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## Abstraction and the Face

Abstraction is an operation. The modernists insisted on this; we are seldom given an example of abstraction without a demonstration or thematization of abstraction as a verb. We witness its power to mine lineaments from a being; provide a few economical gestures and evoke the essence of a figure. Abstraction's first target has always been the face. The face is a white surface with black holes on it, almost already abstracted. It is a special type of sign mechanism, an apparition that exists wherever significance and subjectification both engage. But let us not forget that it is also the prototype of beauty, whether in rancor or benevolence, whether "an instantiation of golden proportions" or "different varieties of vague luminosity without form or dimension."

True to form, one of Baldessari's dots tells everything there is to know about abstraction as it simultaneously obliterates and stands in for a face. Abstraction asserts itself as ineffable, inheriting the beauty of that which it obscures. Without any doubt, abstraction is the most powerful affective tool of architecture. Its economy of means, attention-grabbing, and a certain kind of mysticism, however, make it an easy crutch; it furnishes an immediate sensory confrontation, declaring itself present with the promise of the abundance of a face—whether or not there's anything behind. Exactly like a 99¢ price tag, abstraction makes the viewer stall in the gap between the sign and the referent, to consider a meaning that is slightly different than its object, even though the two often *perform* in exactly the same way.

(The following photographs are the main body of the submission to San Rocco. The text is not obviously related to the photographs in the way that a caption or an explanation would be. Instead it tries to catalog examples of details that might complicate the axis of abstraction.)

















