform to the shape of a scalloped edge. The discrepancies in scale and foreground / background relationships at the two holes could instead be the attributed to the bald patch of paper or the omission of detail necessary to maintain the “sketched” quality of the pictorial surface when it is translated from drawing to etching. None of this is to infer Meisonnier’s actual intentions or those of Gabriel Huquier, who had the task of turning the drawings into prints. It is instead to remark on how the subject matter and its technique of reproduction conspire to cut against evidence of the picture’s self-awareness and replace this with the quotidian. As soon as these moments are uncovered and named, the manual processes of the picture’s format and medium threaten to reinter them as completely natural artifacts of deadpan representation. This midpoint between coy awareness and natural artifact process lodges Miesonnier’s scenes as a general lens through which the rest of the rococo will be observed. [[7]](#footnote-7) The pictures are impossible to un-see. Having noticed the conjunction between shell edge and water foam, the echoes of this similarity leaks beyond the bounds of a single artifact as a generalized paranoid suspicion: a consistency of mind behind the appearance of things repeats a set menu.

Second, moving from the suspicion of repetition to the actual catalog of objects on display, there is a strange capacity for the picture to anticipate things that are not yet depicted. Though not specifically represented in the picture, other rococo elements are anticipated by Meisonnier’s *additive prefiguration.* [[8]](#footnote-8) The scrolls that make up the abutments and archways in the picture are borrowed from a baroque strategy for welding together the attic and base of church façade, but are used here as free-floating conjunctions. Unattached and un-bracketed by terminating elements to either side, the scrolls accept and anticipate future additions, making the engraving a kind of absorptive tissue. Places are set for the forms yet to come and the authors who will produce them.

Nearly all the elements of Meisonnier’s picture work in this way. The reclining body prefigures a support not yet present to receive it, the part in the clouds soon to be infiltrated by rays of light, the steps over which water will cascade. The picture is full with prepositions that are only half-complete, awaiting things that will be rested on, leaned against, perched atop…it dreams of future objects. This additive power makes it possible to imagine not only the generic appearance of “another thing added” but also the specific insertions of one author inside another. Francois de Cuvillies’ brittle, intricate border foliage (Figure 2) is not actually here, yet a blank-ish panel awaits his decoration. Gilles-Marie Oppenord’s ribbons, skins, and knotted sheets (Figure 3) are anticipated by the naked backs and legs of the putto they would half-cover.

Third, surveyed as a stockpile of things susceptible to listing, the contents of Meisonnier’s picture make a *presentimental inventory*. Its contents may begin fountain, balustrade, cloud, shell, and rock, but they could continue without limit: shoe, television, flag—every non-sequitur is welcome and completely neutered of any shock that may come from its addition. The entirety of the world’s things could plausibly make an appearance. *Meisonnier* *The Archivist* has put everything already in place. The contents of the pictures are inexhaustible, but antedated by the suspicion that some other, greater subject has composed it, only to leave the scene shortly before our arrival.

What would it be like to inhabit such a world? In some sense, we already know. Consider again Sedlmayr and Bauer’s Encyclopedia-entry and Cochin’s dismissal of Meisonnier’s work. Consider how the provenance of these words as they moving from one speaker to another opens a set of possibilities for the reading subject. The critique formatted above as a quotation is in fact one man’s statement of opinion that’s been paraphrased and nested inside the opinion of two others, found in a 60-year-old Encyclopedia entry that contains no reference to source text and is then translated from its original French. Silted over by layers of translation and movement through various documents, Cochin’s supposed utterance suddenly acquires both credibility and an easy comportment with the other tidbits around it. It is completely naturalized and ready for use, even though—and perhaps *because*—it was retrieved from a vague corner in some unknown library by archivists (Sedlmary and Bauer) with familiar-sounding names who are no longer around to vouch for the accuracy of their work. It arrives concrete and ready-to-use because of its sense of having been pre-arranged by some subject who is no longer on the scene*.* This is what it would mean *to know* inside the worlds of Meissonier’s pictures. The preselected but infinitely numerous blocks, slabs, and chunks of this world are ready for arrangement.

Taken together, *paranoid repetition, additive prefiguration,* and *presentimental inventory* are forms of *closure without limit.* They circumscribe growth and repetition, give it coherence, yet do not negatively exclude anything in particular; together they are impervious to linear chronological succession. The entirety of the rococo is and was already in a single picture, innumerably populated by things of which we have always been dimly aware. In this way, Cochin’s rococo is *forever after*. It begins at the point dramas end: there are no more plotted obstacles to make the story difficult or uncertain because “certain kind of parallel lines…start converging” in the distance. [[9]](#footnote-9) The motive to continue is not waiting for a surprise, but instead to add one’s self and work to a world that welcomes endless contribution.

This kind of closure—by prefiguration and presentiment—has to be pried apart from another, which might be called closure by *lateness*. Frequently in the critical imagination, late art signals its impending death by circulating known forms. The story goes something like this: at the very end of the line, technical mastery reaches its apogee and itself becomes the primary occupation of its practitioners. Virtuosos diddle with their rarified abilities at this stage, consumed with elaborations on already immaculate curlicues. Invention and novelty recede in favor of rearrangements and misappropriations of a known language, as though the master, now technically perfect, contents himself with the smallness of the field of available objects and no longer bothers with the invention of new toys. The master retreats from the work as signature author, allowing art to “speak for itself” as a romantic foreshadowing of the eventual (terminal) withdrawal of the author. “Touched by death, the hand of the master sets free the masses of material that he used to form.” This is Adorno’s late-stage Beethoven. He has achieved technical preeminence. He could presumably impose himself upon found material and absorb it into a work of his own, yet “one finds formulas and phrases of convention scattered about. The works are full of decorative trill sequences, cadences, and fiorituras.”[[10]](#footnote-10) The familiarity of forms does not open onto further fields of possibility. It opens onto a corpse and to all the myths of progress that require death so that the future might retain its mystique.

With this story in mind, distinctions can be drawn between *lateness* and what might called, positively *Forever After* along the lines of repetition, technique, and subject-hood. Repetition in lateness is the arrangement of known forms to signal the end. Repetition in this mode is writing, meant to be read not for the specificity of its symbols but for the alphabet of recurrence itself; in the end it will always spell in stuttered letters “the end.” *Forever After’s* repetitions trade meaning at this level for the sheer capacity to act entailed by a world of total availability. An already exhausted and limitless catalog of bricks issues a happy imperative: assemble! As for technique in *lateness*, there is a cost for achieving mastery. As it increases, its trenchancy and breadth of relevance recede until creative production is stuck in backwaters unlikely to be revisited—like stereotomic masonry or the art of gothic crown molding. In the *Forever After*, technique is more akin to timbre, where levels of mastery become gradations of sensation, felt by the audience on a spectrum from the raw to the cooked, or from Oppenord to Meissonier. No amount of rarefaction can alienate artifacts from their essential compatibility with one another. Finally, subject-hood in *lateness* is merely a way of re-mapping the human cycle of birth and death onto fields of cultural production, which must of course terminate in the rudest caricature of old-age: withdrawal from active participation in the public sphere. Subject-hood in the *Forever After* is the perpetual offer to re-engage a world of a fundamental compatibility—guaranteed by the pervasive sense of pre-selection by an über-but-unspecified beneficence—rests underneath the most disparate forms. There is a tacit collectivity built into things.

If closure no longer seems an inevitable death sentence, there remains the problem of motive in the *Forever After*. In a world of easy assembly and pre-arranged compatibility, why bother? Although form retains an allure in this situation, the difficulties of its design in the singular and aggregation in multiples no longer supply the difficulties that have served as a convenient pretext for architects to work on solutions. Broadly construed, “fit” is a settled issue, to the point of engendering cavalier indifference to architecture’s sacred cows: the fitness of form to its programmatic task (in the *Forever After*, go ahead and use whatever); the fit of one form against another in tectonic assemblies (most things work); the fitting together of people with symbolically significant things (everything seems so familiar, it’s almost like you said it yourself). If not form—or at least, if not the difficulties of form—what will supply motive? Again, the rococo is a ready storehouse of models.

About a decade after its initial appearance in Pierre Lepautre’s chimneypieces at very end of the 17th century, the rococo appeared in Bavaria. [[11]](#footnote-11) It was taken up by the Catholic church as an in-house style for a building program to refresh an aging stock of mediaeval and gothic buildings. The program of building was triply sealed off from linear, progressive movement and “problems” of building as modern architects might conceive them. The work was isolated from the grand historical narratives of court life. It was executed with a fixed catalog of forms inherited from decorative schemes of the French rococo and the more bombastic parts of the Italian baroque. And it was mostly on the inside, not only removed from public view, but also non-structural and unconstrained by statics, or at least in the way physical forces were understood to motivate gothic decoration. Insulated from exterior prodding, formal motives were instead interested with organizing the church interiors into zones of significance, where movement of objects between arenas endowed them with a kind of charge. For instance, a portion of the interior might be a theater that shares furniture and statues with an audience. There are zones for living things and for dead things, for celestial objects and earthly ones, and for sculptures and paintings. Even as objects are held in common between any of these pairs, they acquire differences in significance by moving back and forth between them. These zones are not quite program, but set up the bounds within which subjects might appear and act. In other words, contrary to the view that the rococo represents a culminating synthesis or unity of the arts, the Bavarian rococo is motivated by the partitions and segregations (however temporary) it establishes in a world of total compatibility.

Following these models, projects in the *Forever After* can: (1) trade on power of re-partitioning by establishing these zones of significance in fields of things that, counterintuitively, seem predestined for easy, flat compatibility; and (2) invent ways of subordinating this field of things to an organizing superstructure, even when they are diverse nearly without limit.

Here are four such projects.

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*The exhaustion of building materials leave utility in doubt. What is here because it is necessary? Is this here because it is an accident or a prop? With the help of this doubt, theater can become more real and reality more theatrical.*

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*1. Ruptured Theater. A stage with a hole in it. Props and effect spill out. Actors are left with only patchy physical support for the illusions of their roles. Meanwhile, the audience is salted with outspilling theatrical devices, clearly fake, but still carrying some of the enchantment of the stage.*

*Zwiefalten Abbey Church, J.M. Fischer (Architect) and J.M. Feichtmayr (Stuccator), 1744-1765.* In a niche opposite the pulpit at Zwiefalten, the figure of Ezekiel steps out from a small proscenium arch onto a promontory of plaster moss and flowers. Behind him is a lush scene loaded with all of the objects to support the story of his canonization. These objects are the narrative props of the theater, but they are also the devices that generate its intangible and scenographic effects to create the sense of a world. They are tinted by some leaf-filtered hazy light and sag demonstratively under the force of some other world’s gravity. The fall of his foot, the hem of his trailing garments buffeted by a wind—all of these are bolstered by the illusionistic effects of the object in the theater from which he emerges. Yet the proscenium and stage are too small. Not only too small, but inverted, pushed out toward the audience on a convex surface so that each niche is just small recessed vestibule in a larger ice-cube tray flexing outward to eject its contents.

Ezekiel is stepping *forward and out* from this ruptured theater. His raised hand is not inside the scene that supports him, but floating free in the nave. He leads a double life, partially inside a world that reaffirms his significance, while dangling out in another, denuded and subject to a different set of conventions. Ezekiel is half tchotchke. This may be a fall from his station as a saint, but it is also an accrual of another form of credibility. Out of the theater, he doesn’t require constant, exhausting reference back to symbolic content. Instead, he sits on a shelf, perhaps gets moved for dusting, and receives fawnings over the beauty and skill of his manufacture. He becomes a part of the way the audience arranges and appreciates a domestic field..

The audience changes, too. The overspill of props from the ruptured theater—foliage sludging in all directions beneath Ezekiel’s feet, clouds and rays spilling out at the top and bottom of the altar—fall in the space where onlookers would normally sit undisturbed and removed from the scene. As they leave the scene, the props lose the quality of illusion they had while inside. They’re clearly fake. Less than fake, even, because as they make contact with the “real” outside the theater, they are obviously base. The clouds are just blobs of plaster encrusted on the wall and the sunbeams are merely a bundle of metal rods in gold ganache. The implausible distance from the thing they are intended to represent, though, re-injects these things with charm. The feat of seeing clouds in a plaster crust enchants the world with theater underneath the abjection of its material, tugging the audience back toward a grandiosity.

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*The sense of* Forever After’s *missing subject—The Archivist who has left the scene in advance of our arrival—need not be a nostalgia for something missing. Instead, objects can bear the anthropomorphized presence of that other, missing intelligence, as though we are joined by crowd of inanimate subjects.*

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*2. Animist Matter. A conjunction of the anthropomorphic error and base material. It works in two parts. First some little trick of empathy—a baby’s face, a voluptuous curve—solicits the anthropomorphic error. Maybe the form of the thing intimates an inner, secret life, or maybe it has a way of coming to the hand that suggests the reciprocal touch of a body. In any case it’s a matter of convenience: it’s easier to accept a co-equal subject than to vigilantly maintain the critical distance required to inhabit a world of mere objects. Yet once the error has been made, there is a rush of paranoid possibility. Base material seems more lifelike, seething and squirming everywhere with possible animisms. And living things seem arrested, confined in concrete and stucco. There is no controlling the seepage of audience into material and material into audience.*

*Osterhofen, J.M. Fischer (Architect) and the Asam Brothers (Stuccator and Frescoer), 1727-1730*. Adjacent to the pulpit at Osterhofen there are the heads of two children with the body of a cloud. Like other fairy tale oddities, it is just a concatenation of familiar things into an unfamiliar whole—more suggestive of the scale of possible combinations than a disturbance of anything fundamental known about clouds or about children in advance of their combination. The act of combination—the anticipation of it being repetitious—supersedes any disturbance that might attach to this particular instance of unfamiliar pairings. But over and against the arbitrariness of a mere accident of combinatorics, head and cloud are reciprocally entangled. The fat infant head atop the cloud arches back, head bearing up, and the arch of the throat is transmitted to the posture of the cloud cantilevering away from the wall. The cloud arches too, not just supporting the head from below, but initiating the whole posture. The second head works this way too, with a mad gleam in the eyes, turning slightly left, to be received and supported by the bulge and twist of the cloud, just like its brother.

Working in tandem with the catalog of accidental pairings, this is a double transmission of properties between the animate and inanimate. The arch of the first child’s neck is written into the base material of the cloud. And the leaning of the cloud away from the wall is written into the head. It is impossible after this recognition to separate inert material from animate figure. Matter becomes animist, full of motives and postures that did not previously belong to it. Animate figures acquire the material cast— weighted down and semi-crystalized.

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*Because new things are no longer possible, projects in the* Forever After *turn attention to the effects of things and their arrangements.*

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*3. Thing-Niche. Adjacent to things—the vacancies between and beside them—are the niches where people go. If a-priori space is bounded with walls, drop ceilings, and windows cut to fit, this is the opposite conception: things precede any notion of space. There are qualitative differences between the two kinds of inhabitation. In the first, everything is fit to your needs, or at least should be. Good rooms are formed by the proper subordination of things to your purpose. In the second, things are more obtrusive. To inhabit a thing-niche is to be a thing-neighbor.*

*Asamkirche (Saint Johann Nepomuk in Munich), The Asam Brothers, 1731-1746.* The pulpit at the Asamkirche begs a question of composition and assembly. There is a wall in the sense that it is not possible to walk through the solid surface of gray scaloglia, but it isn’t typical of the way walls are usually made. Instead of a vertical surface supported by a structure from behind, the wall has to be described as a series of episodes between things. First, the pulpit is lodged between two pink pilasters, in which there are two additional pilasters of grey scaglolia with concave edges nested slightly inside. An arch tops this composition, although it too has a concave outer edge, as though the concave surface could continue back into its recess and make a small stage. The objects in this tiny theater though, are not the focus of attention but are instead a further set of brackets and gateways: more pilasters, and set within them, a door. The three sets of pilasters form a repeating series that moves further back as it decreases in scale, which presumably could do so *ad infinitum*, continuing until out of view. This series is encapsulated inside a niche, perversely set inside the first order of pilasters. Are the pilasters in or out of the niche? Does the door at the back go somewhere, or does it just provide access to some further recess of the same vitrine?

These are not the only constituent parts of the wall. To account for the rest, the mode of observation has to shift from the real—or at least measurable—to the subjective and empathetic. Four figures protrude from the corners where the pulpit is fixed to the wall. They are squeezed through some gap with visible heads poking out and bodies presumably behind. The dimensions of these spaces can be inferred from the expressions on the faces of each: the serene maid floats out from some roomy aerie; the agonized swan is crushed between solids; the stolid ox feels the press of some physical weight but has enough room to survive; the blasé lion fixes its stare on something in the distance, spatially equivocal.

What to make of all this? First, the wall is an assemblage of things, each discrete, nameable, and separable from its neighbors. Second, each thing in the assemblage produces a gap, either by formal or subjective means, and these potentially occupiable regions propagate indefinitely inward from the surface. It is not a wall in the sense of determining the absolute limit of the church interior. It is simply a sufficiently dense episode in a collection of artifacts. In this view the door is not a portal to another space but a surface that will be encountered on its reverse as an unadorned wooden panel, just as it is on the front, like the recto-verso of a coin.

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*There is no difference between building materials and model materials in the Forever-After. Constructions lead double-lives as models.*

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*4. Full-Scale Model. A full-scale piece of architecture that, nonetheless, has the attributes of a model. Parts are not entirely “for real,” either because they beg to be read as representations of other architectures (other buildings, other cities, or entire worlds), or because there is the appearance of a physics that do not properly belong to the context (alternate gravities, invisible winds, or the intimation of material qualities that are not literally present). The full-scale model is present and useful, but also projects forward alternative possibilities. It is the co-presence of things as they are and things as they might be.*

*Weltenburg, the Asam Brothers, 1725-1728.* The scale confessional booth beneath the pulpit at Weltenburg is not entirely *for real.* It has an actual size, of course, a priest and a congregant can both fit inside it like a large piece of furniture or a tiny hut. There are indications, however, that this *real* scale is not what the pulpit is *for*. The wooden columns flanking the central bay are 2:1 enlargements of table legs. The scroll work of the arch atop these legs is larger still, maybe a 3:1 or 4:1 study of a decorative scrollwork at the base of a column, while the arch itself might be a portico to a vast scene beyond. The rocks to the left and right are a further complication. Magnified pebbles? Actual medium-sized boulders? Model mountains? Sedlmayer famously identified the “micromegalithic” ornament of the rococo that represents vast scenes at a small scale, yet this does not go far enough. [[12]](#footnote-12) The confessional is not just a representation of a confessional but a real piece of furniture. The scalar shifts are not all in the direction of the vast rendered small. The confessional is a full-scale model, both plausible as a thing occupying the real space of the here and now, in addition to a representational device that constantly projects its possible appearance at other scales for other uses.

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*The* Forever After *Now*

A strain of contemporary post-digital architecture is approaching the possibility of a *Forever After*. The reason is simply: because the Internet. Architecture’s digital forms are de facto additively prefigural. They don’t come in singles, they come in “broods” or specieated sets, so that in one we can see generations of others related to it by generative algorithms and post-facto searches. The absorptive tissue of Meisonnier’s pictures is analogous to the workspace, the viewport, or a list of search results, in which forms no longer need the excuses of pictorial propriety to appear alongside others—they simply need to be converted to the right format and imaged together in a common setting. Architectural knowledge is a *presentimental inventory* served up from a cloud by an attendant named Siri, or some other vaporous sylph who works in near absolute mystery. We do not know where they are or how exactly they have decided to arrange the vast storehouses in which we wander and make our selections. Like the missing subject responsible for curating the storehouse from which Meisonnier’s objects are drawn, they have left the scene, and we hear their voices only from a great distance. Architecture now, like the rococo, is a sphere of total coherence that encloses without limit, a vast region “populated by things of which we have always been aware.” Whether this condition will persist indefinitely is anybody’s guess, but, from an interior vantage it is only reasonable to plan on it lasting forever.

Although this architecture has accurately chosen to name itself every kind of “post-“, this is not the “post” that seeks “dislocations” away from convention, autonomy, or new forms of instability. [[13]](#footnote-13) Those projects of the twentieth-century are now largely complete, leaving in their wake a field unending in its size and familiarity. Today’s task is nearly the opposite. Faced now with total availability, the job of forever after architecture is the literal construction of itself back toward inclusion in the discipline from its exile as an infinity of parts. Buildings must be reassembled from raw form and from all available material, re-partitioning the contents of the disciplinary inventory re-declare the terms of inhabitation. This is a manual task, surveying a “shattered” world “to build a new one out of its very elements: solid, three-dimensional bodies…” Architecture must “go into the quarry, so to speak, to get the blocks for a new structure…but in putting those blocks together [it will] resume, to some extent, the devices” and ends of its predecessors. [[14]](#footnote-14) We can see this already in the early work of the forever after, which is full of primitive huts, simple trabeated stacks, and barely-processed objects posing as monoliths and infrastructure.[[15]](#footnote-15) Whether this nascent effort succeeds or fails depends upon how rapidly it demonstrates a capacity to formulate propositions about its own efficacies. In other words, the new eccentricity of construction must be paired with new formulations of architecture’s powers. To find these, we need only convince ourselves they are already here.

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Figure 12 tail): “Clump Tchotchke” 2016

Figure 13: “A Cast of Things (buthaup)” 2017

1. See for instance the preponderance of “\_\_\_\_\_ - modernisms” in Vereulen and Akker’s “Notes on Metamodernism.” Timotheaus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker. "Notes on Metamodernism." Journal of Aesthetics and Culture. January 2010, Volume 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, for instance, the Office KGDVS Belgium pavilion at the 2008 Venice Biennial entitled “After the Party.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A parade of minds after Hegel have of course thoroughly debunked the idea of inexorable, linear historical progress. Latour, Feyerabend, and even Kuhn come to mind as sophisticators of science’s movement through time. Nearer to our own field, Rosalind Krauss made it impossible to receive Clement Greenberg’s grand narrative of modernist progress as an accurate recounting of events (although it remains an excellent work of fiction). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Hermann Bauer and Hans Sedlmayr. “Rococo.” *Encyclopedia of World Art*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956. pg. 231 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is not to be confused with making Meissonier analogous to the party itself. The stress here in on the way in which Meissonier helps to characterized the state of acute awareness that saturates his period – the terms or rules under which work occurs. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gabriel Huquier. *Oeuvre de Juste Aurele Meissonnier, Peintre, Sculpteur, Architecte &c., Dessinateur de la Chambre et Cabinet du Roy.* A Paris: Chés Huquier, 1742. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Pun intended. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Among the many species of prefiguration, this kind anticipates by opening to addition. This is related to prefiguration by becoming, whereby objects demonstrate they are sufficiently plastic to convert themselves from one state to another. With addition, each object remains itself and need not melt into base material in order to become another thing—its edges are instead sticky and receptive to future cohabitants. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. David Foster Wallace remarking on the end of “Infinite Jest.” DT Max, *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story* (New York: Viking, 2012) 32ln19. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Adorno, “Late Style in Beethoven,” in *Essays on Music*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 2002. pg 565-566 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This follows Kimball’s identification of the rococo’s first emergence at Versailles and Marly. Fiske Kimball. *The Creation of Rococo.* Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Sedlmayr and Bauer. Ibid, 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. To borrow one of Peter Eisenman’s favorite words. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Panofsky describing the task of Carravagio in the 17th century. Erwin Panofsky (Irving Lavin, ed). “What is Baroque?” *Three Essays on Style.* Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995. Pg. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I have in mind here the First Office “PS1 Dolmen,” Bittertang Farm’s “Bessie” tent, and Ensamble Studio’s “Truffle House.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)