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Sustainability and Pleasure

An Untimely Mediation
by Andrew Payne

*We should love even more
Pleasure attained morbidly, harmfully.
The body rarely feels what pleasure
wants,
What morbidity and harm provide.*

Constantine Cavafy

The pairing of the terms *sustainability* and *pleasure* recalls a distinction familiar from historical discussions of architecture, a distinction between the discipline's utilitarian and hedonistic dedications. Sometime before Vitruvius placed *venustus* in relative isolation from the terminological doublet that articulates his response to the necessitarian aspects of human accommodation (*fermitas, utilitas*), Cicero had already distinguished those arts devoted to the satisfaction of necessity, among which he had one-sidedly included architecture, from those devoted to the pursuit of pleasure.¹ The distinction is made explicit in the dyadic formula "beauty and utility," that organizes 18th-century thinking about landscape

and to a lesser extent the building arts. The distinction of 19th-century architectural theorist Carl Bütticher between *Kernform* and *Kunstform*, which conceived the difference between the structural and artistic modalities of tectonic expression on the model of St. Augustine's distinction between *kernal* and *husk*, represents still a third instance of this oppositional schema.² In each of these examples, as in so many others, it is a matter of differentiating what is required from what is desired, those aspects of a building or a landscape thought to satisfy the conditions necessary to preserving an existent in its mere being from those necessary for precipitating those affective events thanks to which mere being is transformed into well-being. One powerful definition of architecture, shared by the theorists as diverse as Alberti and Hegel, describes it as that art whose specificity consists precisely in the burden it carries of bridging necessity and pleasure, being and well-being.