

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND CRITICISM

MARK RAKATANSKY, SERIES EDITOR

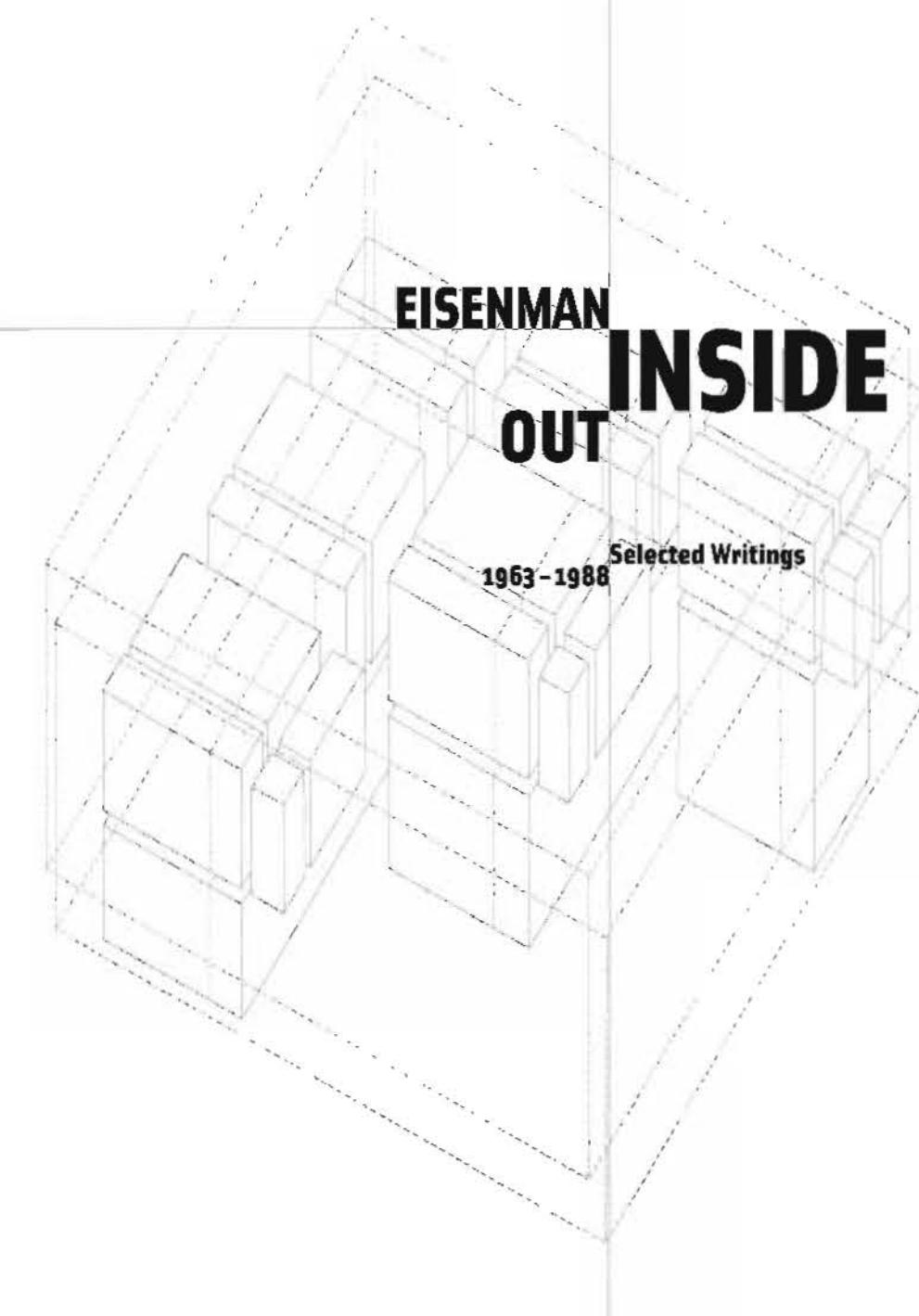
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OUT **INSIDE**

Selected Writings
1963–1988



CHAPTER 2

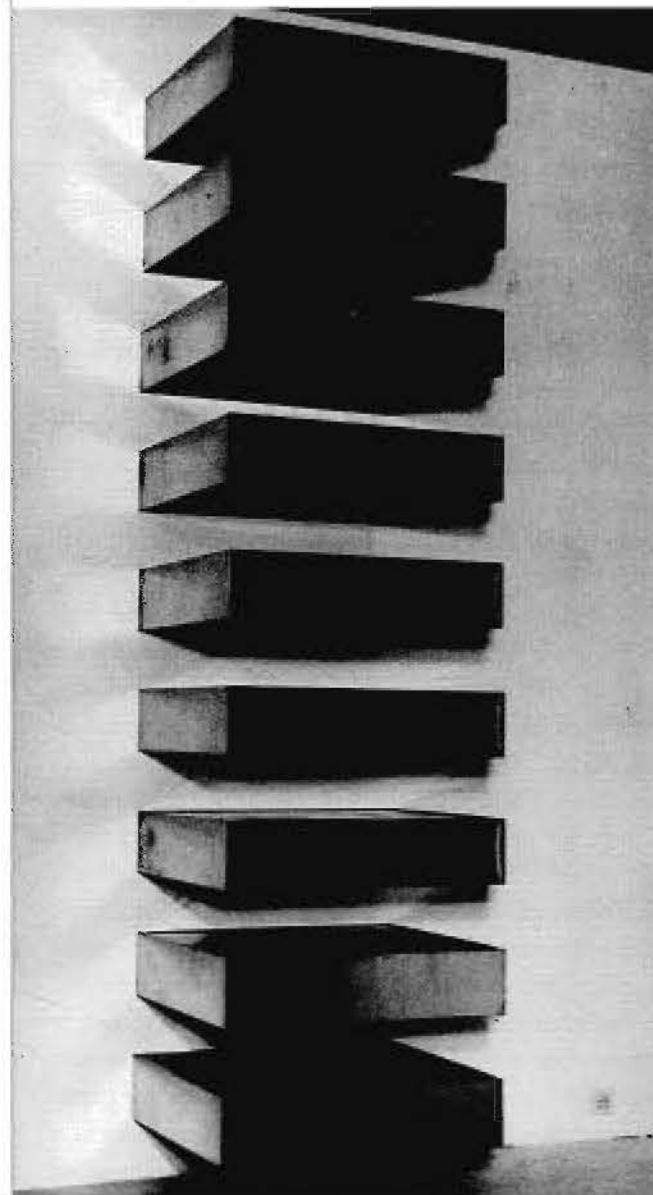
NOTES ON CONCEPTUAL ARCHITECTURE**Toward a Definition**

An examination of recent developments in architecture, its present commitment to a social and technological polemic notwithstanding, would reveal that aspects of painting and sculpture, especially in the domain of what is loosely called "conceptual art," continue to have an important although undefined influence on architectural thinking. While the influence of painting and sculpture would have been commonly accepted in a treatise on the architecture of the 1920's and 1930's, this relationship to post-1950 architecture, except in its most literal interpretations,¹ has rarely been the subject for discussion.

If for no other reason than the recurrence and persistence of a "hard edge" painting and sculpture, which in a very literal sense might be said to be both exemplary of conceptual art and possess architectonic qualities and which would be significant in itself, the problems raised by this recent painting and sculpture seem to have a very direct concern for architecture. While hard edge, essentially abstract, and formal phenomena have not been the only painterly influences on modern architecture (for example, recent "Pop" movements with their emphasis on social commentary have had an influence similar to the Dada painters and sculptors of the twenties), their apparent visual similarity alone would be enough to warrant examination. However, to consider this problem in the traditional terms of visual phenomena and associated meanings would be to miss the essential interest of conceptual attitudes and consequently the thesis of this article. While the intention here is not to become involved in a "semantic" debate over what is or is not "conceptual,"² a clarification of the term and its implications might prove illuminating to the present climate of debate in contemporary architecture. But more significantly, the potential meaning of "conceptual architecture" or of a conceptual aspect in architecture poses fundamental questions concerning the role of form and space, particularly in relation to questions of process and object.

Concept as a primary concern of an architecture is not a recent manifestation. In fact, many books have been devoted to the definition and clarification of the term in an architectural context.³ Thus, while it is today often necessary to articulate contemporary developments under a banner of the "new," in fact, it is possible to see the question of concept as central to architectural thought over quite an extended period. Furthermore, to ascribe present manifestations of the term "conceptual" in both art and architecture to the "avant garde" appears as a strategic yet ingenuous involution fabricated by their apologists and critics.⁴

If the tenets of the conceptual art movements are traced, a highly discriminating and consequently revealing attitude develops in respect of two basic issues: problems of process and problems of object—the nature of these attitudes both limiting and defining these issues in reference to what might properly be called "conceptual architecture." In order to attempt a definition of the conceptual aspect of an architecture, it would seem necessary to differentiate first between that which is conceptual in architecture, and second, to find a way in which it would be possible to make a series of distinctions within the conceptual realm of architecture itself. In both art and architecture, problems of process range from questions of conception, process of work, etc.; to questions more closely related to the object itself—to the design process, to issues concerning composition and arrangement; and lastly, to questions of interpretation, to questions of linear and simultaneous readings,



2.1 Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1970. Copper on light blue Plexiglas, 6 x 27 x 24 in. (15.2 x 68.6 x 61 cm).

to problems of codes, etc. In this respect, a discussion of problems of process seems unlikely to provide a distinction between art and architecture, and since such a discussion would exceed the limits of this paper, it will be questions of objects to which this paper will be primarily focused.

It is possible to generalize three basic attitudes in conceptual art with respect to the object. (1) To invoke a kind of nihilism about the efficacy or relevance of any designed object. (2) The alternative, which is almost diametrically opposite and involves a preoccupation with objects as "things in themselves." The former two positions vary in the con-

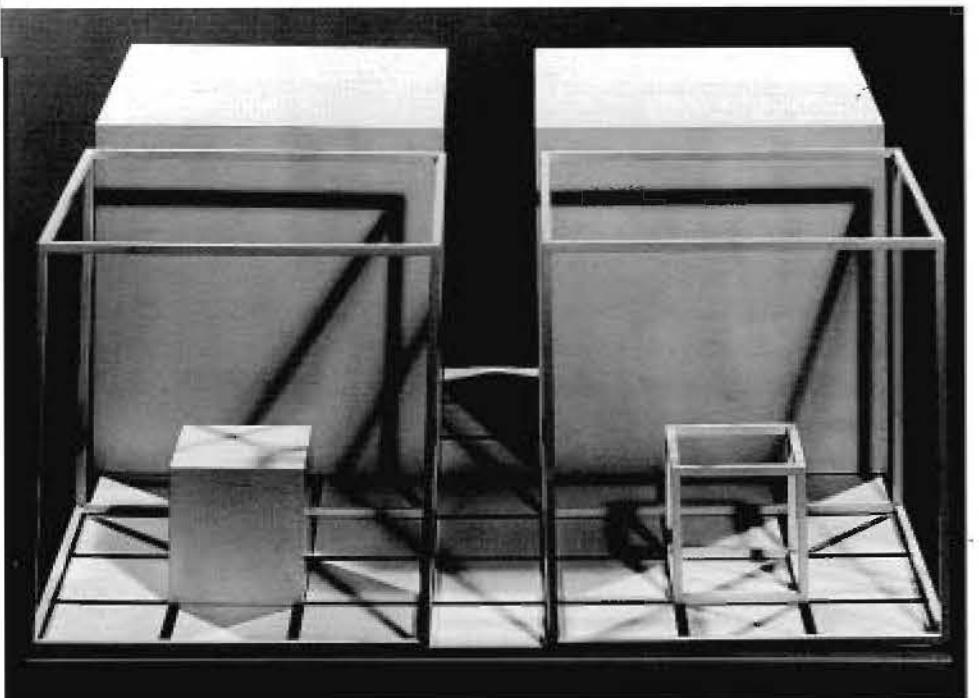
ceptual spectrum from information art and art-language, where the art object is of almost no concern, to aspects of serial and systemic art which produces forms of a geometric abstraction supposedly representative of a non-object condition.⁵ The last position (3) constitutes a concern for the object itself and is manifest in primary structures and "minimal art" (fig. 2.1). In fact, one distinction between other types of conceptual art and minimal art can be seen in this differing attitude toward the object. All three of these attitudes, if it is possible to generalize a basic intention with respect to the role of the object, would concern a change from a primary experience which is visual and sensual to one which is mental and intellectual and therefore presumed to be conceptual.⁶

In this context, the work of such people as Robert Morris and Donald Judd seems to have a similar purpose: to take meaning away from objects in the sense of meaning which is received from an aesthetic experience, or the meaning which is received from a representational image. Here objects have no meaning other than as the object itself.⁷ In one sense, the object is presented as a new form of coded structure, since meaning must be established through a new means—through an interpretation of the inherent qualities in the physical object itself.

A second attitude of conceptual art, in which objects may become more conceptual and less physical, in an aesthetic or perceptual sense, is when their physical presence contains an explicit code or represents a known sign system.

In language, the word-object is a sign having a common agreed-upon meaning. This meaning is not the direct result of understanding the formal structure of the word, but results from an agreed-upon convention given to a particular structure of form. When a word is considered, its order and form are not arranged necessarily to engender an aesthetic response, the primary concern is not with the placement, shape, and size of letters, or whether they can be rearranged in different combinations. For example, while the letter X possesses a strong formal structure of centrality when seen by itself, this aspect becomes residual in the context of a word. Here because of a prearranged code, the conceptual aspect is primary and the perceptual aspect is secondary.⁸ While the aesthetic, perceptual, and sensual aspect of objects can be made secondary in language where the word-object is given sign or code properties, to shift from an aesthetic to a conceptual focus in architecture and art, where there is no agreed-upon sign system, would seem to pose a problem of greater difficulty.

Physical form can be primarily conceptual, although less so when the code is only implicit as in the serial grids of Sol LeWitt (fig. 2.2). While one module of a LeWitt grid structure can be considered as merely a representation of an integer or a unity, when this unity is given physical form, the integer only determines the relative size of the parts to the whole. The fact that the armature also has a width, a length, and a relationship of solid to void is not determined by the notational system. While these physical relationships are considered relatively unimportant and supposedly rather arbitrary to LeWitt, they still present information which would tend to modify the conceptual intention.⁹ But, it is precisely this difference between the concept integer and an actual bar of a grid structure which will be seen to be of critical concern to a conceptual architecture. In the transposition to physical



2.2 Sol LeWitt, *ABCD 9*, 1966. Baked enamel on steel, 19½ x 19½ x 9½ in. (49.5 x 49.5 x 23.8 cm). Photograph by Walter Russell. Courtesy of the John Weber Gallery.

reality, for example, the idea of a line takes on another aspect. No longer is it the idea line, but now it is a straight line or a curved line with a thinness or a thickness.¹⁰ Since this is the nature of all physical reality once transposed from a nonphysical or conceptual realm, it can be accepted as a given. This same physical reality also has the potential to be given a sign system external to its physical form: an explicit system in the case of letters, and an implicit system in the case of a LeWitt grid. It will be seen that the question of whether a work is conceptual or not is not merely whether the physical reality has the potential to be coded, but rather the manner in which the given physical reality is manipulated. Even when the physical form contains an implicit code, it does not change the fact that anything which has a physical presence has both an aesthetic or perceptual aspect as well as what can be called a universal or conceptual aspect which can inform the viewer as to meaning or conception (in both the semantic and syntactic sense), and to its idea (the means, according to LeWitt, for carrying out the conception).¹¹ In most cases, because of a desire to do away with the sensual aspects and the traditional relationship of form and content, conceptual art has overlooked the potential of the universal aspect of physical form to be used for conceptual ends.¹²

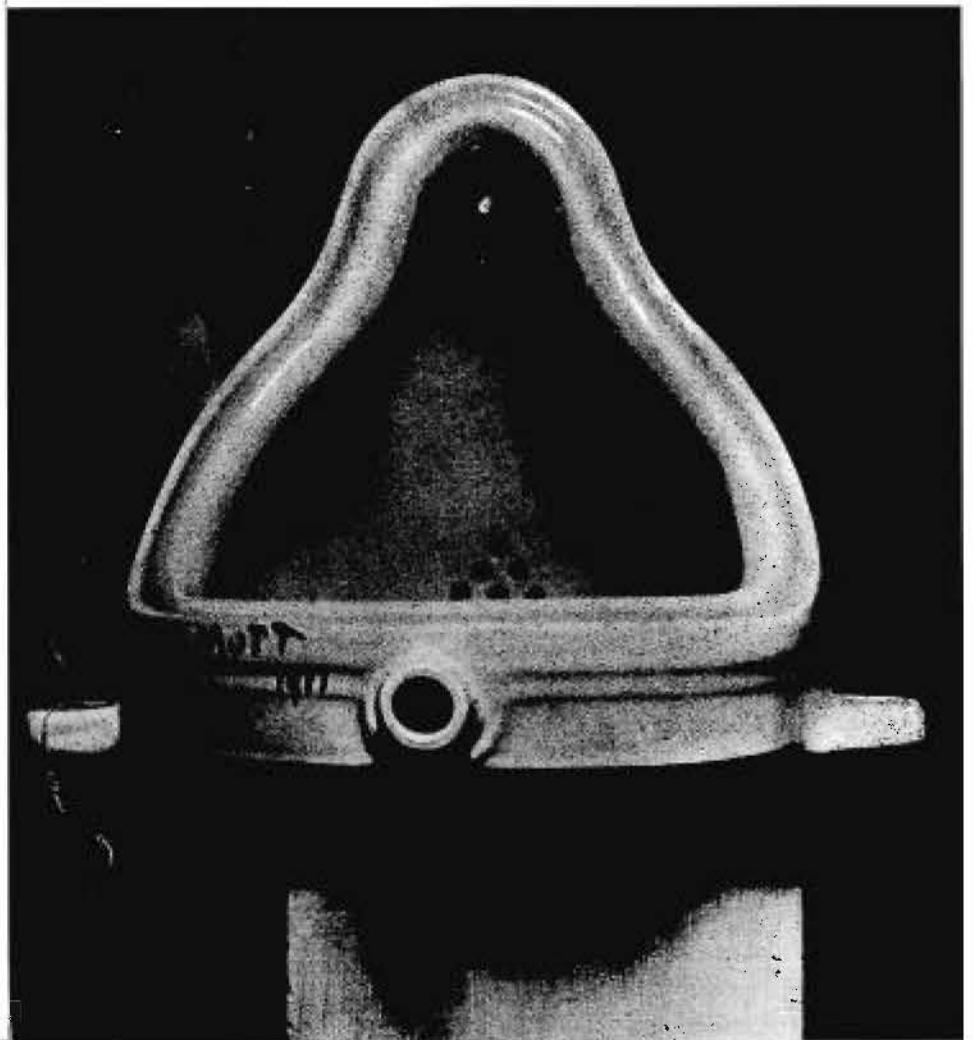
In essence, the conceptual attitude held by the art-language group¹³ says that the object is replaced by the language used to describe the object.¹⁴ Here the object, i.e., the language, is both the form and the meaning simultaneously. The art object is no longer a "vehicle" for an intellectual experience—it "is" the intellectual or conceptual experience itself.¹⁵ Here the issue goes beyond the question of object to, in fact, what constitutes an art form.¹⁶

In the sense that an object remains the reason for the use of language, i.e., the words describe the object,¹⁷ and since the idea of the object still embodies what may be called an aesthetic intention, then whether the object exists or not, there remains an intention concerning a physical phenomenon. This would seem to qualify a sentence describing an art object as art, if it is accepted that an idea or an intention about a physical object does not necessarily require a physical fact.¹⁸ Thus, one aspect of conceptual art is concerned with the idea or intention to produce the object without the requirement of the physical reality of the object itself.

It is possible to say that to have an idea about any object, i.e., something which has a physical presence, whether this presence be an art object or an architectural object, is conceptual. In this sense, the mere intention to paint a picture or to design a building could be considered conceptual. While the idea itself is conceptual, the object of the conception, i.e., the painting or the architecture, is not necessarily so. For example, the intention to paint a Madonna and child does not make the idea of the painting, as opposed to the idea of painting the painting, conceptual. Equally, for an architecture, the idea of designing a house does not make the idea of the house conceptual. Even an abstract drawing such as a plan or an axonometric, while in itself conceptual, may not be a drawing of a building possessing a conceptual structure. In terms of this paper, the idea or intention to paint or design something will be distinguished from the idea within the thing itself, i.e., its conceptual structure. A conceptual structure is that aspect of the visible form, whether it is an idea, in a drawing, or in a building, which is intentionally put in the form to provide access to the inner form or universal formal relationships. While these formal relationships are present in every form, they may not be accessible or may be only accidental since they are undesigned. If these limits of the term conceptual can be accepted, then it is possible to make a distinction between a conceptual art object and a conceptual architectural object. The fundamental difference between art and architecture is that the idea of architecture demands the idea of an object presence, while the idea of art does not.¹⁹

In one sense, conceptual art is a model never to be realized in a final object, and therefore, it is perhaps possible to approximate a true conceptual state. The idea that physical objects can be rendered entirely conceptual should not be at issue.²⁰ Nor should the idea that to be conceptual in art and architecture the work must remain in an idea state. What is at issue and what most conceptual art fails to take into account is that the physical reality itself does have a conceptual aspect.

An art object as opposed to any object possesses an aesthetic intention. An aesthetic intention in art does not always depend on the object or the aesthetic qualities of the object, for example, in the case of a Duchamp, where by taking an object and changing its context, the object can be classified as an art object.²¹ While all objects, whether designed or not, will have an inherent aesthetic, the object in Duchamp's case receives its art appellation not from the aesthetic in the object or its object qualities, but from something external to the object—in the case of Duchamp's urinal (fig. 2.3), a change in context. Thus, it can be said that an aesthetic intention, without necessarily including the idea or the object of the qualities of the object, qualifies something as art.



2.3 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, New York, 1917 (no longer extant). Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, from the second issue of "The Blind Man," published May 1917, by Marcel Duchamp, Beatrice Wood, and H.-P. Roché. Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

In architecture this is not the case. First, because architecture in a literal sense is the context.²² Second, the idea of an architecture as distinguished from a painting will always contain in that idea the ideas of functional and semantically weighted objects such as walls, bathrooms, closets, doors, ceilings. There is no conceptual aspect in architecture which can be thought of without the concept of pragmatic and functional objects, otherwise it is not an architectural conception.²³ To make these conceptual and still remain architecture is quite another matter. Even if it were possible to disregard all of the semantic impositions on form in architecture, lines which are columns, planes which are walls, must always because of the fact of gravity, hold something up; thus a physical presence would exist even as an idea. Equally, in architecture, the ground plane will always be semantically different than the roof plane, and the entry plane acknowledges the difference from exterior to interior. But the idea of wall as plane, or column as line, is not enough to qualify the idea as

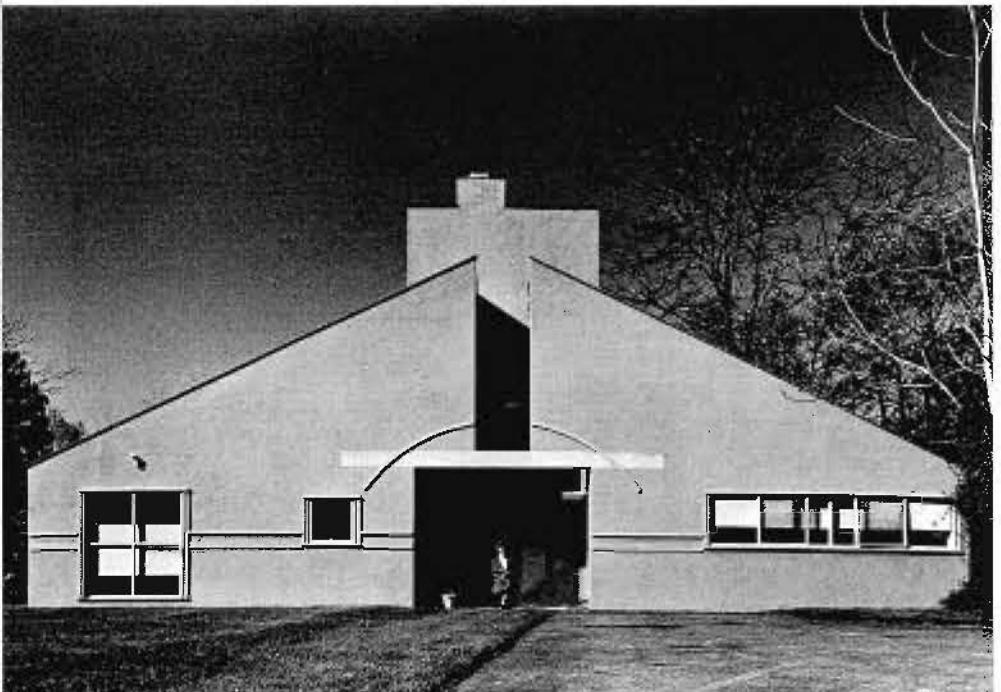
conceptual architecture. Conversely, merely because architecture both in the idea and in the built state has objects does not exclude it from being conceptual. To make something conceptual in architecture would require taking the pragmatic and functional aspects and placing them in a conceptual matrix, where their primary existence is no longer interpreted from the physical fact of being a bathroom or closet, but rather the functional aspect bathroom or closet becomes secondary to some primary reading as a notation in a conceptual context. Again, what makes architecture conceptual is that unlike art, it demands not only the primacy of intention to take something from the sensual to the intellectual realm, but also that this intention be present in the conceptual structure; again, whether it is built or not is not at issue. It would seem that the intention to have a conceptual aspect in architecture which is primary and at the same time considered within the range of structures common to a visual or a plastic art, and further which did not have an inherent and explicit sign system, would have to be made accessible through a structure in the architectural object itself, i.e., through primarily visual means; either formal, pictorial, spatial, etc. In most cases, the major difficulty in achieving such a conceptual intention through the means of a formal structure lies not in the intention itself, but in finding the means of expressing the conceptual aspect so that it is in some way apparent to the viewer.²⁴ To require that the meaning be intrinsic in the formal structure, i.e., not as a sign and therefore external to the form, but received from a structure of inherent relationships in any form, i.e., as universals, is a major problem.

While all objects have a structure, that is, a shape which possesses some inherent relationships which in turn suggest some form of meaning, these are often undesigned to achieve a conceptual end, or they merely obtrude such an end because of the primacy of their sensual aspects, or alternatively, because they are undesigned, they give unintended information.²⁵ In order to approximate a conceptual intention, the shapes which are perceived would have to contain a structure within their physical presence which would have the capacity to take the viewer from the sense (immediate) perception to a conceptual attitude, and at the same time requiring of this structure a capacity to suppress the possible primacy of a sensual response; to provide a means whereby conceptual relationships are conceivable as independent of actual relationships.

Most environments, whether they be linguistic, biological, social, or physical, have a structure. That is, they have a series of elements which have both definable properties and definable relationships between these elements. These structures can usually be described in terms of their differences or similarities to other structures. While many attempts have

conceptual	semantic	syntactic
perceptual	semantic	syntactic

2.4 Initial structure of taxonomy.



2.5 Robert Venturi, Vanna Venturi House, Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, 1962. Photo by Rollin R. LaFrance.

been made comparing architecture and language, mainly using linguistic analogies, the semiological classification of pragmatics, semantics, and syntactics²⁶ can serve as a useful beginning, if only to describe the different aspects of architecture. Traditionally, architecture has been understood in these terms even though its discourse has not been explicitly formulated in this manner: pragmatics—the relation of form to function or technology; semantics—the relation of form to meaning; syntactics—the mediation of meaning and form through a structure of formal relationships. However, it is necessary to make a further distinction when discussing architecture or art in a linguistic context.

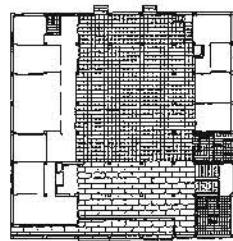
In architecture, relationships exist in two ways, in the environment itself and in the individual's ability to understand and relate to them. They exist at a real, concrete level where the individual is aware of them through his senses—perception, hearing, touching, etc.—and they also exist at an abstract or conceptual level in the actual object. They cannot be seen or heard even though they can be described. A similar form of distinction has been proposed by Noam Chomsky in linguistics: a perceptual or surface structure, and a conceptual or deep structure.²⁷ The important difference is that in language Chomsky says the surface structure corresponds to the phonetic or physical aspect and the deep structure corresponds to the syntactic aspect.²⁸ While Chomsky's equation of a sentence's construction with surface structure and syntactics with deep structure is valid for language because the word-object has primary sign value, it is not elaborate enough for art and architecture, in that it does not address itself to the problem of the aesthetic or sensual aspect of the object beyond the physical arrangement of words. Because the "object" in architecture and art has perceptual attributes as important as its conceptual ones, an elaboration of semantics and

syntax to allow for the perceptual aspects of the object would seem necessary. If pragmatics can be put aside for a moment,²⁹ it is possible to propose a typology where both semantics and syntactics each have a surface and a deep structure—a perceptual and a conceptual aspect (fig. 2.4).³⁰

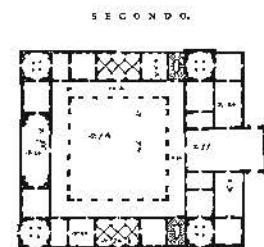
Initially, this taxonomy provides a distinction between the terms semantic and conceptual: between that which is concerned with meaning and content on the one hand, and that which is concerned with concept or idea on the other.³¹ Often, the term meaning is confused with the term conceptual, which is understandable in the sense that meaning is derived from a form or a word through a mental process and, therefore, in a literal sense is conceptual. However, as Chomsky points out, **in language the linking of meaning with the word is a surface phenomenon and it is the syntax—or the structure of the relationship between words—which is the nature of the deep structure or conceptual aspect.** Thus, in language, aspects which are classified as semantic are most often not conceptual. The reverse is true of architecture and painting where aspects which are labeled conceptual are most often in reality semantic. For example, to convey meaning through a means, i.e., some form of sign system, external to the object, may not be necessarily conceptual, but only semantic. The confusion in terminology often obscures the relevance of the deep level in the physical object as a possible aspect of the conceptual realm. Therefore, it would seem reasonable to propose that projects that have the primary intention in the choice of form to convey meaning should be labeled semantic rather than conceptual.

Within the semantic category, it is possible to make a further distinction: between meaning which is received directly from the literal fact, i.e., the presence or recognition of the actual image, and meaning which is received through a process of reconstruction in the mind. The former is semantic in a surface or perceptual sense, and the latter is semantic in a deep or conceptual sense. In an architecture, while this distinction is perhaps less obvious because the context is more complex, nevertheless, the difference in the semantic aspect can be seen. For example, the perceptual aspect of some of the Superstudio images, such as the 1967 project for Calabria, is a literal reference to the Palais des Nations of Hannes Meyer.³² These images are presented, not so much for their formal structure, but rather as an homage to Meyer's Marxist polemic. **For Superstudio, these images are primarily semantic rather than syntactic, and perceptual rather than conceptual, in that their recall is dependent upon the meaning received from the literal image taken out of context, as a fragment of the past.**³³ In comparison, a difference can be seen in the work of Robert Venturi (fig. 2.5). While he also uses images from the past, and the intention in the use of the image of the recovered or found object is also primarily semantic, **it is semantic in a conceptual sense because the recall does not take place in the literal image, i.e., in the perception. In fact, it is in the juxtaposition of images where the recall takes place; the image or perceptual structure being of secondary importance to this relationship of known images in a new or particular context.**

Secondly, the proposed taxonomy makes a distinction between the terms syntactic and conceptual. Often these terms are used interchangeably. For in language what is called syntactic, i.e., the mediation of meaning paired with form through an abstract structure of rela-



2.6 Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Como, Italy, 1936. Plan.



2.7 Andrea Palladio, Palazzo Thiene, Vicenza, Italy, 1545. Pl.



2.8 Andrea Palladio, Villa Foscari (La Malcontenta), Malcontenta, Italy, 1560. Plan.

tionships, is what is here being called conceptual. However, a syntactic structure when speaking of an art object or an architecture has two aspects. One is the actual structure of the perceived object; the other is the implicit structure of the relationship between objects. One is concerned with shape, the other with formal structure. The former is perceptual, the latter is conceptual. Hence, everything that is syntactic may not be conceptual and as has been seen above, everything that is conceptual is not necessarily syntactic.

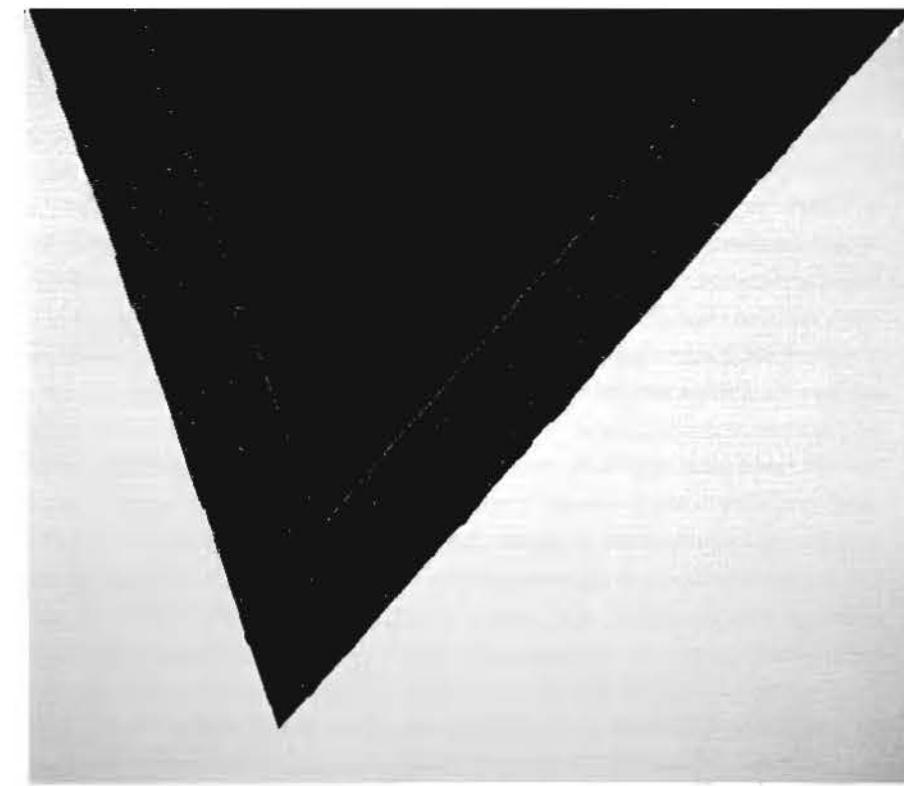
A comparison between Le Corbusier and Giuseppe Terragni illustrates an example of what is meant by the difference between perceptual and conceptual within the syntactic aspect.³⁴ While the work of both is structure by a syntax, the primary intention in each is slightly different. By virtue of their similarity, a subtle distinction helps to explain a difference between perceptual and conceptual.

Le Corbusier essentially took the forms of known objects—from machines, ships, and aircraft. The intention of this imagery was to force a shift in meaning through its appearance in a new context. As has been seen above, with a change in context, the intention is primarily a semantic one. In Terragni, there are obvious semantic implications as in his reference to historical buildings. For example, there is a similarity which can be seen in a comparison of the plans of the Casa del Fascio (fig. 2.6) and the Palazzo Farnese and the Palazzo Thiene (fig. 2.7). But, while the semantic reference is to the high culture of the Italian Renaissance, the ultimate intent in Terragni's use of such a plan would seem to divest such type forms of their traditional meaning, and instead use the formal type as a deep-level syntactic referent to which his specific forms correspond.

Le Corbusier often based his work on similar precedents, as in the case of the Villa at Garches and its relationship to the Villa Malcontenta.³⁵ The critical distinction is that the particular object for Le Corbusier never loses its semantic dimension. Thus, the syntactic ABABA structure of Garches refers not necessarily to the syntax of the Villa Malcontenta (fig. 2.8), but rather to the semantic notion of a Renaissance "ideal." The syntactic dimension in Le Corbusier seems to be primarily concerned with the surface aspect—with giving full value to the physical object so that it can be understood semantically. The semantic dimension, on the other hand, seems to be at a conceptual level—where a process of reconstruction in the mind of the known object references placed in a new context must take place.

In Terragni, the iconography of the object is a secondary aspect, partially because his work followed Le Corbusier in time, and thus, after Le Corbusier had partially exploited the symbolic potential of these forms. Since any intentional iconography in Terragni's work is necessarily reduced, it is possible to see his forms in a syntactic dimension, and in particular, in their relation to the conceptual aspect of syntax.

Lastly, the taxonomy proposes a distinction between the semantic and the syntactic within the conceptual realm. While the conceptual realm is initially defined as being concerned with relationships, when an idea is received from a relationship of objects in a given context and that relationship is clarified through the meaning received from the juxtaposition of known objects, the idea can be considered conceptually semantic. When an idea is received from a relationship of objects in a given context and that relationship is clarified through the structure of form in that context, then the idea is received conceptually from the syntax.



2.9 Kenneth Noland, *Prime Course*, 1964. Acrylic on canvas, 91 x 104 in (231.1 x 264.2 cm). Courtesy of the Greenberg Gallery, St. Louis.

This distinction between conceptual in the semantic sense and conceptual in the syntactic sense can be seen in the following example. Robert Morris, in speaking of the work of Jasper Johns, describes how Johns put an entirely new stress on the edge of the canvas by making the whole image congruent with the physical limits of the work.³⁶ While the concept of an edge stress is usually considered an aesthetic concern, in the case of a Johns's flag or a target, an edge stress can be inferred through the use of a known and thus semantically weighted object placed in a particular relationship to the canvas. Edge stress is understood in this context through our prior knowledge of the limits of the known object, i.e., the size and shape of the flag or target, the fact that it has a number of equal stripes or rings which is known, etc. The congruency of the edge of the image and the edge of the canvas which produces the edge stress can be understood because the limits of the object are known. The fact that the limit of the flag and the limit of the canvas are the same produces a conceptual as opposed to a perceptual edge stress on the canvas. If the flag continued beyond the canvas or was smaller than the canvas, there would be no stress on the edge. In other words, the stress is not perceptual, produced by an actual physical or formal configuration, but rather is conceptually understood because the limits of the object are known and these limits are the same as the limits of the canvas. Equally, this phenomenon is primarily semantic rather than syntactic because the conceptual condition is produced because of the knowledge (semantic) of the object rather than as a result of its formal (syntactic) structure. Johns does not depend on the syntactic structure of centrality for the

development of the edge stress in his targets, but rather on our knowledge of the size and number of rings in the target.

A syntactic as opposed to a semantic conceptual notion of edge stress can be seen in some of the chevron paintings of Kenneth Noland (fig. 2.9). Edge stress in this case, because the paintings do not involve known objects, results from the particular structuring of form in relation to the context of the canvas, such a structuring of or concern for relationships of form being considered syntactic. In neither example was the argument concerned literally with painting circles, stripes, or chevrons in such a way as to produce an actual optical edge stress. This condition would be a perceptual or surface level manifestation as opposed to conceptual.

The initial taxonomy, while only proposing to be a descriptive mechanism, still does not provide a fine enough classification to distinguish certain phenomena, which are particular to the conceptual-syntactic aspect. For example, if the chevron painting of Noland and the serial grids of LeWitt are considered, they have several similarities at a conceptual level. Both are basically syntactic. Both have been referred to as non-compositional³⁷ by their apologists, which would give to both a conceptual attitude. However, in the transposition from a conceptual intention to physical object, a distinction becomes apparent. In most cases where the coded notation is so obvious as to be dominant, as in a LeWitt grid, the physical aspect is diminished and is very much residual. However, when one examines this physical aspect in a pictorial context, as in the case of a Noland chevron, it is found to have both conceptual as well as perceptual qualities. It is this aspect which remains latent in LeWitt's work and active in Noland's work, yet in each case no less present. Noland is using physical means for conceptual ends. LeWitt is using semantic means for conceptual ends. In that the relationship of the forms (i.e., the syntax) is the dominant means used to mediate the intention, both can be considered conceptual syntactic.

The difference is that LeWitt does not use the potential in the physical aspect (i.e., its formal or universal nature) and Noland does. A straight line next to an angled line as in the chevrons has the cultural notation chevron and the semantic of straight and angled, in addition to its conceptual nature as line. However, these lines on a Noland canvas could also be considered conceptually as merely the notation of an integer—x. However, the angle line next to the straight line in the case of Noland, or the solid cube within the grid of LeWitt, also has a conceptual structure resulting from the juxtaposition or relationship of the forms and spaces. Each can be described differently, yet both are conceptual in that the understanding of the intention takes place in the mind. In Noland's work the conceptual aspect can be called pictorial or in architectonic terms, spatial. It deals with a conceptual structure which is implied from relationships of form such as shear, tension, compression, rotation, frontality, obliqueness, recession, etc.; universal attributes or relationships between forms which are conceptual in that they are implied and not actual, literal, or explicit—but in fact no less conceptual.

In LeWitt's work the conceptual aspect can be called a-spatial, in that the relationship of the bars in the grid, or the relationship of the solid to the void, can be given pure code notations of + and - or x and y. The physical presence is merely a general representation in form of the sign system.

From this, two conceptual aspects can be distinguished in the syntactic realm. (One additional conceptual aspect having been specified earlier for the semantic domain.) In LeWitt, the form is a code in a literal or explicit sense, the code being known culturally, i.e., through existing sign systems and expressed as a generalized form of notational system. In the Noland, the form is a code in an implicit sense, the code being known through formal universals, i.e., through a potential, but not yet existing sign system. The former in an architectonic sense could be called a-spatial or coded, the latter spatial and non-coded. It is this distinction between conceptual syntactic a-spatial or notational and conceptual syntactic spatial which may prove useful in an architectural context.³⁸ The danger in all of these classifications is that they can be taken too literally or used too simplistically. For example, in most realized projects it is never one aspect which is present to the exclusion of the other, but rather, one aspect takes on primary characteristics and the other secondary. As has been seen, LeWitt's grids have a latent pictorial structure, and Noland's chevrons have a latent coded structure, even though their primary aspects are the obverse. In summation, this paper has proposed a taxonomy that initially distinguishes between pragmatics, semantics, and syntactics. Further, a distinction has been made between the perceptual and conceptual aspects of each category. This distinction was defined in each case by determining first the primacy of intention, and second, the means used to articulate this intention. For example, in the semantic domain, where the meaning is of primary concern, it is received either as a direct result of the perceptual recall, or as a result of a mental process of reconstruction from a series of known images juxtaposed in a particular context. In the syntactic domain where the structure of relationships is of primary concern, these are either present in the actual physical structure—the percept or visual image—or inherent as a non-visual structure of relationships. In general, the conceptual aspect is defined by an intention to shift the primary focus from the sensual aspects of objects to the universal aspects of objects. This conceptual aspect to be primary must be made intentional, that is, the result of an a priori design intention, and further it must be accessible through the physical fact—whether the primary intention is semantic (concerned with meaning) or syntactic (concerned with formal universals). And, finally, a further distinction was made in the conceptual syntactic domain—between those aspects which relied on formal universals to provide the conceptual aspect, and those aspects which relied on a code or notational system.

The task for a conceptual architecture as opposed to conceptual art would be not so much to find such a sign system or a coding device, where each form in particular context has an agreed-upon meaning, but rather, it would seem more reasonable to investigate the nature of what has been called formal universals which are inherent in any form or formal construct. These universals might act in specific cases in such a way to provide references which are understood in the mind, i.e., conceptually, and which take on significance (i.e., in a syntactic as opposed to semantic sense) by virtue of their existence, and their capacity to be described and differentiated from other like structures. These deep structures, when used intentionally in an architecture—for example, in the form of spatial sequences—might give to functional requirements a primary conceptual aspect and further, a potential for new meaning—admittedly, in the present state of such investigations, of a very low

order without the presence of an actual code. A more difficult task would be to find a way of giving these conceptual structures the capacity to engender more precise and complex meanings merely through the manipulation of form and space. This would require some form of transformational method—where the universals of the conceptual structure are transformed by some device to a surface structure and thus capable of receiving meaning. Whether it is possible to develop such transformational methods and at the same time to reduce both the existing semantic and cultural context of any architecture to produce a structure for new meaning, without developing a new sign system, seems to be a central problem for a conceptual architecture.

Notes

1. For an example of the use of the term architecture or "environment" as an oversimplified metaphor, see Michael Benedikt, "Sculpture as Architecture: New York Letter, 1966–67," in *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968).
2. Initially one is prepared to accept the definition of "conceptual" as proposed by many critics and artists of the conceptual art movement. See especially Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," in *Sol LeWitt* (Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1970), 56–57. As will be seen below in the context of my argument, these definitions are open to question.
3. For an example of such a text, see Erwin Panofsky, *Idea. A Concept in Art Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968).
4. For example, it is debatable in terms of conceptual art whether there has been much change in the past fifty years, if one were to compare the work of Mondrian or Malevich with the work of Sol LeWitt.
5. The general term "conceptual" as it applies to art implies an alternative attitude toward objects which is concerned neither with abstraction nor with representation. In other words, if the idea of an "art object" is taken initially as a given, can it be considered as something other than representational—in the sense that the cubist abstractions of a Fernand Léger or a Juan Gris were literal abstractions of known objects, or other than an abstraction—in the sense of a Mondrian, which could be seen as a pure abstraction of ideas?
6. See LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," 57. "Conceptual art is made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or emotions."
7. See Barbara Rose, "ABC Art," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, 291.
8. To say that words are purely conceptual is to use the term "conceptual" too literally. Words, the representation of meaning paired with an agreed upon sign, are more precisely semantic; it is the relationship between words which is conceptual. (See note 28.) This does not deny that words themselves can become primarily perceptual in another context, such as concrete poetry.
9. See LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," 57. "The physicality of a three-dimensional object then becomes a contradiction to its non-emotive intent." LeWitt sees physicality as "color, surface, texture, and shape," which he rightly says emphasizes the physical aspect of the work. But as will be seen below, this position fails to distinguish two aspects of physicality—a perceptual and a conceptual—which would allow the physical object to be potentially consonant with the conceptual intention.
10. Emilio Ambasz, in conversation, has called this a formal semantic. It will be seen that this term isolates an aspect which is not initially included in the taxonomy proposed below. The concept line or linear is an abstract or universal notion, but a curved line or a straight line has a semantic not in the traditional sense of meaning but rather in what might be called a formal or syntactic sense. While the idea of two lines could be expressed by the integers $x + x$ or $2x$, a curved line next to a straight line has a cultural and aesthetic aspect. But more

importantly, the juxtaposition of a curved line and a straight line produces a formal relationship which could not be expressed by any simple integer notation.

11. LeWitt, *Sol LeWitt*, no. 9, 60.
12. These attempts reduce the percept to a condition similar to a word as merely a sign, and therefore as part of a new code. The object in this context loses its aesthetic, sensual value; its symbolic meaning is also reduced. In fact, it may have no precise meaning at all because in the end it may not be able to be coded, except in a literal one-to-one sense, where the surface structure and the deep structure are the same.
13. See *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969), and *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970).
14. LeWitt, *Sol LeWitt*, no. 16, 60. He has said, "If words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature."

For art-language, physical objects are more limited and less precise than words. "Painting and sculpture have physical limits and the limit of what can be said in them is primarily decided by precisely those physical limits" *Art-Language* 1, no. 1, 7.

15. See Donald Karshan, "The Seventies: Post-Object Art," insert in catalogue, *Conceptual Art Conceptual Aspects* (New York: New York Cultural Center, 1970).
16. Richard Wollheim says that each particular art form is given its identity by what he calls "common structure." As an example to illustrate this idea, Wollheim cites a blank sheet of paper. He says a blank sheet of paper cannot be an example of both a poem and a painting. It has no structure with which to identify or differentiate later occurrences as occurrences of that poem. From this, one can begin to identify particular aspects of a structure which are conceptual, and by virtue of being conceptual, tend to give identity to a work of poetry as opposed to a painting. Thus, part of the conceptual structure of a poem must allow for it to be repeated, reproduced, and read. This would not necessarily be the case for a painting. In painting, the identity lies in the original stuff and not in the copies. Thus, as Wollheim further points out, Mallarmé could have produced a blank sheet of paper if he were producing a painting rather than a poem. The same need to define common structure will be important when it comes to differentiating architecture from painting and sculpture.

For a more detailed explanation of this point, see Wollheim's discussion of common structure in his article "Minimal Art," reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*.

17. In recent manifestations of this argument, it can be seen that even this qualification is no longer a necessary requirement for a sentence to be considered conceptual art.
18. The art-language group would argue that it is the context and not anything intrinsic in the object which determines "art." For example, they suggest that it is possible to think of word signs as an art object merely by placing words into a context normally thought of for an art form. *Art-Language* 1, no. 1, 5.
19. Based on the notion of common structures as proposed by Richard Wollheim, it can be argued that the ideas of architecture and art are distinguishable. A problem for this paper will be the appropriate use of the general term "art" and the specific terms "painting" and "sculpture." Art and architecture will be used here as general terms, painting and sculpture will be considered as specific examples of art.
20. Rosalind Krauss says that the LeWitt boxes and grids are not meant as physical things but as intellectual integers whose real existence is mental. She says that his implied argument that meanings are mental entities which somehow attach themselves to real objects is philosophically naive. If the argument is phrased that meanings are "only" mental entities rather than "can be" mental entities, then she seems to have a valid position. See Rosalind Krauss in *Sol LeWitt*, 29.
21. "By a simple action, Duchamp deprived all objects of a certain kind save one of art quality." The urinal taken out of context derives "art quality" in a semantic sense, by the fact of its being taken out of a normal semantic context and not for any inherent qualities in its form. Thus, part of a common structure in art is its context. See Wollheim, "Minimal Art," 393.
22. When considered at a different scale, for example, in urban design or city planning, whether a building is the

context or is the object in the context will change. It is not this which is at issue, but rather, that conceptually when compared with an art "object," architecture will always assume aspects of context. Questions of object are different from questions of context; in the former one is designing the semantic, and in the latter one is designing the syntax.

23. It is possible to make this same point in another way: to say that while a conceptual art and a conceptual architecture could be similar in an idea state, there is an inherent difference when it comes to the realized state. Where an art object can remain in a more generalized state, for example, as a mathematical notation, architecture will always take on cultural, pragmatic, and semantic references. Furthermore, a conceptual architecture as opposed to a conceptual art "must" deal with the object. This is object not in the sense of built form, but the idea of object.

24. See Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12, no. 2 (1968). "Thus the difficulty of abstract Conceptual Art lies not in the idea but in finding the means of expressing that idea so that it is immediately apparent to the spectator."

25. LeWitt, *Sol LeWitt*, 57. "The physicality of a three-dimensional object then becomes a contradiction to its non-emotive intent." Visual appearance is only a contradiction in its surface aspect. To avoid this in his serial grids, LeWitt reduces the sensual experience by making the physical structure and the conceptual structure the same, i.e., the physical image is merely a literal notation—a one-to-one correspondence with the conceptual structure. The percept and the concept are the same information because no distinction is made between surface and deep structure in the physical object. However, if it is accepted that there is a dual aspect to "physicality"—visual and non-visual—then there can be a relationship which is not necessarily literal between the two. For example, the surface aspect of a LeWitt grid need not be similar to, nor resemble, the deep aspect. However, if the conceptual structure is not acknowledged in the perceptual structure, then how does one determine the nature of any physical form? Equally, if the visual aspect has no relationship to the deep aspect, then is it free to provide any information? If the visual aspect is regulated by the deep aspect, then it is difficult to see it as either incidental or a contradiction. But to assume therefore that the perceptual structure should look like a conceptual structure would seem to limit the nature of what might be considered conceptual.

It would seem that the idea of conceptual art would be to reveal something new in the mind, through the physical form, rather than to explicitly reveal the concept, not through the form, but "as" the form. This idea would present a problem for the work of Judd and Morris which again does not try to distinguish between a surface and a deep structure within the object.

26. This typology, proposed by Charles Morris and used by Noam Chomsky in linguistics as phonology, semantics, and syntactics, is preferred to De Saussure's classification of syntagmatic and paradigmatic or langue and parole, precisely because it provides for a distinction between semantics and syntactics.

27. LeWitt makes a similar distinction. "Art that is meant for the sensation of the eye primarily would be called perceptual rather than conceptual." See LeWitt, *Sol LeWitt*, 56. I first used these terms in an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, "The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture," University of Cambridge, 1963.

28. See Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 47.

29. It would seem that modern technology has provided architecture with the means for disassociating pragmatic limitations from semantic or syntactic concerns. See my article, "From Object to Relationship: Giuseppe Terragni," *Casabella* 344 (January 1970), 38–41.

30. For an explanation of deep and surface structure, see any number of texts by Noam Chomsky. For a less technical description in a linguistic sense, see Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968).

31. This taxonomy has been criticized by Emilio Ambasz as failing to take into account another aspect: the discourse between matter and process. While acknowledging this criticism, the intention here is to limit the discussion by excluding questions of process, and to focus on the distinction between images which are retrieved

primarily for their meaning and those which are retrieved primarily for their form, to distinguish between semantic and syntactic.

For Ambasz, the term "semantic" includes not only architectural ideas and images from the past, but also the process of recovery of these ideas. For him, there are two aspects of this process: one is the operation or recovery, the other is a structuring of relationships. It is this latter aspect which Ambasz calls conceptual.

My argument is that this construction fails to distinguish between ideas and images which are retrieved primarily for their meaning (semantic) and those which are retrieved primarily for their form (syntactic). And, furthermore, his classification seems to make no distinction between the literal or explicit use of a recovered image and the implicit use of a similar image, the latter in my terms, being conceptual.

32. For an example of this, see the Superstudio, "Project für Kalabrien," in *Italien, Jugoslawien, Österreich: Dreiländerbiennale Trigon '69: Architektur und Freiheit* (Graz: Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 1969).

33. In this context, it is possible to suggest a redefinition of the work of many groups commonly referred to by the term "conceptual"; for example, groups such as Archigram and Superstudio could be looked at to see which aspects of their work are truly conceptual and which aspects are merely perceptual-semantic, and thus possibly not conceptual at all.

34. This comparison is in a revised form. It was originally proposed in my article, "From Object to Relationship II," *Perspecta* 13/14 (1971): 36–65. This revision now takes into account the elaboration of the taxonomy to include a conceptual-semantic and a conceptual-syntactic aspect which replaces the former conceptual category which was only syntactic.

35. See Colin Rowe, "The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa," *Architectural Review*, 101 (March 1947), 101–9.

36. See Robert Morris, "Beyond Objects," *Art Forum* 7, no. 8 (1969): 50–54.

37. Noland uses what Michael Fried calls the "deductive structure" of a given context to influence his formal organization. While LeWitt uses an a priori which structures his formal arrangements, recently even he has talked about the influence of the context. See LeWitt, *Sol LeWitt*, 61. "Different kinds of walls make for different kinds of drawings." Here the wall becomes a kind of "deductive structure" which provides formal information to initiate the structure of the drawing. This information can be followed, denied, or distorted—there are no rules, the choice of following, denying, or distorting merely giving different information.

38. Because the distinction between deep and surface, conceptual and perceptual, has not been clearly made, there remains a confusion between aesthetic and formal considerations. Thus, Joseph Kosuth can attack "formalist" art as essentially empty of conceptual levels, and that which does exist as being supplied by the critics. See LeWitt, *Sol LeWitt*, 60, and Karshan, *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, 8. However, a problem remains as to what role these formal and essentially syntactic considerations must play if there is to be a conceptual aspect to architecture in built form.

from De Stijl in that its formal components are not planes so much as they are solids made all the more mass-like through the introduction of diagonal shapes. It should be noted that in De Stijl the diagonal is only implied in the juxtaposition of planar elements and never made literal as in constructivism.²⁰

20. See my unpublished Ph.D. thesis, "The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture," 110.
21. A similar argument is developed by Joseph Rykwert in "Un Episodio Inglese," *Domus*, no. 414 (June 1964).
22. For example, the circular stair in constructivism seems a vehicle for a literal expression of articulation. Stirling's use of the same element, while for similar expository purposes, produces different results. Both of these attitudes can be distinguished from Le Corbusier's use of the circular stair, which, as Colin Rowe has noted, is often the central animating and organizing device for the space. See, for example, the Spiral Museum or the Pavilion Suisse, where, as Rowe says, the stair acts as "a spiral or turbine eroding a plane and reducing it to a turbine" (Colin Rowe, unpublished notes).
23. This kind of potential reversal within the physical data again points up the fallacy of the too-literal, easy, perceptual analogy. In this context one must question the usefulness of such metaphors as "over the heavy teaching labs there foams, like subs from some cubist detergent, a good head of angular north-light glazing" (Reyner Banham, "The Style for the Job," *New Statesman*, 14 February 1964). Or again as "a crystalline sea flooding across the top of the heavy lab area and erupting in diamond breakers over the solid walls on every side of the podium" (Reyner Banham, "The Word in Britain: 'Character,'" *Architectural Forum* 119 [Aug.-Sept. 1964]: 118-25).
24. Stirling himself contends that this is not so. He says that the difference is not so much in the architecture but in the limitations which are placed on the architecture by the intention of the program which is different for Leicester than it is for Cambridge and Oxford.
25. This conflicts with Kenneth Frampton's argument when he says that "its true spiritual affinity lies well within that great romantic American tradition that stems from Frank Lloyd Wright and remains most vividly alive today in the work of Louis Kahn" (Kenneth Frampton, "Leicester University Engineering Laboratory," *Architectural Design* 34 (Feb. 1964): 61-89). Even in the pairing of Wright and Kahn is an oversimplification. In the context of my argument, Wright could be seen as European and Kahn as American.
26. If a historical precedent for such a conceptual gap is necessary then one need only compare Frank Lloyd Wright's work after the success of the Wasmuth Publication of 1910 with his houses of the previous decade.

POST-FUNCTIONALISM

The critical establishment within architecture has told us that we have entered the era of "post-modernism." The tone with which this news is delivered is invariably one of relief, similar to that which accompanies the advice that one is no longer an adolescent. Two indices of this supposed changing are the quite different manifestations of the "Architettura Razionale" exhibition at the Milan Triennale of 1973, and the "Ecole Des Beaux Arts" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1975. The former, going on the assumption that modern architecture was an outmoded functionalism, declared that architecture can be generated only through a return to itself as an autonomous or pure discipline. The latter, seeing modern architecture as an obsessional formalism, made itself into an implicit statement that the future lies paradoxically in the past, within the peculiar response to function that characterized the nineteenth century's eclectic command of historical styles.

What is interesting is not the mutually exclusive character of these two diagnoses and hence of their solutions, but rather the fact that *both* of these views enclose the very project of architecture within the *same* definition: one by which the terms continue to be function (or program) and form (or type). In so doing, an attitude toward architecture is maintained that differs in no significant way from the 500-year-old tradition of humanism.

The various theories of architecture which properly can be called "humanist" are characterized by a dialectical opposition: an oscillation between a concern for internal accommodation—the program and the way it is materialized—and a concern for articulation of ideal themes in form—for example, as manifested in the configurational significance of the plan. These concerns were understood as two poles of a single, continuous experience. Within pre-industrial, humanist practice, a balance between them could be maintained because both type and function were invested with idealist views of man's relationship to his object world. In a comparison, first suggested by Colin Rowe, of a French Parisian *hôtel* and an English country house, both buildings from the early nineteenth century, one sees this opposition manifested in the interplay between a concern for expression of an ideal type and a concern for programmatic statement, although the concerns in each case are differently weighted. The French *hôtel* displays rooms of an elaborate sequence and a spatial variety born of internal necessity, masked by a rigorous, well-proportioned external façade. The English country house has a formal internal arrangement of rooms, which gives way to a picturesque external massing of elements. The former bows to program on the interior and type on the façade; the latter reverses these considerations.

With the rise of industrialization, this balance seems to have been fundamentally disrupted. In that it had of necessity to come to terms with problems of a more complex functional nature, particularly with respect to the accommodation of a mass client, architecture became increasingly a social or programmatic art. And as the functions became more complex, the ability to manifest the pure type-form eroded. One has only to compare William Kent's competition entry for the Houses of Parliament, where the form of a Palladian villa does not sustain the intricate program, with Charles Barry's solution, where the type-form defers to program and where one sees an early example of what was to become known as the *promenade architecturale*. Thus, in the nineteenth century, and continuing on into the twentieth, as the program grew in complexity, the type-form became diminished

as a realizable concern, and the balance thought to be fundamental to all theory was weakened. (Perhaps only Le Corbusier in recent history has successfully combined an ideal grid with the architectural promenade as an embodiment of the original interaction.)

This shift in balance has produced a situation whereby, for the past fifty years, architects have understood design as the product of some oversimplified form-follows-function formula. This situation even persisted during the years immediately following World War II, when one might have expected it would be radically altered. And as late as the end of the 1960's, it was still thought that the polemics and theories of the early Modern Movement could sustain architecture. The major thesis of this attitude was articulated in what could be called the English Revisionist Functionalism of Reyner Banham, Cedric Price, and Archigram. This neo-functionalism attitude, with its idealization of technology, was invested with the same ethical positivism and aesthetic neutrality of the prewar polemic. However, the continued substitution of moral criteria for those of a more formal nature produced a situation which now can be seen to have created a functionalist predicament, precisely because the primary theoretical justification given to formal arrangements was a moral imperative that is no longer operative within contemporary experience. This sense of displaced positivism characterizes certain current perceptions of the failure of humanism within a broader cultural context.

There is also another, more complex, aspect to this predicament. Not only can functionalism indeed be recognized as a species of positivism, but like positivism, it now can be seen to issue from within the terms of an idealist view of reality. For functionalism, no matter what its pretense, continued the idealist ambition of creating architecture as a kind of ethically constituted form-giving. But because it clothed this idealist ambition in the radically stripped forms of technological production, it has seemed to represent a break with the pre-industrial past. But, in fact, functionalism is really no more than a late phase of humanism, rather than an alternative to it. And in this sense, it cannot continue to be taken as a direct manifestation of that which has been called "the modernist sensibility."

Both the Triennale and the Beaux Arts exhibitions suggest, however, that the problem is thought to be somewhere else—not so much with functionalism per se, as with the nature of this so-called modernist sensibility. Hence, the implied revival of neo-classicism and Beaux Arts academicism as replacements for a continuing, if poorly understood, modernism. It is true that sometime in the nineteenth century, there was indeed a crucial shift within Western consciousness: one which can be characterized as a shift from humanism to modernism. But, for the most part, architecture, in its dogged adherence to the principles of function, did not participate in or understand the fundamental aspects of that change. It is the potential difference in the nature of modernist and humanist theory that seems to have gone unnoticed by those people who today speak of eclecticism, post-modernism, or neo-functionalism. And they have failed to notice it precisely because they conceive of modernism as merely a stylistic manifestation of functionalism, and functionalism itself as a basic theoretical proposition in architecture. In fact, the idea of modernism has driven a wedge into these attitudes. It has revealed that the dialectic of form and function is culturally based.

In brief, the modernist sensibility has to do with a changed mental attitude toward the artifacts of the physical world. This change has not only been manifested aesthetically, but also socially, philosophically, and technologically—in sum, it has been manifested in a new cultural attitude. This shift away from the dominant attitudes of humanism, that were pervasive in Western societies for some four hundred years, took place at various times in the nineteenth century in such disparate disciplines as mathematics, music, painting, literature, film, and photography. It is displayed in the non-objective abstract painting of Malevich and Mondrian; in the non-narrative, atemporal writing of Joyce and Apollinaire; the atonal and polytonal compositions of Schönberg and Webern; in the non-narrative films of Richter and Eggeling.

Abstraction, atonality, and atemporality, however, are merely stylistic manifestations of modernism, not its essential nature. Although this is not the place to elaborate a theory of modernism, or indeed to represent those aspects of such a theory which have already found their way into the literature of the other humanist disciplines, it can simply be said that the symptoms to which one has just pointed suggest a displacement of man away from the center of his world. **He is no longer viewed as an originating agent. Objects are seen as ideas independent of man.** In this context, man is a discursive function among complex and already-formed systems of language, which he witnesses but does not constitute. As Levi-Strauss has said, "Language, an unreflecting totalization, is human reason which has its reason and of which man knows nothing." It is this condition of displacement which gives rise to design in which authorship can no longer either account for a linear development which has a "beginning" and an "end"—hence the rise of the atemporal—or account for the invention of form—hence the abstract as a mediation between pre-existent sign systems.

Modernism, as a sensibility based on the fundamental displacement of man, represents what Michel Foucault would specify as a new *épistème*. Deriving from a non-humanistic attitude toward the relationship of an individual to his physical environment, it breaks with the historical past, both with the ways of viewing man as a subject and, as we have said, with the ethical positivism of form and function. Thus, it cannot be related to functionalism. It is probably for this reason that modernism has not up to now been elaborated in architecture.

But there is clearly a present need for a theoretical investigation of the basic implications of modernism (as opposed to modern style) in architecture. In his editorial, "Neo-Functionalism," in *Oppositions* 5, Mario Gandelsonas acknowledges such a need. However, he says merely that the "complex contradictions" inherent in functionalism—such as neorealism and neo-rationalism—make a form of neo-functionalism necessary to any new theoretical dialectic. This proposition continues to refuse to recognize that the form/function opposition is not necessarily inherent to any architectural theory and so fails to recognize the crucial difference between modernism and humanism. In contrast, what is being called post-functionalism begins as an attitude which recognizes modernism as a new and distinct sensibility. It can be best understood in architecture in terms of a theoretical base that is concerned with what might be called a modernist *dialectic*, as opposed to the old humanist (i.e., functionalist) opposition of form and function.

This new theoretical base changes the humanist balance of form/function to a dialectical relationship within the evolution of form itself. The dialectic can best be described as the potential co-existence within any form of two non-corroborating and non-sequential tendencies. One tendency is to presume architectural form to be a recognizable transformation from some pre-existent geometric or Platonic solid. In this case, form is usually understood through a series of registrations designed to recall a more simple geometric condition. This tendency is certainly a relic of humanist theory. However, to this is added a second tendency that sees architectural form in an atemporal, decompositional mode, as something simplified from some pre-existent set of non-specific spatial entities. Here, form is understood as a series of fragments—signs without meaning dependent upon, and without reference to, a more basic condition. The former tendency, when taken by itself, is a reductivist attitude and assumes some primary unity as both an ethical and an aesthetic basis for all creation. The latter, by itself, assumes a basic condition of fragmentation and multiplicity from which the resultant form is a state of simplification. Both tendencies, however, when taken together, constitute the essence of this new, modern dialectic. They begin to define the inherent nature of the object in and of itself and its capacity to be represented. They begin to suggest that the theoretical assumptions of functionalism are in fact cultural rather than universal.

Post-functionalism, thus, is a term of absence. In its negation of functionalism it suggests certain positive theoretical alternatives—existing fragments of thought which, when examined, might serve as a framework for the development of a larger theoretical structure—but it does not, in and of itself, propose to supply a label for such new consciousness in architecture which I believe is potentially upon us.

THE END OF THE CLASSICAL

The End of the Beginning, the End of the End

Architecture from the fifteenth century to the present has been under the influence of three “fictions.” Notwithstanding the apparent succession of architectural styles, each with its own label—classicism, neo-classicism, romanticism, modernism, post-modernism, and so on into the future—these three fictions have persisted in one form or another for five hundred years. They are *representation, reason, and history*.¹ Each of the fictions had an underlying purpose: representation was to embody the idea of meaning; reason was to codify the idea of truth; history was to recover the idea of the timeless from the idea of change. Because of the persistence of these categories, it will be necessary to consider this period as manifesting a continuity in architectural thought. This continuous mode of thought can be referred to as *the classical*.²

It was not until the late twentieth century that the classical could be appreciated as an abstract system of relations. Such recognition occurred because the architecture of the early part of the twentieth century itself came to be considered part of history. Thus it is now possible to see that, although stylistically different from previous architectures, “modern” architecture exhibits a system of relations similar to the classical.³ Prior to this time, the “classical” was taken to be either synonymous with “architecture” conceived of as a continuous tradition from antiquity or, by the mid-nineteenth century, a historicized style. Today the period of time dominated by the classical can be seen as an “episteme,” to employ Foucault’s term—a continuous period of knowledge that includes the early twentieth century.⁴ Despite the proclaimed rupture in both ideology and style associated with the Modern Movement, the three fictions have never been questioned and so remain intact. This is to say that architecture since the mid-fifteenth century aspired to be a paradigm of the *classic*, of that which is *timeless, meaningful, and true*. In the sense that architecture attempts to recover that which is classic, it can be called “classical.”⁵

The “Fiction” of Representation: The Simulation of Meaning

The first “fiction” is representation. Before the Renaissance there was a congruence of language and representation. The meaning of language was in a “face value” conveyed within representation; in other words, the way language produced meaning could be represented within language. Things were; truth and meaning were self-evident. The meaning of a romanesque or gothic cathedral was in itself; it was *de facto*. Renaissance buildings, on the other hand—and all buildings after them that pretended to be “architecture”—received their value by representing an already valued architecture, by being simulacra (representations of representations) of antique buildings; they were *de jure*.⁶ The message of the past was used to verify the meaning of the present. Precisely because of this need to verify, Renaissance architecture was the first simulation, an unwitting fiction of the object.

By the late eighteenth century historical relativity came to supersede the face value of language as representation, and this view of history prompted a search for certainty, for origins both historical and logical, for truth and proof, and for goals. Truth was no longer thought to reside in representation but was believed to exist outside it, in the processes of history. This shift can be seen in the changing status of the orders: until the seventeenth century they were thought to be paradigmatic and timeless; afterward the possibility of

their timelessness depended on a necessary historicity. This shift, as has just been suggested, occurred because language had ceased to intersect with representation—that is, because it was not *meaning* but a *message* that was displayed in the object.

Modern architecture claimed to rectify and liberate itself from the Renaissance fiction of representation by asserting that it was not necessary for architecture to represent another architecture; architecture was solely to embody its own *function*. With the deductive conclusion that form follows function, modern architecture introduced the idea that a building should express—that is, look like—its function, or like an *idea* of function (that it should manifest the rationality of its processes of production and composition).⁷ Thus, in its effort to distance itself from the earlier representational tradition, modern architecture attempted to strip itself of the outward trappings of "classical" style. This process of reduction was called *abstraction*. A column without a base and capital was thought to be an abstraction. Thus reduced, form was believed to embody function more "honestly." Such a column looked more like a *real* column, the simplest possible load-carrying element, than one provided with a base and capital bearing arboreal or anthropomorphic motifs.

This reduction to pure functionality was, in fact, not abstraction; it was an attempt to represent reality itself. In this sense functional goals merely replaced the orders of classical composition as the starting point for architectural design. The moderns' attempt to represent "realism" with an undecorated, functional object was a fiction equivalent to the simulacrum of the classical in Renaissance representation. For what made function any more "real" a source of imagery than elements chosen from antiquity? The idea of function, in this case the message of utility as opposed to the message of antiquity, was raised to an originary proposition—a self-evident starting point for design analogous to typology or historical quotation. The moderns' attempt to represent realism is, then, a manifestation of the same fiction wherein meaning and value reside outside the world of an architecture "as is," in which representation is about its own *meaning* rather than being a *message* of another previous meaning.

Functionalism turned out to be yet another stylistic conclusion; this one based on a scientific and technical positivism, a simulation of efficiency. From this perspective the Modern Movement can be seen to be continuous with the architecture that preceded it. Modern architecture therefore failed to embody a new value in itself. For in trying to reduce architectural form to its essence, to a pure reality, the moderns assumed they were transforming the field of referential figuration to that of non-referential "objectivity." In reality, however, their "objective" forms never left the classical tradition. They were simply stripped down classical forms, or forms referring to a new set of givens (function, technology). Thus, Le Corbusier's houses that look like modern steamships or biplanes exhibit the same referential attitude toward representation as a Renaissance or classical building. The points of reference are different, but the implications for the object are the same.

The commitment to return modernist abstraction to history seems to sum up, for our time, the problem of representation. It was given its "post-modern" inversion in Robert Venturi's distinction between the "duck" and the "decorated shed."⁸ A duck is a building that looks like its function or that allows its internal order to be displayed on its exterior; a

decorated shed is a building that functions as a billboard, where any kind of imagery (except its internal function)—letters, patterns, even architectural elements—conveys a *message* accessible to all. In this sense the stripped-down "abstractions" of modernism are still referential objects: technological rather than typological ducks.

But the post-modernists fail to make another distinction which is exemplified in Venturi's comparison of the Doges' Palace in Venice, which he calls a decorated shed, and Sansovino's library across the Piazza San Marco, which he says is a duck.⁹ This obscures the more significant distinction between architecture "as is" and architecture as message. The Doges' Palace is not a decorated shed because it was not representational of another architecture; its significance came directly from the meaning embodied in the figures themselves; it was an architecture "as is." Sansovino's library may seem to be a duck, but only because it falls into the history of library types. The use of the orders on Sansovino's library speaks not to the function or type of the library, but rather to the representation of a previous architecture. The façades of Sansovino's library contain a message, not an inherent meaning; they are signboards. Venturi's misreading of these buildings seems motivated by a preference for the decorated shed. While the replication of the orders had significance in Sansovino's time (in that they defined the classical), the replication of the same orders today has no significance because the value system represented is no longer valued. A sign begins to replicate or, in Jean Baudrillard's term, "simulate" once the reality it represents is dead.¹⁰ When there is no longer a distinction between representation and reality, when reality is only simulation, then representation loses its a priori source of significance, and it, too, becomes a simulation.

The "Fiction" of Reason: The Simulation of Truth

The second "fiction" of post-medieval architecture is *reason*. If representation was a simulation of the meaning of the present through the message of antiquity, then reason was a simulation of the meaning of the truth through the message of science. This fiction is strongly manifest in twentieth-century architecture, as it is in that of the four preceding centuries; its apogee was in the Enlightenment. The quest for origin in architecture is the initial manifestation of the aspiration toward a rational source for design. Before the Renaissance the idea of origin was seen as self-evident; its meaning and importance "went without saying"; it belonged to an a priori universe of values. In the Renaissance, with the loss of a self-evident universe of values, origins were sought in natural or divine sources or in a cosmological or anthropomorphic geometry. The reproduction of the image of the Vitruvian man is the most renowned example. Not surprisingly, since the origin was thought to contain the seeds of the object's purpose and thus its destination, this belief in the existence of an ideal origin led directly to a belief in the existence of an ideal end. Such a genetic idea of beginning/end depended on a belief in a universal plan in nature and the cosmos which, through the application of classical rules of composition concerning hierarchy, order, and closure, would confer a harmony of the whole upon the parts. The perspective of the end thus directed the strategy for beginning. Therefore, as Alberti first defined it in *Della Pittura*, composition was not an open-ended or neutral process of transformation, but rather a

strategy for arriving at a predetermined goal; it was the mechanism by which the idea of order, represented in the orders, was translated into a specific form.¹¹ Reacting against the cosmological goals of Renaissance composition, Enlightenment architecture “aspired to a rational process of design whose ends were a product of pure, secular reason rather than of divine order. The Renaissance vision of harmony (faith in the divine) led naturally to the scheme of order that was to replace it (faith in reason), which was the logical determination of form from a priori types.

Durand embodies this moment of the supreme authority of reason. In his treatises formal orders become type forms, and natural and divine origins are replaced by rational solutions to the problems of accommodation and construction. The goal is a socially “relevant” architecture; it is attained through the rational transformation of type forms. Later, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, function and technique replaced the catalogue of type forms as origins. But the point is that from Durand on, it was believed that deductive reason—the same process used in science, mathematics, and technology—was capable of producing a truthful (that is, meaningful) architectural object. And with the success of rationalism as a scientific method (one could almost call it a “style” of thought) in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, architecture adopted the self-evident values conferred by rational origins. If an architecture looked rational—that is, represented rationality—it was believed to represent truth. As in logic, at the point where all deductions developed from an initial premise corroborate that premise, there is logical closure and, it was believed, certain truth. Moreover, in this procedure the primacy of the origin remains intact. The rational became the moral and aesthetic basis of modern architecture. And the representational task of architecture in an age of reason was to portray its own modes of knowing.

At this point in the evolution of consciousness something occurred: reason turned its focus onto itself and thus began the process of its own undoing. Questioning its own status and mode of knowing, reason exposed itself to be a fiction.¹² The processes for knowing—measurement, logical proof, causality—turned out to be a network of value-laden arguments, no more than effective modes of persuasion. Values were dependent on another teleology, another end fiction, that of rationality. Essentially, then, nothing had really changed from the Renaissance idea of origin. Whether the appeal was to a divine or natural order, as in the fifteenth century, or to a rational technique and typological function, as in the post-Enlightenment period, it ultimately amounted to the same thing—to the idea that architecture’s value derived from a source outside itself. Function and type were only value-laden origins equivalent to divine or natural ones.

In this second “fiction” the crisis of belief in reason eventually undermined the power of self-evidence. As reason began to turn on itself, to question its own status, its authority to convey truth, its power to prove, began to evaporate. The analysis of analysis revealed that logic could not do what reason had claimed for it—reveal the self-evident truth of its origins. What both the Renaissance and the modern relied on as the basis of truth was found to require, in essence, faith. Analysis was a form of simulation; knowledge was a new religion. Similarly, it can be seen that architecture never embodied reason; it could only state the desire to do so; there is no architectural image of reason. Architecture pre-

sented an aesthetic of the experience of (the persuasiveness of and desire for) reason. Analysis, and the illusion of proof, in a continuous process that recalls Nietzsche’s characterization of “truth,” is a never-ending series of figures, metaphors, and metonymies:

In a cognitive environment in which reason has been revealed to depend on a belief in knowledge, therefore to be irreducibly metaphoric, a classical architecture—that is, an architecture whose processes of transformation are value-laden strategies grounded on self-evident or a priori origins—will always be an architecture of restatement and not of representation, no matter how ingeniously the origins are selected for this transformation, nor how inventive the transformation is.

Architectural restatement, replication, is a nostalgia for the security of knowing, a belief in the continuity of Western thought. Once analysis and reason replaced self-evidence as the means by which truth was revealed, the classic or timeless quality of truth ended and the need for verification began.

The “Fiction” of History: The Simulation of the Timeless

The third “fiction” of classical Western architecture is that of history. Prior to the mid-fifteenth century, time was conceived nondialectically; from antiquity to the Middle Ages there was no concept of the “forward movement” of time. Art did not seek its justification in terms of the past or future; it was ineffable and timeless. In ancient Greece the temple and the god were one and the same; architecture was divine and natural. For this reason it appeared “classic” to the “classical” epoch that followed. The classic could not be represented or simulated, it could only be. In its straightforward assertion of itself it was nondialectical and timeless.

In mid-fifteenth century the idea of a temporal origin emerged, and with it the idea of the past. This interrupted the eternal cycle of time by positing a fixed point of beginning. Hence the loss of the timeless, for the existence of origin required a temporal reality. The attempt of the classical to recover the timeless turned, paradoxically, to a time-bound concept of history as a source of timelessness. Moreover, the consciousness of time’s forward movement came to “explain” a process of historical change. By the nineteenth century this process was seen as “dialectical.” With dialectical time came the idea of the zeitgeist, with cause and effect rooted in presentness—that is, with an aspired-to timelessness of the present. In addition to its aspiration to timelessness, the “spirit of the age” held that an a priori relationship existed between history and all its manifestations at any given moment. It was necessary only to identify the governing spirit to know what style of architecture was properly expressive of, and relevant to, the time. Implicit was the notion that man should always be “in harmony”—or at least in a non-disjunctive relation—with his time.

In its polemic rejection of the history that preceded it, the Modern Movement attempted to appeal to values for this (harmonic) relationship other than those that embodied the eternal or universal. In seeing itself as superseding the values of the preceding architecture, the Modern Movement substituted a universal idea of relevance for a universal idea of history, analysis of program for analysis of history. It presumed itself to be a value-free and collective form of intervention, as opposed to the virtuoso individualism and informed connoisseurship personified by the post-Renaissance architect. Relevance in modern architecture came to lie in embodying a value other than the natural or divine; the zeitgeist was

seen to be contingent and of the present, rather than as absolute and eternal. But the difference in value between presentness and the universal—between the contingent value of the zeitgeist and the eternal value of the classical—only resulted in yet another set (in fact, simply the opposite set) of aesthetic preferences. The presumably neutral spirit of the “epochal will” supported asymmetry over symmetry, dynamism over stability, absence of hierarchy over hierarchy.

The imperatives of the “historical moment” are always evident in the connection between the representation of the function of architecture and its form. Ironically, modern architecture, by invoking the zeitgeist rather than doing away with history, only continued to act as the “midwife to historically significant form.” In this sense modern architecture was not a rupture with history, but simply a moment in the same continuum, a new episode in the evolution of the zeitgeist. And architecture’s representation of its particular zeitgeist turned out to be less “modern” than originally thought.

One of the questions that may be asked is why the moderns did not see themselves in this continuity. One answer is that the ideology of the zeitgeist bound them to their present history with the promise to release them from their past history; *they were ideologically trapped in the illusion of the eternity of their own time.*

The late twentieth century, with its retrospective knowledge that modernism has become history, has inherited nothing less than the recognition of the end of the ability of a classical or referential architecture to express its own time as timeless. The illusory timelessness of the present brings with it an awareness of the *timeful* nature of past time. It is for this reason that the representation of a zeitgeist always implies a simulation; it is seen in the classical use of the *replication of a past time* to invoke the timeless as the *expression of a present time*. Thus, in the zeitgeist argument, there will always be this unacknowledged paradox, a simulation of the timeless through the replication of the timeful.

Zeitgeist history, too, is subject to a questioning of its own authority. How can it be possible, from within history, to determine a timeless truth of its “spirit”? Thus history ceases to be an objective source of truth; origins and ends once again lose their universality (that is, their self-evident value) and, like history, become fictions. If it is no longer possible to pose the problem of architecture in terms of a zeitgeist—that is if architecture can no longer assert its relevance through a consonance with its zeitgeist—then it must turn to some other structure. To escape such a dependence on the zeitgeist—that is, the idea that the *purpose* of an architectural style is to embody the spirit of its age—it is necessary to propose an alternative idea of architecture, one whereby it is no longer the purpose of architecture, but its inevitability, to express its own time.

Once the traditional values of classical architecture are understood as not meaningful, true, and timeless, it must be concluded that these classical values were *always* simulations (and are not merely seen to be so in light of a present rupture of history or the present disillusionment with the zeitgeist). It becomes clear that the classical itself was a simulation that architecture sustained for five hundred years. Because the classical did not recognize itself as a simulation, it sought to represent extrinsic values (which it could not do) in the guise of its own reality.

The result, then, of seeing classicism and modernism as part of a single historical continuity is the understanding that there are no longer any self-evident values in representation, reason, or history to confer legitimacy on the object. This loss of self-evident value allows the timeless to be cut free from the meaningful and the truthful. It permits the view that there is no one truth (a timeless truth), or one meaning (a timeless meaning), but merely the timeless. When the possibility is raised that the timeless can be cut adrift from the timeful (history), so too can the timeless be cut away from universality to produce a timelessness which is not universal. This separation makes it unimportant whether origins are natural or divine or functional; thus, it is no longer necessary to produce a classic—that is, a timeless—architecture by recourse to the classical values inherent in representation, reason, and history.

The Not-Classical: Architecture as Fiction

The necessity of the quotation marks around the term “fiction” is now obvious. The three fictions just discussed can be seen not as fictions but rather as simulations. As has been said, fiction becomes simulation when it does not recognize its condition as fiction, when it tries to simulate a condition of reality, truth, or non-fiction. The simulation of representation in architecture has led, first of all, to an excessive concentration of inventive energies in the representational object. When columns are seen as surrogates of trees and windows resemble the portholes of ships, architectural elements become representational figures carrying an inordinate burden of meaning. In other disciplines representation is not the only purpose of figuration. In literature, for example, metaphors and similes have a wider range of application—poetic, ironic, and the like—and are not limited to allegorical or referential functions. Conversely, in architecture only one aspect of the figure is traditionally at work: object representation. The architectural figure always alludes to—aims at the representation of—some other object, whether architectural, anthropomorphic, natural, or technological.

Second, the simulation of reason in architecture has been based on a classical value given to the idea of truth. But Heidegger has noted that error has a trajectory parallel to truth, that error can be the unfolding of truth.¹³ Thus to proceed from “error” or fiction is to counter consciously the tradition of “mis-reading” on which the classical unwittingly depended—not a presumably logical transformation of something a priori, but a deliberate “error” stated as such, one which presupposes only its own internal truth. Error in this case does not assume the same value as truth; it is not simply its dialectical opposite. It is more like a dissimulation, a “not-containing” of the value of truth.

Finally, the simulated fiction of Modern Movement history, unwittingly inherited from the classical, was that any present-day architecture must be a reflection of its zeitgeist; that is, architecture can simultaneously be about presentness and universality. But if architecture is inevitably about the invention of fictions, it should also be possible to propose an architecture that embodies an other fiction, one that is not sustained by the values of presentness or universality and, more importantly, that does not consider its purpose to reflect these values. This other fiction/object, then, clearly should eschew the fictions of the classical (representation, reason, and history), which are attempts to “solve” the problem of

architecture rationally; for strategies and solutions are vestiges of a goal-oriented view of the world. If this is the case, the question becomes, **What can be the model for architecture when the essence of what was effective in the classical model—the presumed rational value of structures, representations, methodologies of origins and ends, and deductive processes—has been shown to be a simulation?**

It is not possible to answer such a question with an alternative model. But a series of characteristics can be proposed that typify this aporia, this loss in our capacity to conceptualize a new model for architecture. These characteristics, outlined below, arise from that which cannot be; they form a structure of *absences*.¹⁴ The purpose in proposing them is not to reconstitute what has just been dismissed, a model for a theory of architecture—for all such models are ultimately futile. Rather what is being proposed is an expansion beyond the limitations presented by the classical model to the realization of **architecture as an independent discourse, free of external values—classical or any other—that is, the intersection of the meaning-free, the arbitrary, and the timeless in the artificial.**

The meaning-free, arbitrary, and timeless creation of artificiality in this sense must be distinguished from what Baudrillard has called “simulation”;¹⁵ it is not an attempt to erase the classical distinction between reality and representation—thus again making architecture a set of conventions simulating the real; it is, rather, more like a *dissimulation*.¹⁶ Whereas simulation attempts to obliterate the difference between real and imaginary, dissimulation leaves untouched the difference between reality and illusion. The relationship between dissimulation and reality is similar to the signification embodied in the mask: the sign of pretending to be *not* what one is—that is, a sign which seems not to signify anything besides itself (the sign of a sign, or the negation of what is behind it). Such a dissimulation in architecture can be given the provisional title of the “not-classical.” As dissimulation is not the inverse, negative, or opposite of simulation, a “not-classical” architecture is not the inverse, negative, or opposite of classical architecture; it is merely different from or other than. A “not-classical” architecture is no longer a certification of experience or a simulation of history, reason, or reality in the present. Instead, it may more appropriately be described as an *other* manifestation, an architecture as is, now as a fiction. It is a representation of itself, of its own values and internal experience.

The claim that a “not-classical” architecture is necessary, that it is proposed by the new epoch or the rupture in the continuity of history, would be another zeitgeist argument. The “not-classical” merely proposes an end to the dominance of classical values in order to reveal other values. It proposes, not a new value or a new zeitgeist, but merely another condition—one of reading architecture as a text. There is nevertheless no question that this idea of the reading of architecture is initiated by a zeitgeist argument: that today the classical signs are no longer significant and have become no more than replications. A “not-classical” architecture is, therefore, not unresponsive to the realization of the closure inherent in the world; rather, it is unresponsive to representing it.

The End of the Beginning

An origin of value implies a state or a condition of origin before value has been given to it. A beginning is such a condition prior to a valued origin. In order to reconstruct the timeless, the state of *as is*, of face value, one must begin: begin by eliminating the time-bound concepts of the classical, which are primarily origin and end. The end of the beginning is also the end of the beginning of value. But it is not possible to go back to the earlier, prehistoric state of grace, the Eden of timelessness before origins and ends were valued. We must begin in the present—without necessarily giving a value to presentness. The attempt to reconstruct the timeless today must be a fiction which recognizes the fictionality of its own task—that is, it should not attempt to simulate a timeless reality.

As has been suggested above, latent in the classical appeal to origins is the more general problem of cause and effect. This formula, part of the fictions of reason and history, reduces architecture to an “added to” or “inessential” object by making it simply an effect of certain causes understood as origins. This problem is inherent in all of classical architecture, including its modernist aspect. **The idea of architecture as something “added to” rather than something with its own being—as adjectival rather than nominal or ontological—leads to the perception of architecture as a practical device. As long as architecture is primarily a device designated for use and for shelter—that is, as long as it has origins in programmatic functions—it will always constitute an effect.**

But once this “self-evident” characteristic of architecture is dismissed and architecture is seen as having no *a priori* origins—whether functional, divine, or natural—**alternative fictions for the origin can be proposed: for example, one that is arbitrary, one that has no external value derived from meaning, truth, or timelessness.** It is possible to imagine a beginning internally consistent but not conditioned by or contingent on historic origins with supposedly self-evident values.¹⁷ Thus, while classical origins were thought to have their source in a divine or natural order and modern origins were held to derive their value from deductive reason, “not-classical” origins can be strictly arbitrary, simply starting points, without value. They can be artificial and relative, as opposed to natural, divine, or universal.¹⁸ Such artificiality determined beginnings can be free of universal values because they are merely arbitrary points in time, when the architectural process commences. One example of an artificial origin is a graft, as in the genetic insertion of an alien body into a host to provide a new result.¹⁹ As opposed to a collage or a montage, which lives within a context and alludes to an origin, a graft is an invented site, which does not so much have object characteristics as those of process. A graft is not in itself genetically arbitrary. Its arbitrariness is in its freedom from a value system of non-arbitrariness (that is, the classical). It is arbitrary in its provision of a choice of reading which brings no external value to the process. But further, in its artificial and relative nature a graft is not in itself necessarily an achievable result, but merely a site that contains motivation for action—that is, the beginning of a process.²⁰

Motivation takes something arbitrary—that is, something in its artificial state which is not obedient to an external structure of values—and implies an action and a movement concerning an internal structure which has an inherent order and an internal logic. This

raises the question of the motivation or purpose from an arbitrary origin. How can something be arbitrary and non-goal-oriented but still be internally motivated? Every state, it can be argued, has a motivation toward its own being—a motion rather than a direction. Just because architecture cannot portray or enact *reason* as a value does not mean that it cannot argue systematically or reasonably. In all processes there must necessarily be some beginning point; but the value in an arbitrary or intentionally fictive architecture is found in the intrinsic nature of its action rather than in the direction of its course. Since any process must necessarily have a beginning and a movement, however, the fictional origin must be considered as having at least a methodological value—a value concerned with generating the internal relations of the process itself. But if the beginning is in fact arbitrary, there can be no direction toward closure or end, because the motivation for change of state (that is, the inherent instability of the beginning) can never lead to a state of no change (that is, an end). Thus, in their freedom from the universal values of both historic origin and directional process, motivations can lead to *ends* different from those of the previous value-laden *end*.

The End of the End

Along with the end of the origin, the second basic characteristic of a “not-classical” architecture, therefore, is its freedom from a priori goals or ends—the end of the end. The end of the classical also means the end of the myth of the end as a value-laden effect of the progress or direction of history. By logically leading to a potential closure of thought, the fictions of the classical awakened a desire to confront, display, and even transcend the end of history. This desire was manifest in the modern idea of utopia, a time beyond history. It was thought that objects imbued with value because of their relationship to a self-evidently meaningful origin could somehow transcend the present in moving toward a timeless future, a utopia. This idea of progress gave false value to the present; utopia, a form of fantasizing about an “open” and limitless end, forestalled the notion of closure. Thus the modern crisis of closure marked the end of the process of moving toward the end. Such crises (or ruptures) in our perception of the continuity of history arise not so much out of a change in our idea of origins or ends than out of the failure of the present (and its objects) to sustain our expectations of the future. And once the continuity of history is broken in our perception, any representation of the classical, any “classicism,” can be seen only as a belief. At this point, where our received values are “in crisis,” the end of the end raises the possibility of the invention and realization of a blatantly fictional future (which is therefore non-threatening in its “truth” value) as opposed to a simulated or idealized one.

With the end of the end, what was formerly the process of composition or transformation ceases to be a causal strategy, a process of addition or subtraction from an origin. Instead, the process becomes one of modification—the invention of a non-dialectical, non-directional, non-goal-oriented process.²¹ The “invented” origins from which this process receives its motivation differ from the accepted, mythic origins of the classicists by being arbitrary, reinvented for each circumstance, adopted for the moment and not forever. The process of modification can be seen as an open-ended tactic rather than a goal-oriented strategy. A strategy is a process that is determined and value-laden before it begins; it is directed. Since

the arbitrary origin cannot be known in advance (in a cognitive sense), it does not depend on knowledge derived from the classical tradition and thus cannot engender a strategy.

In this context architectural form is revealed as a “place of invention” rather than as a subservient representation of another architecture or as a strictly practical device. To invent an architecture is to allow architecture to be a cause; in order to be a cause, it must arise from something outside a directed strategy of composition.

The end of the end also concerns the end of the object representation as the only metaphoric subject in architecture. In the past the metaphor in architecture was used to convey such forces as tension, compression, extension, and elongation; these were qualities that could be seen, if not literally in the objects themselves, then in the relationship between objects. The idea of the metaphor here has nothing to do with the qualities generated between buildings or between buildings and spaces; rather, it has to do with the idea that the internal process itself can generate a kind of non-representational figuration in the object. This is an appeal, not to the classical aesthetic of the object, but to the potential poetic of an architectural text. The problem, then, is to distinguish texts from representations, to convey the idea that what one is seeing, the material object, is a text rather than a series of image references to other objects or values.

This suggests the idea of architecture as “writing” as opposed to architecture as image. What is being “written” is not the object itself—its mass and volume—but the act of massing. This idea gives a metaphoric body to the act of architecture. It then signals its reading through an other system of signs, called *traces*.²² Traces are not to be read literally, since they have no other value than to signal the idea that there is a reading event and that reading should take place; trace signals the idea to read.²³ Thus a trace is a partial or fragmentary sign; it has no objecthood. It signifies an action that is in process. In this sense a trace is not a simulation of reality; it is a dissimulation because it reveals itself as distinct from its former reality. It does not simulate the real, but represents and records the action inherent in a former or future reality, which has a value no more or less real than the trace itself. That is, trace is unconcerned with forming an image which is the representation of a previous architecture or of social customs and usages; rather, it is concerned with the marking—literally the figuration—of its own internal processes. Thus the trace is the record of motivation, the record of an action, not an image of another object-origin.

In this case a “not-classical” architecture begins actively to involve an idea of a reader conscious of his own identity as a reader rather than as a user or observer. It proposes a new reader distanced from any external value system (particularly an architectural-historical system). Such a reader brings no prior competence to the act of reading other than an identity as a reader. That is, such a reader has no preconceived knowledge of what architecture should be (in terms of its proportions, textures, scale, and the like); nor does a “not-classical” architecture aspire to make itself understandable through these preconceptions.²⁴

The competence of the reader (of architecture) may be defined as the capacity to distinguish a *sense of knowing* from a *sense of believing*. At any given time the conditions for “knowledge” are “deeper” than philosophic conditions; in fact, they provide the possibility of distinguishing philosophy from literature, science from magic, and religion from myth.

The new competence comes from the capacity to read *per se*, to know how to read, and more importantly, to know how to read (but not necessarily decode) architecture as a text. Thus the new "object" must have the capacity to reveal itself first of all as a *téxt*, as a reading event. The architectural fiction proposed here differs from the classical fiction in its primary condition as a text and in the way it is read: the new reader is no longer presumed to know the nature of truth in the object, either as a representation of a rational origin or as a manifestation of a universal set of rules governing proportion, harmony, and ordering. But further, knowing how to decode is no longer important; simply, language in this context is no longer a code to assign meanings (*that this means that*). The activity of reading is first and foremost in the recognition of something as a language (*that it is*). Reading, in this sense, makes available a level of *indication* rather than a level of meaning or expression.

Therefore, to propose the end of the beginning and the end of the end³⁵ is to propose the end of beginnings and ends of value—to propose an other "timeless" space of invention. It is a "timeless" space in the present without a determining relation to an ideal future or to an idealized past. Architecture in the present is seen as a process of inventing an artificial past and futureless present. It remembers a no-longer future.

This paper is based on three non-verifiable assumptions or values: timeless (originless, endless) architecture; non-representational (objectless) architecture; and artificial (arbitrary, reasonless) architecture.

Notes

1. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 83. Jean Baudrillard portrays the period beginning in the fifteenth century by three different simulacra: counterfeit, production, and simulation. He says that the first is based on the natural law of value, the second on the commercial law of value, and the third on the structural law of value.
2. The term "classical" is often confused with the idea of the "classic" and with the stylistic method of "classicism." That which is classic, according to Joseph Rykwert, invokes the idea of "ancient and exemplary" and suggests "authority and distinction"; it is a model of what is excellent or of the first rank. More importantly, it implies its own timelessness, the idea that it is first rank at any time. Classicism, as opposed to the classical, will be defined here as a method of attempting to produce a "classic" result by appealing to a "classical" past. This accords with the definition given by Sir John Summerson, for whom classicism is not so much a set of ideas and values as it is a style. He maintains that while much of Gothic architecture was based on the same proportional relationships as the "classical" architecture of the Renaissance, no one could confuse a Gothic cathedral with a Renaissance palazzo; it simply did not have the look of classicism. In contrast, Demetri Porphyrios argues that classicism is not a style, but instead has to do with rationalism: "As much as architecture is a tectonic discourse, it is by definition transparent to rationality . . . the lessons to be learned today from classicism, therefore, are not to be found in classicism's stylistic wrinkles but in classicism's rationality." Porphyrios here confuses classicism with the classical and the classic, that is, with a set of values privileging the "truth" (that is, rationality) of tectonics over "expression" and error. The fallacy of this approach is that classicism relies on an idea of historical continuity inherent in the classical; therefore it does not produce the timelessness characteristic of the classic. The classical, by implication, has a more relative status than the classic; it evokes a timeless past, a "golden age" superior to the modern time or the present.
3. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1973). It is precisely Michel Foucault's distinction between the classical and modern that has never been adequately articulated in relationship to architecture. In contrast to Foucault's epistemological differentiation, architecture has remained an uninterrupted mode of representation from the fifteenth century to the present. In fact, it will be seen that what is assumed in architecture to be classical is, in Foucault's terms, modern, and what is assumed in architecture to be modern is in reality Foucault's classical. Foucault's distinction is not what is at issue here, but rather the continuity that has persisted in architecture from the classical to the present day.
4. Foucault, xxii. While the term "episteme" as used here is similar to Foucault's use of the term in defining a continuous period of knowledge, it is necessary to point out that the time period here defined as the classical episteme differs from Foucault's definition. Foucault locates two discontinuities in the development of Western culture: the classical and the modern. He identifies the classical, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, with the primacy of the intersection of language and representation; the value of language, "its meaning," was seen to be self-evident and to receive its justification within language; the way language provided meaning could be represented within language. On the other hand, Foucault identifies the modern, originating in the early nineteenth century, with the ascendance of historical continuity and self-generated analytic processes over language and representation.
5. "The End of the Classical" is not about the end of the classic. It merely questions a contingent value structure which, when attached to the idea of the classic, yields an erroneous sense of the classical. It is not that the desire for a classic is at an end, but that the dominant conditions of the classical (origin, end, and the process of composition) are under reconsideration. Thus it might be more accurate to title this essay "The End of the Classical as Classic."
6. Franco Borsi, *Leon Battista Alberti* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). The façade of the church of Sant'Andrea in Mantua by Alberti is one of the first uses of the transposition of ancient building types to achieve both verification and authority. It marks, as Borsi says, "a decisive turning away from the vernacular 'to the Latin'" (272). It is acceptable in the "vernacular" to revive the classical temple front because the function of the temple in antiquity and the church in the fifteenth century was similar. However, it is quite another matter to overlay the temple front with the triumphal arch. See R. Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), and also D. S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Renaissance* (London: MacMillan, 1970).
7. It is as if Alberti were saying that with the authority of God in question, man must resort to the symbols of his own power to verify the church. Thus the use of the triumphal arch becomes a message on the façade of Sant'Andrea rather than an embodiment of its inherent meaning.
8. Jeff Kipnis, from a seminar at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, 28 February 1984. "Form cannot follow function until function (including but not limited to use) has first emerged as a possibility of form."
9. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 87.
10. See the film, *Beyond Utopia: Changing Attitudes in American Architecture* (New York: Michael Blackwood Productions, 1983).
11. Baudrillard, 8, 9. In referring to the death of the reality of God, Baudrillard says, "Metaphysical despair came from the idea that the images concealed nothing at all, and that in fact they were not images but actually perfect simulacra."
12. Leone Battista Alberti, *On Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 68–74.
13. Morris Kline, *Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5.
14. Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 133. "Errancy is the essential counter-essence to the primordial essence of truth. Errancy opens

- itself up as the open region for every opposite essential truth. Errancy and the concealing of what is concealed belong to the primordial essence of truth."
14. Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," *October*, no. 27 (Winter 1983). Deleuze uses a slightly different terminology to address a very similar set of issues; he discusses the Platonic distinction between model, copy, and "simulacrum" as a means of assigning value and hierarchical position to objects and ideas. He explains the overthrow of Platonism as the suspension of the *a priori* value-laden status of the Platonic copy in order to "raise up simulacra, to assert their rights over icons or copies. The problem no longer concerns the distinction *Essence/Appearance of Model/Copy*. This whole distinction operates in the world of representation. The simulacrum is not degraded copy, rather it contains a positive power which negates both original and copy, both model and reproduction. Of the at least two divergent series interiorized in the simulacrum neither can be assigned as original or as copy. It doesn't even work to invoke the model of the Other, because no model resists the vertigo of the simulacrum" (52, 53). Simulation is used here in a sense which closely approximates Deleuze's use of copy or icon, while dissimulation is conceptually very close to his description of the pre-Socratic simulacra.
15. Baudrillard, 2. In the essay "The Precession of Simulacra," Baudrillard discusses the nature of simulation and the implication of present-day simulacra on our perception of the nature of reality and representation: "Something has disappeared; the sovereign difference between them (the real and . . . simulation models) that was the abstraction's charm."
16. Baudrillard, 5. Distinguishing between simulation and what he calls dissimulation, Baudrillard says that "to dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. . . . Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and make believe he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms. (Littre). Thus feigning . . . is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false' and between 'real' and 'imaginary'. Since the simulator produces 'true' symptoms, is he ill or not?" According to Baudrillard, simulation is the generation by models of a reality without origin: it no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. While this sounds very much like my proposal of the "not-classical," the "not-classical" is fundamentally different in that it is a dissimulation and not a simulation. Baudrillard discusses the danger in the realization of the simulacra—for when it enters the real world it is its nature to take on the "real" attributes of that which it is simulating. Dissimulation here is defined differently; it makes apparent the simulation with all of its implications on the value status of "reality" without distorting the simulacra or allowing it to lose its precarious position, poised between the real and the unreal, the model and the other.
17. What is at issue in an artificial origin is not motivation (as opposed to an essential or originary cause, as in an origin of the classical) but rather the idea of self-evidence. In deductive logic, reading backward inevitably produces self-evidence. Hence the analytic process of the classical would always produce a self-evident origin. Yet there are no *a priori* self-evident procedures which could give one origin any value over any other. It can be proposed in a "not-classical" architecture that any initial condition can produce self-evident procedures that have an internal motivation.
18. The idea of arbitrary or artificial in this sense must be distinguished from the classical idea of architecture as artificial nature or from the idea of the arbitrariness of the sign in language. Arbitrary in this context means having no natural connection. The insight that origins are a contingency of language is based on an appeal to reading: the origin can be arbitrary because it is contingent on a reading that brings its own strategy with it.
19. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). This is basically similar to Jacques Derrida's use of graft in literary deconstruction. He discusses graft as an element which can be discovered in a text through a deconstructive reading: "Deconstruction is, among other things, an attempt to identify grafts in the texts it analyzes: what are the points of juncture and stress where one scion or line or argument has been spliced with another? . . . Focusing on these moments, deconstruction elucidates the heterogeneity of the text" (150). The three defining qualities of graft as it is used in this paper are (1) graft begins with the arbitrary and artificial conjunction of (2) two distinct characteristics which are in their initial form unstable. It is this instability which provides the motivation (the attempt to return to stability) and also allows modification to take place. (3) In the incision there must be something which allows for an energy to be set off by the coming together of the two characteristics. Culler's discussion of deconstructive strategy contains all of the elements of graft: it begins by analysis of text to reveal oppositions. These are juxtaposed in such a way as to create movement, and the deconstruction (graft) is identifiable in terms of that motivation. This paper, which concentrates on transposing these ideas from a pure analytic framework to a program for work, is more concerned with what happens in the process of consciously making grafts than finding those that may have been placed unconsciously in a text. Since a graft by definition is a process of modification, it is unlikely that one could find a static or undeveloped moment of graft in an architectural text: one would be more likely to read only its results. Graft is used here in a way that closely resembles Culler's analysis of Derrida's method for deconstruction of opposition: "To deconstruct an opposition . . . is not to destroy it. . . . To deconstruct an opposition is to undo and displace it, to situate it differently" (150). "This concentration on the apparently marginal puts the logic of supplementarity to work as an interpretive strategy; what has been relegated to the margins or set aside by previous interpreters may be important precisely for those reasons that led it to be set aside" (140). Derrida emphasizes graft as a non-dialectic condition of opposition: this paper stresses the processual aspects which emerge from the moment of graft. The major differences are of terminology and emphasis.
20. Culler, 99. "The arbitrary nature of the sign and the system with no positive terms give us the paradoxical notion of an 'instituted trace,' a structure of infinite referral in which there are only traces—traces prior to any entity of which they might be the trace." This description of "instituted trace" relates closely to the idea of motivation as put forth in this paper. Like Derrida's "instituted trace," motivation describes a system which is internally consistent, but arbitrary in that it has no beginning or end and no necessary or valued direction. It remains a system of differences, comprehensible only in terms of the spaces between elements or moments of the process. Thus, motivation here is similar to Derrida's description of difference—it is the force within the object that causes it to be dynamic at every point of a continuous transformation. Internal motivation determines the nature of modification for the object and is rendered readable through trace.
21. Jeff Kipnis, "Architecture Unbound," unpublished paper, 1984. Modification is one aspect of extension which is defined by Kipnis as a component of decomposition. While extension is any movement from an origin (or an initial condition), modification is a specific form of extension concerned with preserving the evidence of initial conditions (for example, through no addition or subtraction of materiality). On the other hand, synthesis is an example of extension which does not attempt to maintain evidence of initial conditions but rather attempts to create a new whole.
22. The concept of trace in architecture as put forward here is similar to Derrida's idea in that it suggests that there can be neither a representational object nor representable "reality." Architecture becomes text rather than object when it is conceived and presented as a system of differences rather than as an image or an isolated presence. Trace is the visual manifestation of this system of differences, a record of movement (without direction) causing us to read the present object as a system of relationships to other prior and subsequent movements. Trace is to be distinguished from Jacques Derrida's use of the term, for Derrida directly relates the idea of "difference" to the fact that it is impossible to isolate "presence" as an entity. "The presence of motion is conceivable only insofar as every instant is already marked with the traces of the past and future . . . the present instant is not the past and future . . . the present instant is not something given but a product of the relations between past and future. If motion is to be present, presence must already be marked by difference and deferral" (Culler, 97). The idea that presence is never a simple absolute runs counter to all of our intuitive convictions. If there can be no inherently meaningful presence which is not itself a system of differences then there can be no value-laden or *a priori* origin.

23. We have always read architecture. Traditionally it did not induce reading but responded to it. The use of arbitrariness here is an idea to stimulate or induce the reading of traces without references to meaning but rather to other conditions of process—that is, to stimulate pure reading without value or prejudice, as opposed to interpretation.
24. Previously, there was assumed to be an a priori language of value, a poetry, existing within architecture. Now we are saying that architecture is merely language. We read whether we know what language we are reading or not. We can read French without understanding French. We can know someone is speaking nonsense or noise. Before we are competent to read and understand poetry we can know something to be language. Reading in this context is not concerned with decoding for meaning or for poetic content but rather for indication.
25. C. F. Franco Rella, "Tempo della fine e tempo dell'inizio" (The Age of the End and the Age of the Beginning), *Casabella* 48, no. 498–99 (Jan.–Feb. 1984): 106–8. The similarity to the title of Franco Rella's article is coincidental, for we use the terms "beginning" and "end" for entirely different purposes. Rella identifies the present as the age of the end, stating that the paradoxical result of progress has been to create a culture that simultaneously desires progress and is burdened with a sense of passing and the chronic sense of irredeemable loss. The result is a culture which "does not love what has been but the end of what has been. It hates the present, the existing, and the changing. It therefore loves nothing." Rella's article poses the question of whether it is possible to build today, to design in a way that is with rather than against time. He desires the return to a sense of time-boundedness and the possibility of living in one's own age without attempting to return to the past. The mechanism by which he proposes to re-create this possibility is myth. He differentiates myth from fiction, and it is this difference which illuminates the opposition between his proposal and the propositions of this paper. Myth is defined as a traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the worldview of a people in the traditional value-laden sense, giving history and thus value to timeless or inexplicable events. Rella dismisses fiction as verisimilitude, merely creating the appearance of truth. Instead of attempting to return to the past, myth attempts to create a new beginning merely situating us at an earlier, and less acute, state of anxiety. But a myth cannot alleviate the paradox of progress. Against both of these, "The End of the Beginning and the End of the End" proposes dissimulation, which is neither the simulation of reality as we know it nor the proposal of an alternate truth, which appeals to the identical verifying structures of belief—that is, origins, transformations, and ends. "The End of the Classical" insists on maintaining a state of anxiety, proposing fiction in a self-reflexive sense, a process without origins or ends which maintains its own fictionality rather than proposing a simulation of truth.

THE FUTILITY OF OBJECTS

**Decomposition and
the Processes
of Differentiation**