Current Approaches in German-Speaking Sociology of Architecture: Navigating Agency and Experience

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Collective Review:

Neubert, Christine (2018). Gebauter Alltag: Architekturerfahrung in Arbeitsumgebungen [The Built Everyday: Architectural Experience in Work Environments]. Wiesbaden: Springer; 258 pages; ISBN: 978-3-658-21098-4; 34,99 Euro

Leuenberger, Theresia (2018). Architektur als Akteur? Zur Soziologie der Architekturerfahrung [Architecture as Agent? On a Sociology of Architectural Experience]. Bielefeld: transcript; 390 pages; ISBN: 978-3-8376-4264-3; 39,99 Euro

Egger, Jan (2019). Häuser machen Schule: Eine architektursoziologische Analyse gebauter Bildung [Educating Buildings. A Sociology of Architecture Analysis of Built Education]. Wiesbaden: Springer; 307 pages; ISBN: 978-3-658-26652-3 53,49 Euro

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Abstract: Despite their differences, sociologists of architecture agree on one fundamental premise: buildings—and architecture more broadly—play a role in shaping social life. The importance of the "agency" of architecture has been equally highlighted in debates in cultural theory. The authors of the publications under discussion here approached this issue through empirical research. We suggest that, in doing so, they make visible the methodological challenges and potentials that confront sociologists of architecture. We aim to offer a comparative overview of some of the newer publications in the German-speaking sociology of architecture which adapt established methods of qualitative sociology to the field of architecture. We review these works through the lens of how well they empirically address the issue of the ways in which architecture can be shown to have agency in society.

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1. Introduction

The sociology of architecture no longer needs legitimisation. Following the Anglophone (CUFF, 1991; JONES, 2011; STEVENS, 1998; YANEVA, 2009, 2013) and French traditions (BOUDON, 1971; CHADOIN, 2006; CHAMPY, 2001; HOUDART & MINATO, 2009), German-speaking architectural sociology has found its place. Initially, scholars of the most widely received publications in this field dealt with their topic through the lens of social theory (DELITZ, 2010; FISCHER & DELITZ, 2009; STEETS, 2015), while empirical studies have been slower to materialise. Researchers tend to focus on disparate phenomena using a wide range of methodologies: e.g. a discourse analysis of city branding (GRUBBAUER, 2011), an inquiry of urban atmospheres (GÖBEL, 2014), a theory of tall buildings based on grounded theory methodology (GLAUSER, 2018), or an artefact analysis for a sociology of religion (KARSTEIN & SCHMIDT-LUX, 2017). Overall, there has been little concerted effort to develop shared methodologies that are *gegenstandsangemessen* [adequate to the objects] (STRÜBING, HIRSCHAUER, AYASS, KRÄHNKE & SCHEFFER, 2018) of a sociology of architecture. [1]

One major concern running through a lot of sociology of architecture is the issue of architectural agency: "What Buildings Do" (GIERYN, 2002). Again, these concerns have been conceived mostly conceptually (DELITZ, 2010; STEETS, 2015). While some ethnographic studies about architectural agency have been put forward within the frame of actor-network theory, the characteristic blurring of the lines between theoretical, methodological, and empirical aspects of research (e.g. LAW, 2009) has impeded concerted efforts to show, not merely assert, the agency of architecture. The question is: If we acknowledge that architecture has agency in society, how can we demonstrate that? [2]

We review some of the newer contributions to architectural sociology in Germany in which this point is addressed explicitly through empirical social research. On the basis of the three dissertation publications which we have selected, we ask, first, how their authors conceptualise the agency of architecture and, second, which approaches they use in order to substantiate the assumed social agency of architecture. We will first give a summary and general assessment of all three books in turn (Section 2), beginning with NEUBERT (2008) *Gebauter Alltag* [The Built Everyday] (Section 2.1), then moving on to LEUENBERGER (2018) *Architektur als Akteur?* [Architecture as Agent?] (Section 2.2), and finally to EGGER (2019) *Häuser machen Schule* [Educating Buildings] (Section 2.3). In a next step, we will compare these studies, looking for similarities and differences between them (Section 3). Finally, we will conclude this review with a reflection about what we can learn regarding the concepts of agency and experience in the sociology of architecture (Section 4.). [3]

2. Three Recent Studies

2.1 Christine NEUBERT: Gebauter Alltag [The Built Everyday]

In *Gebauter Alltag: Architekturerfahrung in Arbeitsumgebungen* [The Built Everyday: Architectural Experience in Work Environments] (2018), Christine NEUBERT explores the ways in which people of different professions experience the architecture of their workplaces. Unlike many other studies in the sociology of architecture, NEUBERT is not interested in particularly exceptional architecture projects designed by star architects boosting media attention in the context of city branding (ALAILY-MATTAR, PONZINI & THIERSTEIN, 2020), but rather in everyday architecture and everyday experience with this architecture. Her book represents an effort to move away from abstract, academic stipulations and instead highlight the mundane ways in which people interact with buildings in their everyday lives. [4]

The book is organised into six chapters. After an introduction, NEUBERT gives an overview on useful concepts from cultural sociology for a sociology of architecture (Chapter 2.1), as well as of studies more closely related to workplace studies and the sociology of the everyday (Chapter 2.2), leading to an outline of her own approach (Chapter 2.3). In a detailed explanation of her methodological and theoretical assumptions (Chapter 3), NEUBERT rejects the tendency to examine architecture solely as a "form of high culture", "if not as an art form, then at least as an iconic sign" (p.30)[1], and studied solely in its visual, aesthetic form. Drawing on a range of phenomenological, anthropological and pragmatic traditions*,* she instead puts forward a practice-based concept of architectural experience as an everyday, lived and embodied way of being in the world. In a next step, NEUBERT lays out her ethnographic research design, including descriptions of her field access and data collection process (Chapter 4). In the main body of the book, she presents the results from the case studies where she chose to investigate the interaction of people at work (Chapter 5). In the final chapter, she sums up her findings to discuss the relation between architectural experience and materiality (Chapter 6). [5]

Methodologically, NEUBERT insists on two premises of a sociology of architecture: First, everyday interaction with the built environment cannot be studied from a distance (p.42). According to NEUBERT, it is important to get as close as possible to the practices taking place in the working environments. Participatory observations on site are therefore essential. Second: in order to understand their everyday encounter with the built environment, NEUBERT believes it is essential to give workers themselves a voice. She thus also addresses the fact that experiences with architecture in everyday life are for the most part neither reflected, nor verbalised (p.76). She therefore combines participant observations with interviews, choosing to interweave these in an ethnographic approach that she also refers to as "practice-constructivist architectural research" (p.42). [6]

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1   All translations from German texts are ours.

Looking for typological breadth, she conducts her research in five different field sites: a library, a museum, an art studio, an industrial plant, and a laboratory. Based on observations and interviews on these sites, NEUBERT comes to the conclusion that architecture does not necessarily shape the everyday life of workers as an aesthetic experience, but is yet effective as a condition shaping everyday lives. The librarian cannot breathe in her working environment, the artist is disturbed by heat and noise, and the industrial worker is stressed because of the long distances that have to be covered. Everyday working life is co-structured by the architecture of the working environment. NEUBERT gives insight into *how* this structuring takes place. She conceptualises these experiences through the heuristic notion of *Widerständigkeitserfahrung* [resistance experience] (pp.69ff.). The largest part of her empirical sections is arranged by architectural concepts like "air", "light", or "visual axis". Architecture's agency is meshed into the practice of work in this way. [7]

Her involvement with and exposure to these workplaces varies quite considerably. While she already held a position at the university library before starting her research there, she reported that the plant and the laboratory restricted her access to their work settings. Equally, the length of conversations varies considerably between, for example, library colleagues and the less communicative lab workers. Overall, in her analysis the conversational interviews take a more central role than the field notes (pp.75ff.). Even though NEUBERT seems to position herself more strongly on the side of practice theory methodologically in that she conceptualises architecture as something that cannot be explained outside of practices (pp.5, 44), the "spoken experience" predominates in the presentation of the results. The relation between the two devised methods, thus, remains ambivalent. It seems that in those cases, where the experience of architecture remains sealed to the researcher through observations, she is more dependent on linguistic representations of this experience (p.75). [8]

The wide range of material collected perhaps explains why the conceptual frame does not always perfectly fit the empirical material. While NEUBERT aims to capture both pleasant and unpleasant aspects of experience in her notion of "experience of resistance" (p.70), she tends to focus attention on architecture as a limiting rather than an enabling force. In some of the practices she describes, it is unclear why we should conceive of the architecture as "resisting". For example, NEUBERT explains how partition walls initially appeared "intransparent, obscuring visibility" (p.165), but after getting used to them, she realises that they are positioned in such a way that a small slit allows her to see whether someone is behind them. While the term "resistance" may cause irritation (as it potentially over-emphasises the obstructive effect of architecture), NEUBERT presumably prioritises "resistance" because she assumes architecture can only be experienced once it is "breached" (GARFINKEL, 1967, pp.36ff.) and stops being an ordinary, unnoticed background to people's activity. The strength of this concept lies in alerting us to the easily overlooked ways in which architecture affects everyday life (see also NEUBERT, 2020). Throughout her ethnographic descriptions, NEUBERT succeeds in directing attention to these "invisible" and

"silent" (HIRSCHAUER, 2006; SUCHMAN, 1995) features. Overall, NEUBERT shows how architecture shapes everyday practices at work, instead of acting as an aesthetic experience. While the depth in the treatment of individual case studies varies, NEUBERT's transparency about these matters and her pragmatic approach to dealing with such methodological troubles is a major strength of the book. Recollecting her rather short stay in the artistic studio, for instance, NEUBERT openly admits and reflects that it would have required "correspondingly more time, empathy and concentration on the respective field of work [...] to actually be able to accompany the artists in their everyday lives" (p.121). Moreover, some of these methodological problems may have to be attributed less to NEUBERT than to structural problems of the sociology of architecture. Sociological studies of architecture often imply a conception of itself as a niche interest, of which it is demanded to formulate a special theory and practice (for example with respect to the embodied and material dimensions of its object). Micro-sociological findings risk being overlooked that way. This is a pity, especially when innovative findings such as these go unnoticed even when they could have larger resonance in, for example, the sociology of work or other established areas within the discipline. [9]

2.2 Theresia LEUENBERGER: *Architektur als Akteur?* [Architecture as Agent?]

Architektur als Akteur? Zur Soziologie der Architekturerfahrung [Architecture as Agent? On a Sociology of Architectural Experience] (2018) by Theresia LEUENBERGER raises the question how architectural agency varies depending on different group-specific experiences. LEUENBERGER worked with three different groups of adolescents, with whom she toured two museum buildings designed by star architects Rem KOOLHAAS and Peter ZUMTHOR, the *Kunsthal* in Rotterdam and the *Kunsthaus* in Bregenz. They then engaged in a total of six group discussions with a focus on their experience of the architecture. [10]

The book begins with an elaborate theoretical discussion through which LEUENBERGER repositions the sociology of architecture around the concept of "experience" (Chapter 1), and then explains why this type of social research requires a focus on social practices as well as what she calls "modes of mediation" (Chapter 2). This concept, which she derives from the work of Bruno LATOUR (2005), leads LEUENBERGER to her main contribution to architectural sociology. Mediation, she argues, takes on very different forms in which materiality and perceivers can be differently related. She calls these differences "power differentials" and explores three different configurations in which they can emerge in architectural experience: The relationship might yield more power to materiality (Chapter 3), be close to equally distributed between materiality and perceiver (Chapter 4), or be more pronounced on the side of the perceiver (Chapter 5). In the second half of the book, LEUENBERGER shifts her attention first towards an analysis of the architects ZUMTHOR and KOOLHAAS and their buildings (Chapter 6). She contrasts their architectural vision to the perspectives of her user groups (Chapter 7) and, finally, merges these two points of view into

an argument for understanding architectural experience as a group-specific social practice (Chapter 8). [11]

LEUENBERGER's main achievement lays in developing a sophisticated conceptual apparatus and heuristics to grasp the multiple facets of architectural experience. She draws on resources such as LATOUR's actor-network theory (2005), SCHATZKI's theory of social practices (1996) and Martina LÖW's sociology of space (2016) in a way that is both impressive to the reader and rarely achieved on this level of detail. The focus on the notion of experience is in line with a pragmatic heritage that has gained popularity in cultural sociology in recent decades, not least in the sociology of architecture. By thinking about experience as an inherently mediated phenomenon, however, LEUENBERGER is able to bring back more established sociological methods and data types. A conceptual framework inspired by actor-network theory and group discussions is a combination rarely seen in contemporary research. LEUENBERGER appears to benefit from the fact that years of cultural sociology have made the importance of material objects and architecture a commonplace assumption. It has enabled her to go back and develop a more differentiated account of how mediated agency actually plays out in different groups' encounters with their material environment. LEUENBERGER decided to separate the theoretical and thematic emphasis on modes of mediation with materiality from the methodic preferences prevalent in post-humanist sociology. Much of whether or not the book will appear plausible to readers depends on if they find this combination of LEUENBERGER's theory and her methods and data type convincing. [12]

In the first half of the book, LEUENBERGER outlines her key concepts and also develops a series of sub-categories. She positions 16 such categories along her spectrum of power differentials according to whether they lean towards the power of the materiality or the perceiver. LEUENBERGER derives these categories from a range of discussions in phenomenology, architectural theory, and the sociology of space. At times this procedure provokes the question of whether or not such abstract constructions are really suited to the empirical task at hand in the later part of the book. For example, LEUENBERGER invokes ancient philosophers such as DEMOCRITUS and HECATAEUS of Abdera (pp.99ff.), as well as contemporary German phenomenologists like Jürgen HASSE (pp.91ff., 112ff.), Hermann SCHMITZ (pp.112ff.) and Gernot BÖHME (pp.19ff.). These discussions allow LEUENBERGER to speak to a wide range of issues and publications on architecture. They position the book within a vast theoretical landscape of arguments running back thousands of years. In addition, they provide the reader with something akin to a glossary of such issues. While not LEUENBERGER's primary objective, its systematic approach invites the reader to return to the book and re-use it selectively. [13]

What results from this procedure is a text that displays the effort the author has put into making the categorical apparatus and the empirical data work together, but LEUENBERGER accomplishes such a fit with varying success. In the first part of the book, she moves seamlessly from theoretical and philosophical discussions to small excerpts of adolescents talking about the two buildings of the

case studies. At this point, the use of the empirical data appears to be mostly illustrative. LEUENBERGER does not follow procedures that are more common in ethnography, ethnomethodology or grounded theory methodology, where the theoretical categories would derive from the group discussions themselves. While there is likely to have been some de facto influence of the group discussions on the choice of categories, there is no programmatic claim in this book that this would be the case. The strength of the text's adaptability and embeddedness in existing literature, therefore, is bought at the price of compromising some sensitivity to the way issues are raised in the empirical data. [14]

In the second half of the book, LEUENBERGER focuses on presenting her empirical data in a systematic manner. Her overarching intention is to achieve a rigorous and exhaustive grid through which to understand the experience of architecture. While she applies this framework equally to the architects' descriptions of their buildings and the participants' perspective from the group discussions she conducted, the latter are at the heart of LEUENBERGER's endeavour. This part of the empirical investigation is also best suited to have a lasting impact on the way scholars will carry out empirical research on architecture in the future. [15]

Throughout this section, LEUENBERGER describes the group discussions, reproducing and paraphrasing some of it. She pursues a stylistic strategy that can be described as "hyperlinking" into a continuous text into which she inserts the categories elaborated in the first half of the book. Sometimes they form part of the text. More often, however, they appear in brackets and italics, often several times within a single sentence. While this has some detrimental effects on the readability of the text, it also raises important questions about how to integrate the natural language data from group discussions through coding procedures with theoretical constructs. Ordinary expressions and opinions stated during group discussions can be helpful to illustrate theoretical concepts, but presenting them as actual instances of them at times stretches the point. LEUENBERGER analyses parts of the group discussions at granular detail, including sequentiality and phonetics in order to argue that a given excerpt fits a category. Other parts require the author to exercise little explication, and the bracketed concept refers the reader back to the category like a hyperlink. In this way, LEUENBERGER requires her readers to accept repeated context switches between the different sections of the text as well as types of materials and arguments. [16]

From the point of view of sociologists with training in ethnographic or hermeneutic traditions, this procedure lacks sensitivity towards the context of the utterances and their production within the setting of group discussions. In other traditions of qualitative research, this procedure is more commonplace and acceptable. Researchers' basic methodological persuasions, including the question whether or not they find it worthwhile to integrate such rich data sources with a rigorous system of categories will determine in large extent how plausible this book will appear. LEUENBERGER's effort to provide systematic categories to capture different types of architectural experience is impressive. At the same time, the number of differentiations she makes can be overwhelming and the book's

readability suffers from the proliferation of categories. There is a potential tension between the social theoretical focus on social practices and mediations on the one hand, and the research methods that are more common in the predominantly German tradition of the sociology of knowledge and documentary methods (BOHNSACK, 2010). LEUENBERGER's project is ultimately more plausible within this strand of research than in the context of practice-based studies with their focus on situated activities. The question of how convincing her categorisation work is will remain for every reader to decide in each individual instance of it. But the breadth and aspiration of the example LEUENBERGER has provided is an innovative and promising blueprint with which to integrate the unwieldy empirical object that is architecture into an established and replicable mode of qualitative social research. [17]

2.3 Jan Egger: *Häuser machen Schule* [Educating Buildings]

In his book *Häuser machen Schule. Eine architektursoziologische Analyse gebauter Bildung* [Educating Buildings. A Sociology of Architecture Analysis of Built Education] (2019), Jan EGGER investigates the architecture of school buildings as sites in which statehood is represented and articulated (p.4). Through the analysis of three schools in Switzerland that have been built and rebuilt at different times, EGGER aims to study the ways pedagogical orders are codified and stabilised in their settings (pp.2, 80). The author puts forward the first book-length application of "objective hermeneutics", an analytical method devised by Ulrich OEVERMANN and popular in parts of German-speaking sociology (OEVERMANN, ALLERT, KRONAU & KRAMBECK, 1987), to suit the purposes of architectural sociology (for an earlier, shorter attempt see SCHMIDTKE, 2008, and for research on architecture as a profession using objective hermeneutics, see SCHMIDTKE, 2006; SCHÜTZEICHEL, 2008). [18]

The book is structured into eight chapters, including introduction and conclusion. EGGER starts the text by reviewing studies undertaken on the subject of school architecture (Chapter 2). He proceeds to situate it in a more sociological framework (Chapter 3). For EGGER, the significance of school buildings lies in the precise ways in which they allow to combine the sociology of space and architecture to issues raised within the sociology of education and socialisation. In the following chapter, he justifies and explicates his use of objective hermeneutics (Chapter 4). Finally, the main section of the book comprises the three case studies of school buildings. The first of these is about the Breitenrain school in Bern (Chapter 5), the second about the Hinter Gärten schoolhouse in Riehen (Chapter 6), and the last case study is about the Schmitten school in Fribourg (Chapter 7). [19]

Objective hermeneutics is a method for addressing the *latent rules* that structure interactions. As a method, it relies on textual protocols that allow the sequential reconstruction of the scopes of action. The analysis proceeds along the "step-by-step" unfolding of meaning within the text. The analyst asks what the space for action is at each point in a sequence and reconstructs hypotheses for why certain options were actually pursued by the actors. [20]

EGGER outlines that buildings do not immediately lend themselves to this type of analysis, as they are "simultaneously synchronic and diachronic" artefacts; i.e. without the kind of sequentiality of speech and written texts (p.80). In order to make objective hermeneutics applicable to the architecture of school buildings, the author suggests three ways in which the buildings could be approached as a sequence: First, by describing those elements that are the most striking; second, describing architecture from the inside to the outside; third, by describing architecture from the outside to the inside (p.91). For his own study, EGGER chooses to fix the sequentiality from the outside to the inside, thus, proceeding from the embedding in the neighbourhood to the school's interior arrangement. This procedure imitates an approach to the school building from a distance: An analysis of the settlement environment and morphology of the school area on the basis of aerial photographs is followed by an analysis of the facades and building developments and finally, spatial arrangements within the school (p.92). [21]

In order to come to grips with the agency of architecture, or its *Wirkungsweisen* [modes of operation] (pp.53ff.), EGGER builds on a central assumption in OEVERMANN's methodology, according to which social life must be reconstructed as a dialectic of routines and crises. Architecture, in this view, can inspire different kinds of crises. They may concern the aesthetic experience, the decisions behind a design or the immediate, bodily interaction with the built environment. EGGER seeks to reconstruct "the modes of operation" of how architecture objectifies and institutionalises routines through which these crises are managed. [22]

EGGER's analysis of the three different school buildings serves to illustrate some of the structural continuities and transformations pedagogy has undergone since the 19th century. Organised around the space-consuming sports field, EGGER finds that the Breitenrain schoolhouse in the city of Bern is reminiscent of military structures and discipline typical for the 19th Century (pp.151ff.). The Hinter Gärten schoolhouse in Riehen, according to EGGER, stimulates learning through sensory experiences (pp.199ff.). Clear colour coding differentiates between spaces, allowing groups of pupils to move between different settings (p.201). In a school in Schmitten (Fribourg), EGGER sees a manifestation of values such as creativity, spontaneity, and authenticity (alongside discipline and diligence) evident in demands for "child-friendly" school buildings (p.272). [23]

Not all of EGGER's claims are thoroughly convincing and the resulting contrast between the three schools appears slightly idealised. At several points throughout the book, for example, EGGER describes school architecture as primarily disciplinary in FOUCAULT's sense (1975), leaving no room for personal autonomy (p.154) or autonomous appropriation by the users (p.166). In other sections, however, EGGER emphasises that children are particularly inclined to do the opposite of what is inscribed in buildings (p.58). There is a tension between the two claims and it is hard to see how EGGER's data sources, i.e. blueprints and photographs, could allow us to plausibly decide in favour of either one of them. On the other hand, EGGER is able to make a range of more nuanced observations on layouts and material aspects of the school building as

part of children's socialisation process. The perspective of objective hermeneutics at times resembles the point of view architects themselves take up. Systematically exploiting visual data in this way could potentially open up ways to move qualitative methods in sociology closer to the professional practices of the field. Their availability and accessibility should equally allow students and scholars alike to follow EGGER's example. As such, his methodological extension of objective hermeneutics should benefit the field of architectural sociology as a whole. [24]

3. Comparison

NEUBERT, LEUENBERGER, and EGGER all adapt methods from traditions of qualitative social research that were not developed with architecture in mind. These books require that both their authors and readers are ready to view social life from a perspective that will at times be irritating and surprising. This has already been true for social theories of architecture, but it becomes even more obvious in these empirical studies. It is one thing to say that architecture matters in social life, but it is more difficult to show how it does so. While all authors find that architecture is not a determined object, but dependent on the appropriation of its users, this notion unfolds in different ways. In NEUBERT's account, buildings primarily emerge as entities that are given meaning through every day and physical-bodily interaction with them. Architecture in LEUENBERGER's book acquires meaning in the "conjunctive experiential space", in which it is experienced. For EGGER, architecture implies a certain social order that is inscribed in its design features. [25]

While all three authors tend to agree that architectural experience is an implicit knowledge (NEUBERT, LEUENBERGER) or implies an implicit social order (EGGER) that has to be made explicit through methods of qualitative social research, they look for insight in different places. LEUENBERGER based her study in group discussions and BOHNSACK's (2010) version of the documentary method. (This reference to the method is made explicit in the appendix of the book, which readers might want to consult before going into the empirical chapters.) For LEUENBERGER, finding that different groups experience architecture differently depending on their educational and professional backgrounds, the group is the *locus* of architectural experience. NEUBERT, in contrast, locates architectural experience within workplaces and their everyday practices. This approach is methodologically situationalist in the sense that meaning is not ascribed to buildings by subjects (individuals or groups), but as a matter of practical concern for participants to be observed *in situ*. Finally, EGGER conceptualises architectural experience as a simultaneity of impressions that structure actions. Following the tradition of objective hermeneutics, EGGER finds that this simultaneity has to be broken down and translated into a sequential protocol in order to serve as data for analysis. Hence, it is the latent structures of meaning that unfold from one element of design to the other that are the locus of architectural experience and agency. [26]

As a result, NEUBERT, LEUENBERGER and EGGER deal with very different data in their analyses. NEUBERT refers to observation protocols and interview transcripts, while LEUENBERGER works on transcripts of the group discussions she has conducted, and EGGER deals with protocols that are essentially based on pictures and photographs of buildings. The visual data perhaps presents the sharpest contrast to NEUBERT and LEUENBERGER, in that the voices of actual users or participants are not the focal point of analysis. Instead, the analysis centers on the author's methodologically controlled interpretation of a building or —more precisely—its mediated *representation* of architecture. Perhaps it is this tension that unites the three books: The desire to be close to architecture and architectural experience on the one hand and the necessity to eventually translate, analyse and represent data linguistically on the other. In particular, we see parallels here between NEUBERT, who favours practices as focal points of the social methodologically, but eventually gives more space to interviews and thus linguistic representations of architecture and EGGER's aspiration to analyse architecture itself, while having to use images as data. [27]

The studies also share some similarities in their empirical results. Particularly NEUBERT and LEUENBERGER share an interest in questioning (while not fundamentally rejecting) the subject-object distinction with regard to architectural experience. Both observe degrees of power with which architecture imprints itself. EGGER's account does equally define architecture as spatially preconfigured definitions of situations that suggest, enforce, or prevent certain actions and that can be distinguished according to how open or closed the space of possibilities opened up by certain architectures is (p.283). His empirical findings, however, tend to be more concerned with the pedagogical order in each case and documented in certain architectures than a more abstract conceptualisation of architectural experience or agency. The findings of NEUBERT and LEUENBERGER seem to be more compatible in this regard. While NEUBERT, however, attributes architectural experiences to one key concept, the more nuanced concept of the "power differential" allows LEUENBERGER to open up a whole relational field of categories. This categorical apparatus is a sophisticated alternative to approaches in which "material agency" is upgraded to an end in itself. While NEUBERT provides insight into the collected data in the form of quotations from interviews and observation protocols, LEUENBERGER presents her findings in tables and by inserting ("hyperlinking") categories into the running text. [28]

4. Conclusion: Agency and Experience

Architecture remains a phenomenon that is difficult to grasp sociologically, as the diversity of methods reviewed here indicates. Beyond the insight into their particular case studies, all three books help to construct methodological approaches walking the fine line between continuation of research traditions and innovation. Participant-observation and interviews (NEUBERT), group discussions (LEUENBERGER) and protocols of buildings (EGGER) all turn out to be valuable empirical resources with their own potentials and challenges. So do the analytical strategies used to evaluate the different types of data, ranging from practice-based ethnographic analysis (NEUBERT) to a documentary method with extensive coding procedures (LEUENBERGER) and objective hermeneutics (EGGER). Taken together the authors' use of these methods of data collection and analysis shows that established methods of qualitative social research are suitable to study architecture. The adaptation of these methods for the subject area of architecture is at the same time fraught with some challenges that cannot be solved in one study. [29]

The authors of all three books follow up on theoretical discussions that emphasise the relevance and agency of architecture in social life (DELITZ, 2010; STEETS, 2015), but explore methodological avenues in order to substantiate that insight empirically. They take a different route from those, especially in anthropology, which are eager to move beyond concepts of "practice" (NIEWÖHNER, 2019) and towards "material agency" (BARAD, 2007, pp.189ff.; see also KNAPPETT & MALAFOURIS, 2010). Both EGEER (p.89) and NEUBERT (p.230) explicitly question the extent to which buildings themselves can be said to have agency. LEUENBERGER's distinction between "power differentials" also offers a more differentiated view on the question of agency. Despite their differences, all three studies have a noteworthy commonality in that the term "experience" plays a central role in their arguments. For NEUBERT, the "experience of architectural resistance" is an analytical category. While we have questioned the extent to which "resistance" is a helpful qualifier for all the phenomena she describes, the ethnographic material she gathered succeeds best to capture the lived detail of how architecture is experienced in everyday situations. It is possible that focusing on a single case study or fewer case studies could have yielded a thicker, more contextual description, but her effort to combine different methods should be appreciated. Especially those interested in different working environments and a description of the silent, often unnoticed ways in which architectural experience is inscribed in mundane routines are well-advised to pick up this book. [30]

Experience for LEUENBERGER, on the other hand, is a varied phenomenon to be captured in a sophisticated theoretical terminology. We have voiced concerns about how the methodological translation by the way of categorisation at times obscures the complex, lived experience of architecture. At the same time, LEUENBERGER's conceptually ambitious book will be of great interest to those hoping to gain a generalisable vocabulary of architectural experience, potentially applicable to more and various cases. Lastly, for EGGER, experience is not the

subject matter of his study, nor the central result of it. Rather, thinking about experience is the motor that drives his methodological approach. His method, objective hermeneutics, is supposed to put him in a position to experience architectural artefacts in a methodologically controlled fashion and reflect on that experience. Social life, in this framework, is essentially a dialectic between experiences of crises and routines temporarily displacing such crises. Whether this allows EGGER to align user experiences with his own, and how these would relate to each other, are questions we believe are still worth asking. Nonetheless, EGGER's book offers the clearest methodological procedure potentially applicable to data that are comparatively easy to acquire and, hence, offering a way forward for many new studies in architectural sociology. [31]

It stands to reason that experience—a category of little prominence in either theoretical debates or studies in actor-network-theory—gains prominence as soon as we try to find qualitative methodologies in architectural sociology. After all, there are numerous pragmatic, practice-based, and phenomenological-hermeneutic theories available pointing to the relatedness of both subject and object in experience. The three authors have provided models for engaging with varied ways in which architecture can become active as part of a social experience. Future methodological debate, as well as more studies, will be better equipped thanks to them. There is no need to revert to a two-world view and oppose the "objectivity" of a building to the "subjectivity" of someone's experience of it (STEETS & SCHMIDT-LUX, 2020). We do not need to choose between the question of architectural agency to that of architectural experience. The two are connected without a need to prioritise the one over the other. [32]

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