

Reflections on Architecture in an Age of Simultaneous Representation

Seminal Seeds of Endurance: *What Can Be More Modern than the Archaic/Kwinter*

When asked to write an essay "framing salient developments for our discipline and profession" I reflected autobiographically on my introduction to Architecture first as a student 1961-67 and then as a young professor at Princeton for eleven years 1969-80. I used to say I had spent half my life in New York and then half my life in Princeton. That was a lifetime ago. During the next decade in Texas, and another two decades in Virginia, I kept an eye from afar on Princeton's leadership role as seminal for the deep discipline and evolving profession. I trace these observations through the mnemonic device of *One Good Window, Please*. These are windows where Orientation and Gravity, approximating Stonehenge, serve as connective tissues to frame the flows of so-called currencies, perhaps an offering of Architecture as a Covenant with the World, Again. I see the evolution of Architecture at Princeton, now 50 years out, as a kaleidoscopic mirror and raucous echo of national and international debates on the social, political and economic relevancies of ethics and epistemologies. Where do we belong, and for what purpose? Here and now we are fortunate indeed to be back at Princeton, self-critically mature yet still wondrously engaged with the Sun and the Moon. It is healthy to reflect on our vital situation.

The First Window: Antioch Court

Sunrise September 10, 1961

I remember walking from Brown Hall toward Marquand Art Museum when on the way I stumbled upon Ralph Adams Cram's McCormick Hall where a modest door was labeled *School of Architecture*. That small stair entry led immediately to a large U-shaped gallery surrounding Antioch Court where a glass prism framed one towering massive south facing wall full of excavated scavi, mosaic panels and acanthus leaves germinated from ancient Assyrian seeds recovered from still ongoing archeological expeditions. Current Master Thesis projects filled the other surrounding white walls, where watercolors bathed precise pen and ink draftsmanship of contemporary cultural institutions of sleek planes and layered transparencies reflecting upon Arcadian landscapes of crew-cut fields and iridescent waterscapes. Lithe sailboats were rendered as a parting token of affection by Billy Shellman and would glide by announcing that all was right in this world at the transition from the Eisenhower onto the Kennedy eras in America.



Figure 01: Michael Graves

This singular atrium, both a source of dynamic light and re-orientation to an ancient world, was a generous window connecting us to the ever-presence of the past while appreciating the vitality of here and now through Antioch Court. Glistening above the lush greenery were fragments of ancient mosaics inaugurating us to be in dialogue as youthful citizens with distant strangers. We were told again and again mid-century we were contributors to a Modern Age while every stair leading from the Antioch Court Gallery up to the lofty common drafting room had a landing which opened onto yet another main gallery of the Art Museum, first the Ancient World, then Medieval, up to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and finally the Birth of the Modern which connected to the Drafting Studio. No ambiguity there, we were above it all, without limitations, seeing far and wide. At mid-century we were clearly Modern, making the future out of the Lessons of the Past. We realized step by step at the pace of our heartbeats that we were a part of a past, which made the Modern possible.

We first read *Vers Une Architecture*, erroneously translated as *Towards a (New) Architecture* and felt part of an Architecture of Continuity along with James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Einstein's appetite for *Relativity* and Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 02). This was a moment of pause, place and provocation. Antioch Court framed a connection to the past and literally gave light to the massive walls of contemporary youthful work contributing to an era of American Optimism coincidental with Kennedy's Camelot. That first Good Window was one of cultural continuities with recurrent dualities, and framed the start of our education and subsequently our profession fifty years ago. Our School of Architecture was attached from the start as Chapter House to the larger Art Museum in a style understood as Venetian Gothic (1925) clearly not the later branding of Collegiate Gothic of Oxbridge set in motion also by Cram a decade later with our Chapel.

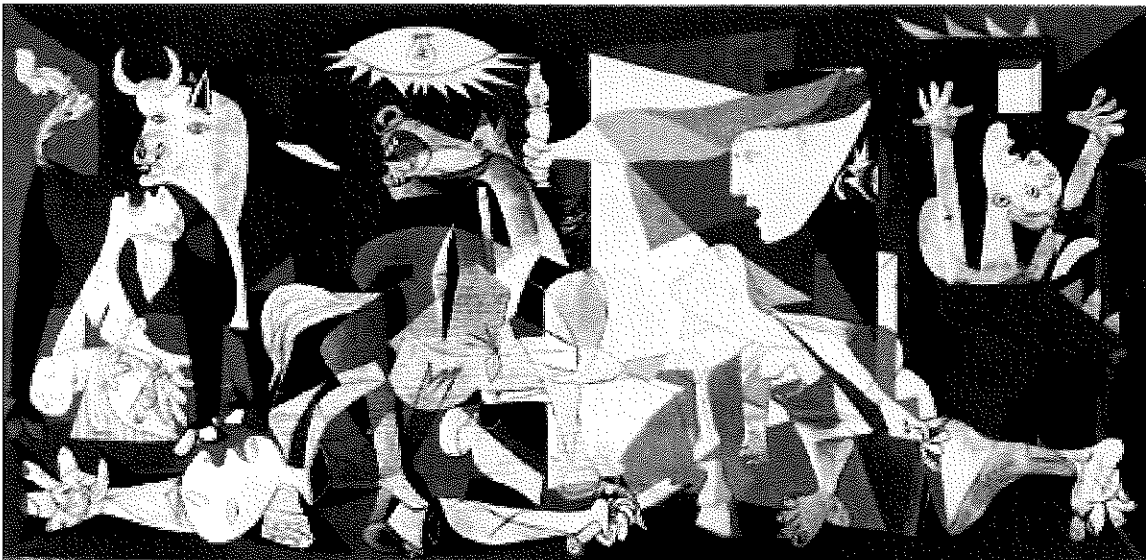


Figure 02: Guernica by Picasso

Princeton had been following a Beaux Arts Curriculum of spatial typologies under Jean Labatut since the 1920s with a heavy curriculum of Architectural History for eight semesters. For several of us (David Jones/Peter Waldman/John Williams/ Tod Williams/ Bill Wolfe continuing on as MFA students)) we formed Labatut's last thesis class in 1967 in then a radically changed school with the coming of Graves, Eisenman, backed up by the English Invasion of Frampton, Vidler, Rowe and Calquhoun). We were in transition along with the generational shift of faculty and were the last class to have Beaux-Arts training with Frannie Comstock where we learned the magic that can be gleaned with dexterous and

On alternate days William Faye Shellman III exposed us to what might be referred to as free-hand exercises, in contrast to mechanical drawing, and lessons offered from his well massaged leather bound book of lecture notes. We started with a photograph of the Cheops Pyramid at Giza (figure 03) and were to learn that architecture is profoundly accountable; each incremental side of this equilateral pyramid was exactly the same length as well as the four square base. I made *my first mis-take* asking what the other image was in front of the Pyramid. He said "Not to worry, it was not architecture." Not confrontational at the time, I let my curiosity about the Sphinx subside, though the same culture seemed to construct them side-by-side simultaneously.

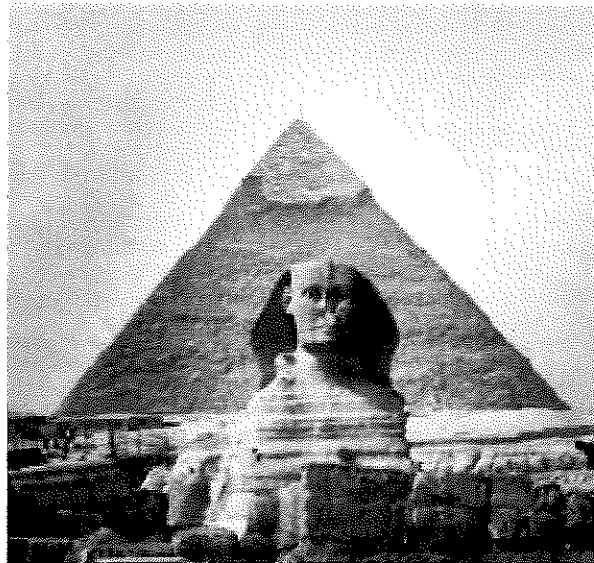


Figure 03: Cheops Pyramid at Giza

The next week, our lessons emerged from Greece, the Athenian Acropolis (figure 04), when Mr. Shellman showed us the Parthenon (8 columns across the front, 16 logically across the flanks). We were being *trained* that architecture was accountable. But being one of Pynchon's Slow Learners, I made the same error, *my second mis-take*, and asked Mr. Shellman what was the image to the left of the Parthenon. He responded impatiently "Not to worry, it was not architecture." The ungainly *Erectheum*, with four different fronts and flanks, even Female Caryatids with a hybrid of distinctly scaled Ionic columns, was certainly not authoritatively Doric as the Masculine and clearly not under control. It seemed curious if not profoundly amusing that architecture has always been *accountable and speculative* since 2500 BC in Egypt, and now apparent in 500 BC in Greece. Fifteen years later another Princeton Graduate⁴⁹ Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) rocked Architectural Pedagogy and Practice where Ambiguity, Recurrent Dualities, and the invention of a spatial middle ground were essential characteristics of mid-century cultural history.



Figure 04: Athenian Acropolis

A Window onto Rome

Noon September 11, 1962

Michael Graves, with a soft voice, arrived fresh from the American Academy in Rome, and exhibited bold gestural brush and ink washes of massive weighty cavernous fragments of ruins echoing the fleshiness of the Baroque once again covering the Gallery walls illuminated by Antioch Court (figure 05). The setting was now a Window to the City, a reminder of the *Necessity for Ruins as A Field Guide for Getting Lost* (Solnit) and Found. This initial offering of Graves reinforced our second vital connection to the past, moving now from Assyria to Rome serving the Education of the Architect. We learned the very next semester, from the same master of the massiveness of Rome, an "other" capacity to abstract three-dimensional connective tissues out of points, lines and planes yielding an architecture of lightness in a Bauhaus based foundation course eclipsing the spatial typologies of our the Beaux Arts beginnings. Graves brought in Richard Meier as his teaching assistant and we were sent off to the Museum of Modern Art bookstore to buy the pamphlet: *Discovery of the Square*. I made *my third mis-take* and also bought adjacent publications *The Discovery of the Circle* and *The Discovery of the Triangle*. Returning to class and holding up all three, I was told to trash the latter two and focus on the Square. My inclusive bias for "the other" fed an appetite for the speculative Sphinx, the hybridized Erectheum and the forbidden forms of the Circle and the Triangle.

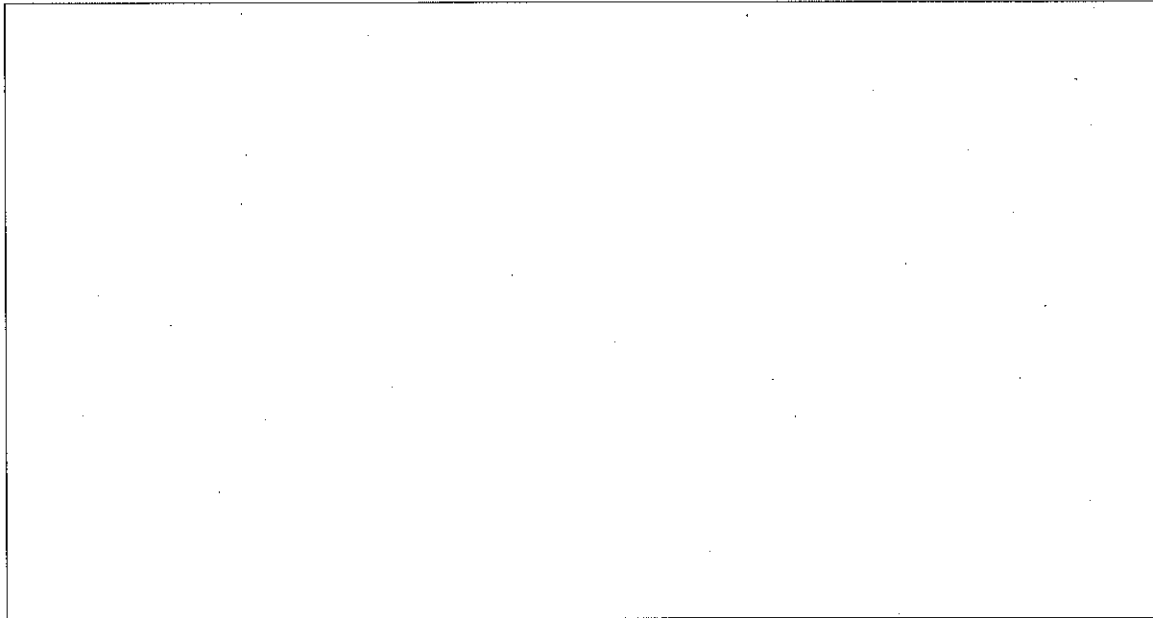


Figure 05: Ink Wash Plan

Windows Along McCosh Walk
Accountable Modularity/ Layered Transparencies
Sunset September 12, 1963

We moved into the New Architecture Building along McCosh Walk leaving behind the Museum and its Art /Architecture and Archeology Libraries, into a modular exercise of brick and glass panels. Now this new building was *accountable*, systematically clear and certainly resolved, even the mechanical systems were exposed. No frictional speculation or fictional figures could be found. The only library we had was of planning policy reports of post War America.

Peter Eisenman joined us from Cambridge by way of Cornell and the Eisenman-Graves Catalyst thrust us into the 20th century Modernism of Le Corbusier/Terragni (figure 06/07) and an architecture of evolutionary thought articulated by Colin Rowe. It was a time of leanness and restraint, the abstractions of white museum board and layered transparencies. We had arrived in 1961 at a school where as architects we were prepared for a career designing country clubs and episcopal chapels for residential prep schools, and emerged in 1965 projecting museums and town halls. On rare occasions we practiced infill buildings in small towns respecting the scale of the street guided by Health Licklider and Henry Jandl. We learned to draw not only with 2B-6H pencil leads, but mastered Ink on Mylar line drawings with Rapidograph pens inverting plans into sections and resultant elevations; there were no longer Beaux Arts facades and flanks as we now resided in a cubist middle ground. No longer would we render Arcadian landscapes with watercolors or specify material palettes of masonry below and wood framing above as Victor Olgyay approximated Stonehenge as he introduced us to the science of the celestial soffit now re-discovered in the name of renewable energy sources. Our palette was to be that of abstract form, and if pressed to call out concrete, steel and tight skins of stucco and plaster as if inside and outside were the same.

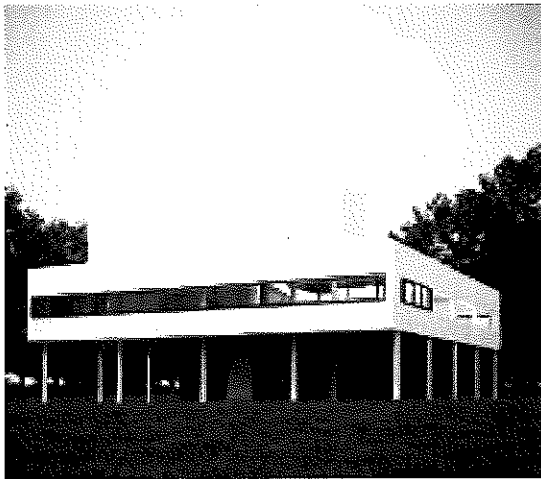


Figure 06: Villa Savoye by Le Corbusier

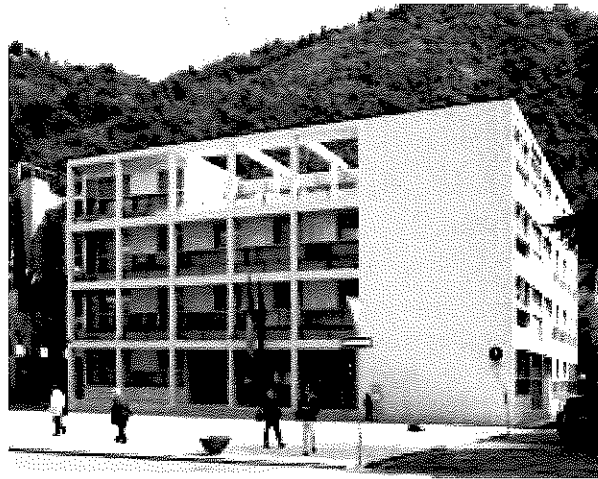


Figure 07: Casade Fascio

Windows onto the World: On Politics and the Forest Edge Mid-Night, Under A Full Moon September 13, 1965

Robert Geddes arrived as our new Dean from the University of Pennsylvania and challenged both program and site options for now this more socially and politically relevant School. Shelters for Drug Addicts and Homeless Families, Daycare Centers, Inner City Schools for Students at Risk, and Police and Fire stations were the new tasks for Pedagogy and then Practice for this small college town school in central New Jersey. We visited Trenton and Philadelphia, Camden and New York and projected linear cities from Boston to Washington; we rode public transportation and imagined affordable housing. These were the years of civil rights and civil disobedience for the discipline and the profession. The City became the subject and social justice became the program. Architecture was introduced as a political force and Geddes linked a University elective to his Foundation Course Architecture 101 *Cities, Buildings, and Landscapes* and suggested a connection to American Cultural History through his essay *The Forest Edge: Thomas Coles' Course of the Empire* (figure 08). By then, Princeton had abandoned the Marquand Libraries and Museum, and never had identified a landscape architecture program. Geddes emphasis on Polis, the Art of the City, required the introduction of planning under Chester Rapkin and Julian Wolpert, and we learned to collaborate with urban geographers and aid in the deinstitutionalization of Asylums for the mentally and physically disabled. The profession evolved in the role of activist citizenship as the Civil rights movement at the time the Vietnam War split the nation. Some of our generation served overseas in the military and others learned of a larger world through the Peace Corps. We emerged a decade later from the start of our privileged education from the cocoon of Antioch Court to the visceral presence of Catalytic Crisis evolving from the calm resonance of Matisse's *Window* (figure 09) onto Picasso's *Guernica*. The Poetics and Pragmatics of the City now framed our graduate education as first Colin Rowe directed us toward a New Museum for Natural Sciences in Philadelphia followed by Alan Colquhoun who challenged us with the bare bones and explicit requirements of A Plasma Physics Laboratory for A Research Corridor along the New Jersey Turnpike where we were accountable now for every costly construction sequence, and every cubic yard of non-requisite space.

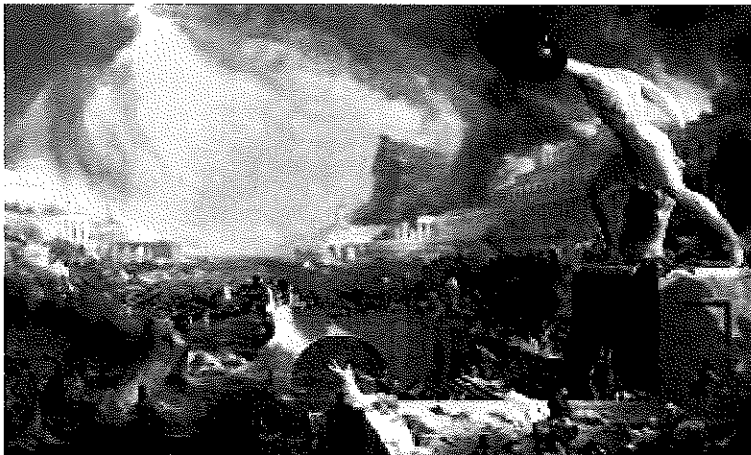


Figure 08: Thomas Coles' Course of the Empire



Figure 09 Window by Matisse

Windows of Excess: The Post Modern Project

Time Flies: The Second Decade after Graduation 1975-85

The War ended, and some of lingered to teach for the next decade at Princeton, Cincinnati, Rice, Cooper Union and Yale, where the benign post war economies produced a profession newly engaged with *housing the bourgeoisie* (Lipstadt) as aspirational capitalist investment, no longer a retreat or a shelter. House size grew, as appreciation allowed an attitude of flipping investments on both the residential and institutional scale. Museums began to grow as venues of recreation. Post Modernism under Graves (figure 10), Krier and Aldo Rossi (figure 11) envisioned no longer projects of endless space but rather well articulated Rooms at residential and civic scales.

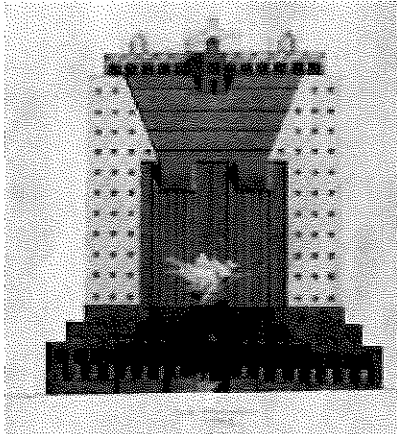


Figure 10: Michael Graves Federal Building

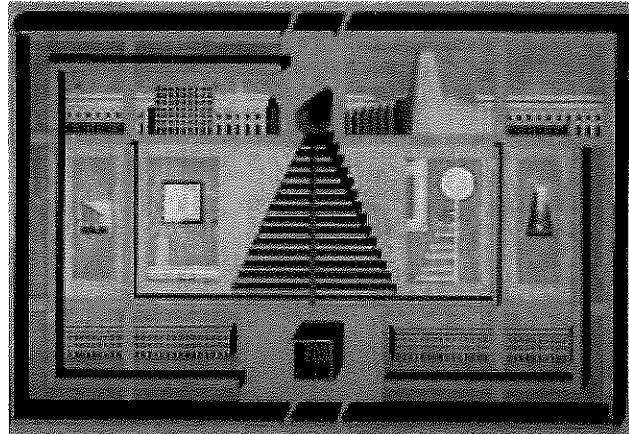


Figure 11: Aldo Rossi Modena

The international competition *Roma Interrota* (figure 12) (1979) engaged a wide range of Princeton faculty and alumni as an urban agenda to reinhabit the City, to celebrate craft along with Hannah Arendt's *Work and Labor*, and Rossi's call for *Enduring Permanences*. The clock turned back to the memory of Antioch Court, demolished 1964, to Proust's *Souvenirs of a Lost Past*. The Pope's Balcony, always Aldobrandini (figure 13), the Belvedere, Ledoux and persistently Roman leitmotifs produced exquisite renderings on *Arches* paper, prisma-color, pastel, watercolor, while the free hand returned and inserted cypress trees framed our pastoral imaginations. Graves always had landscape as part of his palette. Often asked what was the origin of his figural delineations (figure 14), he would answer: "One day you will understand." Time was on his side as he made it possible for dozens of his students to pass through the gates of the American Academy in Rome as Fellows and re-frame their understanding through the figural void in the ancient boxwood hedge overlooking the City of Rome. Some Window, some archaic Void, some enduring City revealed in the nick of time for so many students over the past 50 years. Mille Grazie.



Figure 12: Roma Interrota

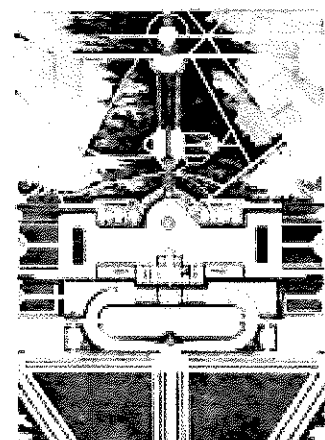


Figure 13: Villa Albobrandin

Simultaneously, in this context of Excess, Frampton's treatise on the reconsideration of Modernism and the Avant-Garde, *Critical Regionalism* (1983) stirred the epistemological imagination. Where ideas originate and the lessons of long, long ago and far, far away, of the primitive as the primal, were revealed in the prescient haunted work of Alvaro Siza, Alvar Aalto and Peter Zumthor, architects considered idiosyncratic two decades earlier (figure 15). As the Vietnam war took a Euro-centrally educated generation to far away places, we would be moved by Tanazaki's *In Praise of Shadows* and Sanyo's *Mirrors for the Moon*, as did some in the Academy resonate with Sanford Kwinter's essay on *African Genesis: What could be More Modern than the Archaic?* Some were looking deep into the radical nature of roots, into the role of geology and the language of embedded meaning and signs, Semiotics, and into the ethical and epistemological responsibilities of architecture as a discipline and a profession to make a better world.



Figure 14: Banacerra by Michael Graves

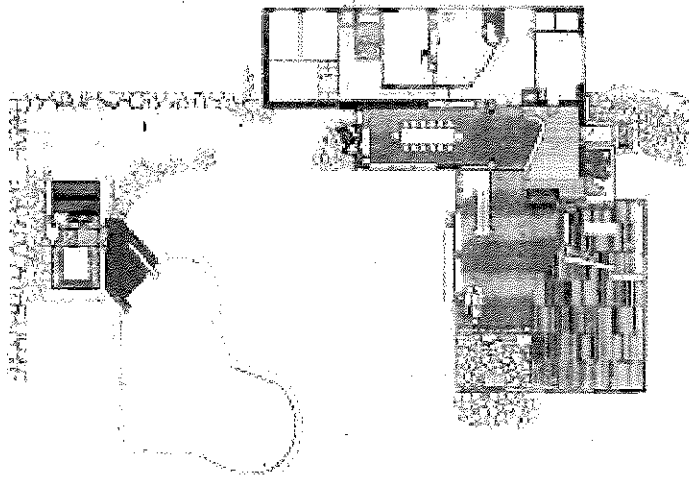


Figure 15: Villa Maria Aalto

The De-Constructivist Window as the Prosthetic Lens

The Third Decade 1985-95

Princeton 's faculty (Eisenman, Graves; later Meier, Gwathmey and Cooper Union's John Heyduk) generated the professional national debate between the East Coast Whites and the West Coast Silvers (Gehry/Morphosis/SCI-Arc) through the publication of *Five Architects* and the Gandelsonnas *Architectural* Forum essay on *Semiotics & Architecture*. The door opened up the dialogue with European Linguistic Thinkers and De-Constructive Philosophers at the same time pop culture's Post Modernism extended across the American cultural landscape now centered in pervasive shopping centers with the scenographic commodification of Disneyland, Las Vegas, and Prince Charles' Canary Wharf Docklands. While the Whites initially rendered abstracted spaces without a visceral constructional agenda, the Silvers began to appreciate the grittiness of joints, prosthetic supports and flashing. Frank Gehry's Santa Monica house (figure 16) and a decade later his Bilbao Guggenheim, Coop Himmelblau's Vienna Office Chard (figure 17), and the emergence of the digital wireframe permitted what seemed a vast break, or mirror image from the wall of a collaged past through the reflections on the present. A more patient second look at these new original projects of innovation remind me of the role of Antioch Court reflecting the theses of currencies with Shellman's sails of Flows so skillfully Framed in 1961. Spatial Tales of Origin are more primal, more architectural as an enduring civic discourse imagining common ground instead of the rhetoric of invention, innovation with a disdain for his or her stories of *then and there* in a world of *now here* or regrettably *no where*.



Figure 16: Frank Gehry's Santa Monica House

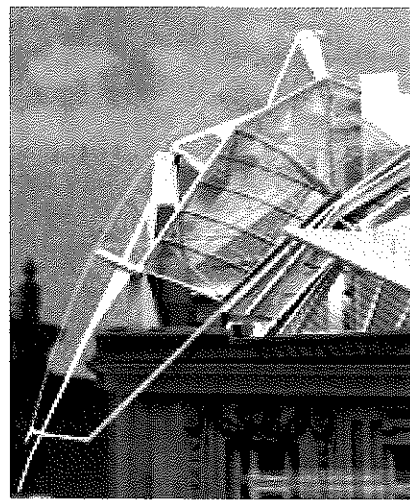


Figure 17: Coop Himmelblau's Vienna Office Chard

Windows onto Field Operations, Landscape Urbanism in the Face of BIG DATA

Four Decades Later 1995-2005

While Michael Graves started a major pedagogic re-orientation at Princeton beginning in 1962 he soon became a major hero of the Post Modern movement nationally and internationally for the next three decades not only as a star architect but profound educator for generations of professionals and leaders of the discipline. Michael Graves won the ASCA Topaz Award in 2009, the highest honor of the Profession and the Academy and serves as Trustee of the American Academy of Rome. We used to refer to Graves in his early years as Michelangelo for his amazing sensibilities and profoundly human sensitivities.

Graves is a teacher's teacher; an architect who has inspired generations to the still vital lessons of Antioch Court whose light revealed the power of in-site to young minds nourished by this Master and Friend. From the start when Michael drew the portrait of a modest window from his Bank Street Office, he drew in addition both the tree beyond and the bird nest within. Throughout his work, land form and the three Natures of Wilderness, Landscape and Garden graced this son of Indianapolis, the land the extensive farmsteads of the mid-west with a Jeffersonian grid imposed upon a restive topographic imagination (Grant Wood, *Springtime & Fall Plowing*) (figure 18/19), which he recorded again in the Roman *Campagna* (figure 20) and reconstructed in his Public Civic Theaters and Private Retreats around the world.

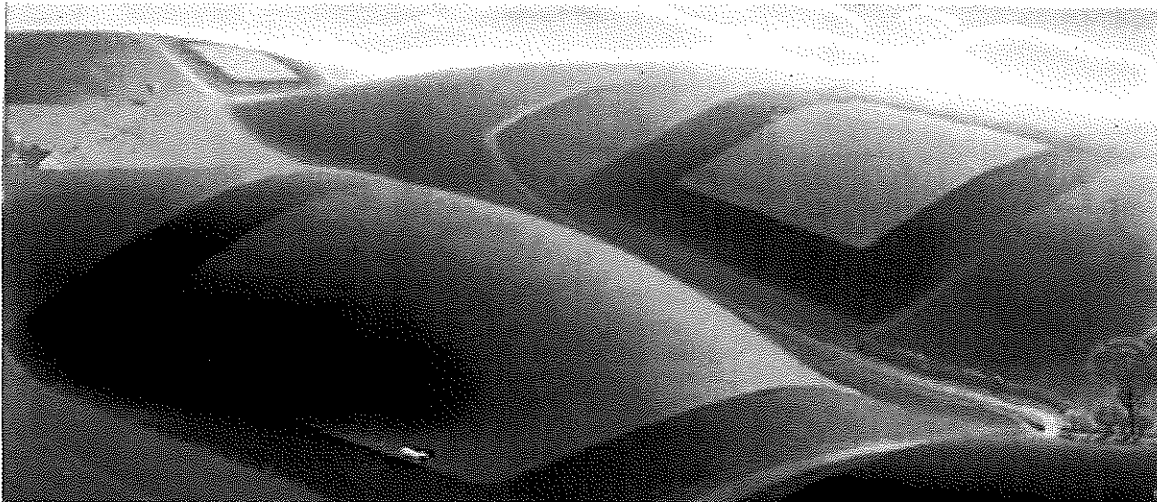


Figure 18 : Spring Turning By Grant Wood

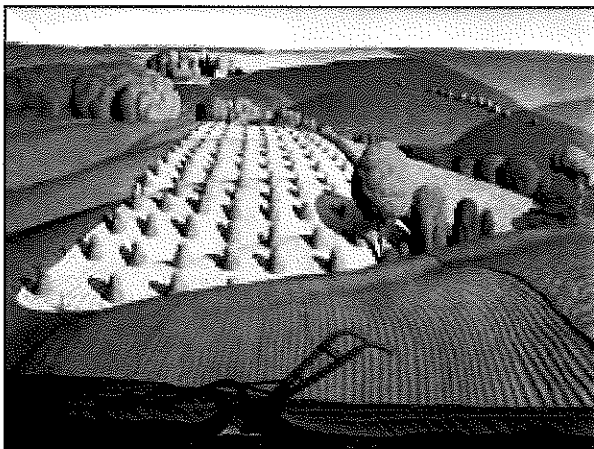


Figure 19: Fall Plowing By Grant Wood

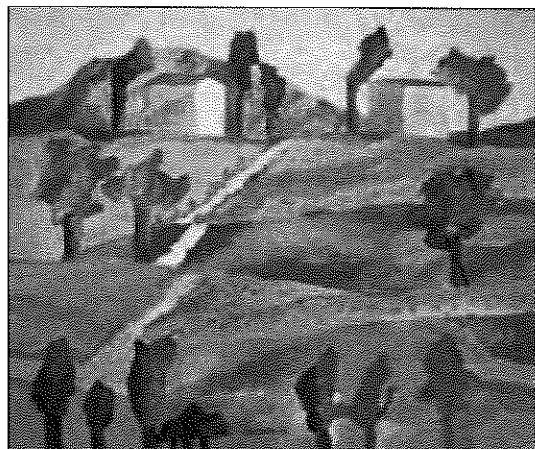


Figure 20: Roman Campagna

One might critically say the pre-conditions of the site have not been at the explicit core of the Princeton program, but I believe it has *always* been there, but not celebrated as now “new thinking”, the result of BIG DATA. Long ago Labatut taught how to make steps longer and shallower outside than those inside with a delight in the pause of the landing; Graves made architectural promenades from outside to inside; up to rooftop terraces and down to grottoes only to meander the length of a 1000-foot long garden.

In recent years, Princeton Dean Stan Allen has initiated the study of *Field Operations* (figure 21) to lead a curriculum at the scale of Landscape Urbanism or the New Nature of Infrastructure in response to the scale of Climate Change and the currency of BIG Data as the new capacity of Evidence Based Design. Princeton students take on a Brooklyn site of Six Billion square feet, a new master plan for Shanghai to assure it will always be the BIGGEST City in the World. Assigned as Yellow Master Plan Guidelines by the same Gandelsonnas of *Semiotics* (1975) (figure 22), he has led this cynical project on semantic inference for the past two decades for a School looking East as well as West.

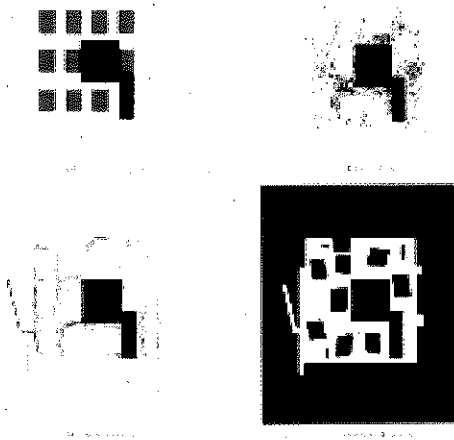


Figure 21: Stan Allen Field Operations

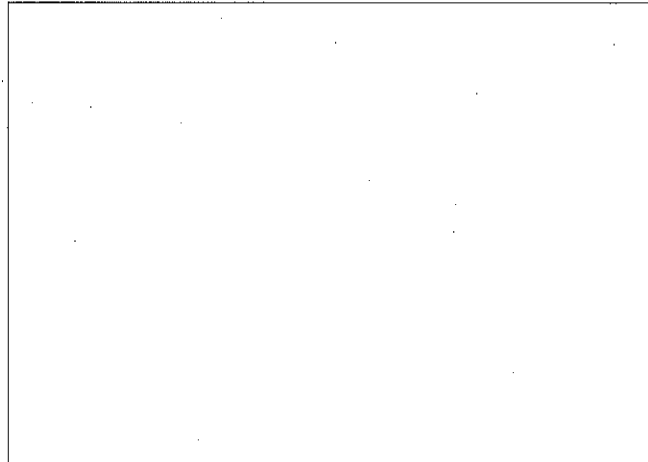


Figure 22: Semiotics PA Cover

Equally for the past two decades faculty members Liz Diller and Richard Scofidio have branded Princeton's pedagogy as current and disconnected with Antioch Court and serve the profession as star architects, since Graves retired, with Windowless Un-Private Houses (MOMA exhibit) 2006 where virtual reality is accessible on a Blank Screen instead of a wet canvas. The Big Blank glazing walls looking in on the choreography of spectacle haunts the planes of voided panels for their projects at Alice Tully Hall and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Boston. These voided expansions, an architecture of almost nothing, are projected for the latest MOMA Expansion of New York over the dead body of Williams Tsien's Folk Art Museum (figure 22).

Students now study extreme climates, extremes sports, and extreme catastrophes such as proposals for post hurricane Sandy. BIG DATA may be a substitute for the archeological imagination now at Princeton and some of the stars of the profession. Outstanding professional leaders such as Princeton Alumni Adam Yarinski of ARO have the inherited genes of studying with both Graves and Allen. Our own classmate, Tod Williams with Billie Tsien, has just received (2014) the Presidential Medal of Honor for their exemplary work across all scales and continents.



Figure 23: Williams Tsien's Folk Art

Windows of Restraint:

2005-2015

In the Face of Excess a Call for the Rarefied

This Final Window framing salient developments for our discipline and profession takes me full circle back to the precious seeds of antiquity, which flourished in the now demolished yet not erased Antioch Court which is now a loading dock for an often expanded museum. A century and a half earlier than this our 50th Reunion, Gottfried Semper (1865) reminded us that the first architectural act is to break the ground, to plant a seed perhaps, to prepare solid foundations for a culture to flourish. Princeton's School of Architecture is seminal to the profession, as we have become stewards of the rare resources of this world. Princeton's new (2013) Dean Alejandro Zara-Polo is yet another refugee from the Crisis in Spain, collectively identified as the Spanish Armada, as are Harvard's GSD new dean Inaki Albalos, and University of Virginia's new fearless leader Inaki Alday. Zara-Polo has initiated a new debate through a stunning lecture series Spring 2014 termed Rarefied against a decade of Excess. He has made a clarion call to the discipline and to the profession that we must build with what we have on hand; five thousand years of exploitative quarrying of the earth's resources which have resulted in a cornucopia of salvageable materials, building the new city from the nutritive processes, ecotones of the ancient and yet enduring. The lush vital acanthus leaves and JB Jackson's Necessity for Ruins may be mirrored in the future of the profession which is revealed in Raphael's School of Athens (1520) (figure 25) where Plato and Aristotle are in dialogue with Michelangelo and Pope Sixtus V, ancient seeds of wisdom flourishing as catalysts for contemporary Citizens and Strangers.

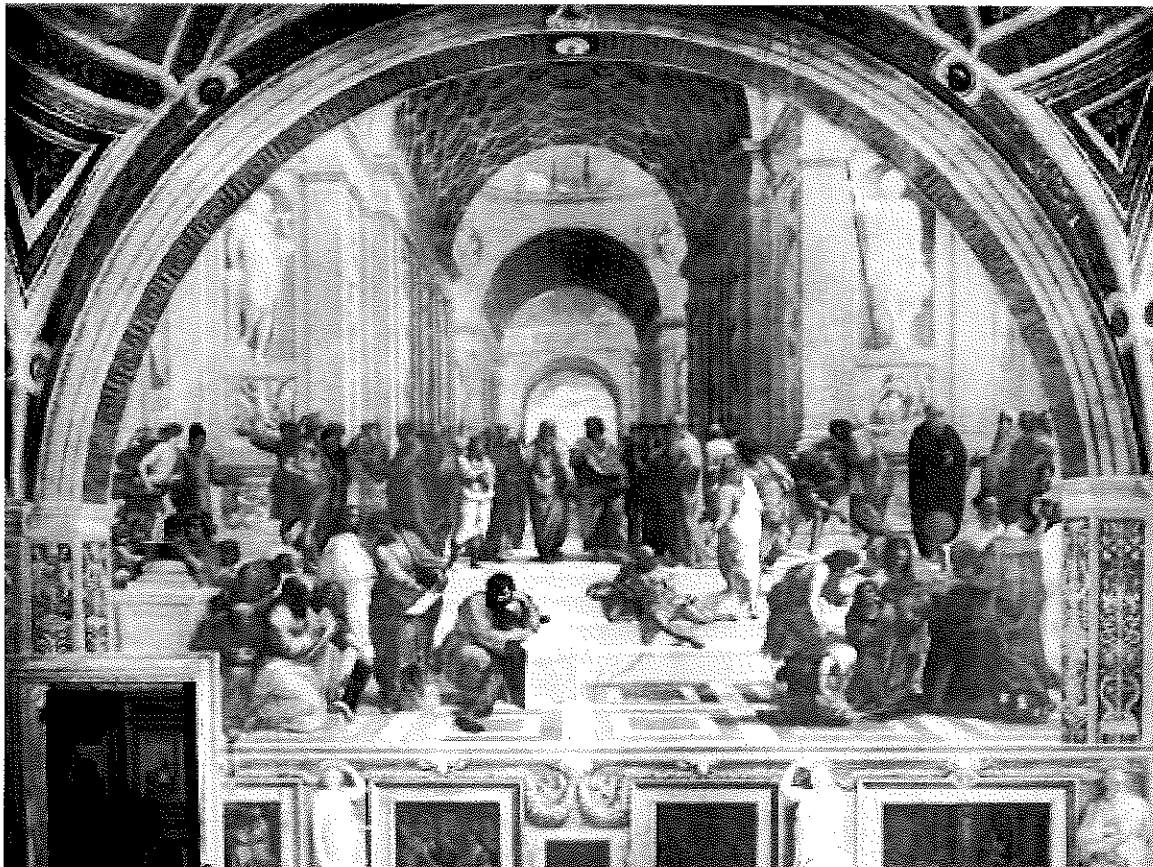


Figure 25: Raphael's School of Athens

Peter D. Waldman, BA 1965, MFA 1967
William R. Kenan Professor of Architecture
University of Virginia