



# *No dots -- Just LINES*

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# Contents

## 1 Urbanism

or how to make life less nasty, brutish and short

- 3 Architecture and Revolution: Le Corbusier and the Futurists
- 9 Freewheeling: A Critique of Top-Down Rationalization and the Grassroots Backlash
- 18 Bigness, Or the Problem of Large

## 2 Genealogy

or what Nietzsche said about history: yours is the only version that matters

- 27 History, Precedent and Repetition
- 31 Red School, White School
- 41 Hard Science, Soft Science

## 3 Polemicism

or why a little irreverence never hurt anyone and is a Good Samaritan thing to do

- 45 Complexity and Control in Architecture
- 49 Mies, Weese and Sejima Walk into a Bar

## 4 Transdisciplinarity

or when it's ok to covet (and move into) your neighbor's house

- 55 Super Decor: Architecture and the Interior
- 61 Process + Projection: Architecture and Photography
- 67 Child's Play: Reductive Strategies in Architectural Representation

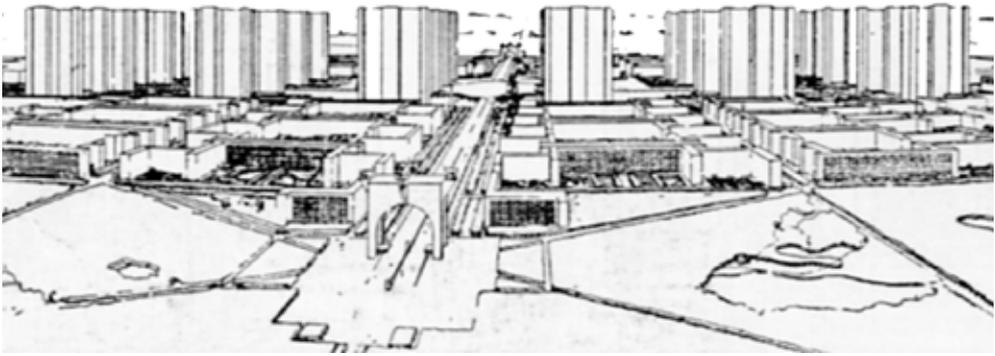


# 1 Urbanism

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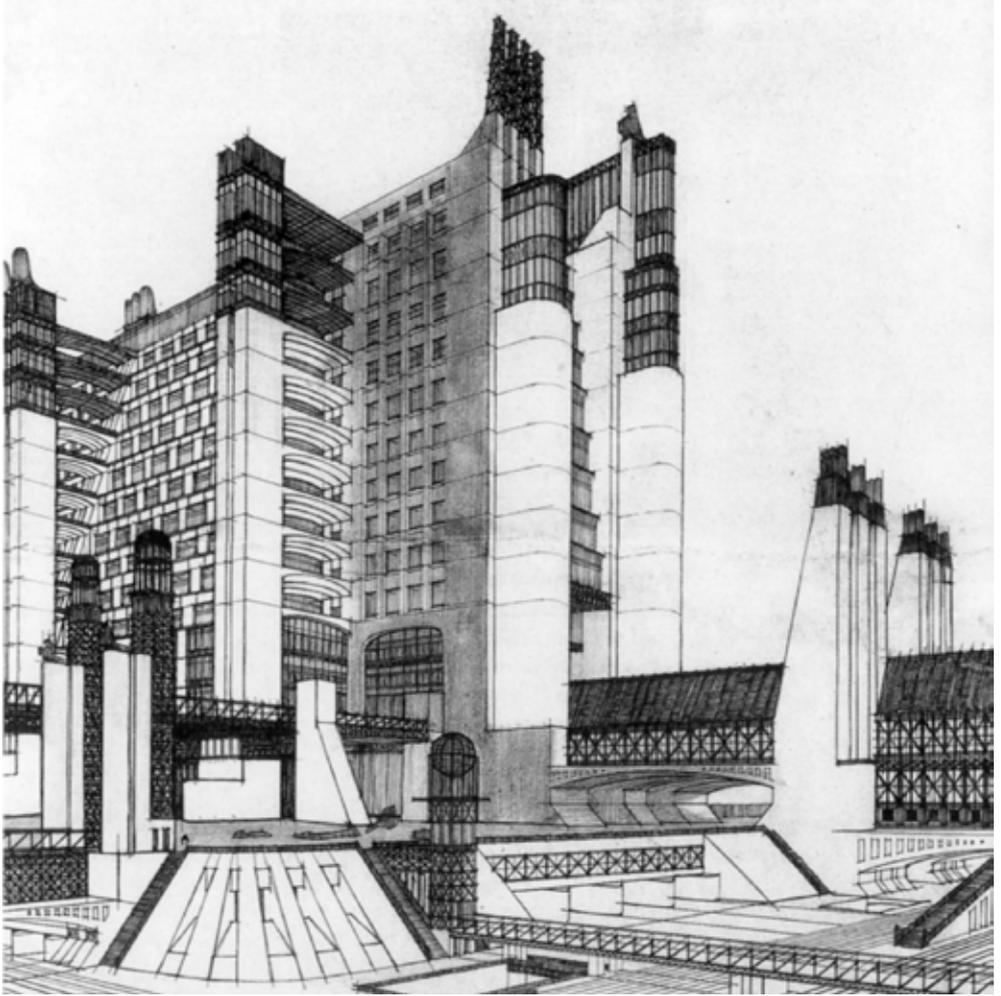
## Architecture and Revolution: Le Corbusier and the Futurists

Arch 532, Spring 2009. Instructor: Alexander Eisenschmidt



Le Corbusier, *Une Ville Contemporaine, L'Esprit Nouveau* (1921)

The act of challenging existing structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination has been alternately hailed as heroic and condemned as treasonous throughout human history. The American (1775), French (1789) and Russian (1917) revolutions were all born of this impulse to renew the social, economic and political relationships between citizen and state. Revolutions are traditionally understood within this narrow definition, as calls to a common cause; a stirring of the masses intended to force reorganization of government in the interests of the people. However, revolutions encompass far more than political upheaval and a bloody struggle for power; the technological, commercial and industrial innovations of the 19th and 20th centuries were equally transformative and ushered in the modern era. It is these two differing approaches to revolution that characterize the Futurist manifestos and the writings of Le Corbusier. **While the Futurists seek to combine anarchy with art and architecture as a force for political renewal, Le Corbusier advocates a peaceful revolution in Architecture to ensure political stability.** In this essay I will consider the underlying theme of revolution in the manifestos of Futurism, Futurist painting and Futurist architecture alongside Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*, with reference to Antonio Sant'Elia's *La Citta Nuova* and Le Corbusier's *City of Three Million*.



Antonio Sant'Elia, *La Città Nuova Drawings* (1914)

## The Architectural Manifesto

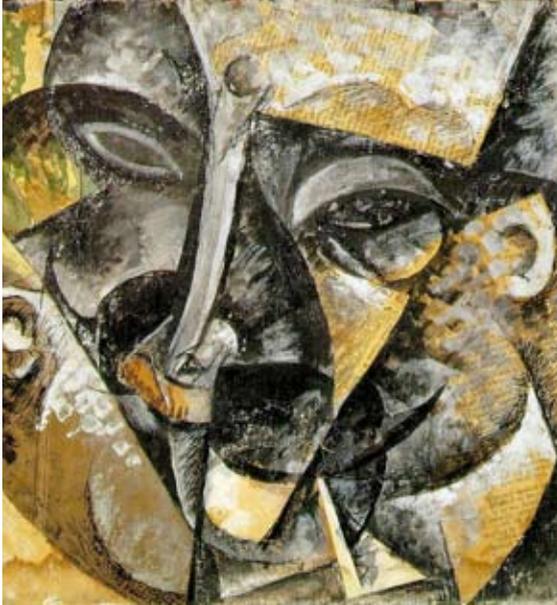
The manifesto - a public declaration of one's beliefs and intentions - is by its very nature a political document, intended to influence and drive the views of others. It would not be amiss therefore, to construe that both the Futurists and Le Corbusier were interested in shaking up the sociopolitical organization of the city, although the former more overtly than the latter. The founder of Futurism, Filippo Marinetti, first propagandized his views in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1909. Umberto Boccioni and his fellow futurist painters followed suit with their 1910 *Manifesto of the Futurist Painters*: "we declare war on all

artists and all institutions which insist on hiding behind a façade of false modernity, while they are actually ensnared by tradition, academism and, above all, a nauseating cerebral laziness.”<sup>1</sup> The movement’s architectural mouthpiece was provided by Antonio Sant’Elia in 1914. His manifesto on Futurist architecture notes the disconnect between contemporary lifestyles and architecture: “Modern building materials and our scientific ideas absolutely do not lend themselves to the disciplines of historical styles.”<sup>2</sup> Le Corbusier affirms this state of affairs in *Towards a New Architecture*: “The various classes of workers in society today no longer have dwellings adapted to their needs...It is a question of building which is at the root of social unrest today: architecture or revolution.”<sup>3</sup> He points out that a quiet revolution has already taken place in industry and business. New building materials, steel and concrete in particular, are available. All that remains, what the new “epoch” *demand*s, is a revolution in architecture.

The clear parallel between Le Corbusier and the Futurists is that both begin their manifestos on a similar premise – **intellectual laziness as well as artistic and architectural stagnation are leading to the death of cities and nations**, and newly emerging machines, materials and systems of organization must be utilized to renew them.

### **Dynamism versus Reason**

Having diagnosed the malady, both propose technology-driven revolutions as the cure, but to entirely different ends. In what can only be characterized as anarchist nationalism, the Futurists embrace the ‘mechanization of man’ to force Italy into modernity and simultaneously destroy its history. Marinetti incites the masses: “Come on! Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums! ...Take up your pickaxes... and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!”<sup>4</sup> **Boccioni expresses his conviction that violent political rebirth will also give rise to a “cultural resurgence” in which the values of modernity - speed and dynamism - become dominant.** Many of Boccioni’s early sculptures or paintings, such as *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913) and *Dynamism of a Man’s Head* (1914) capture modern restlessness through the use of oblique lines and shifting planes of color. Of course, war is equally symbolic of modernity, as the two world wars demonstrated. As Paul Virilio wrote in *Speed and Politics*, “Speed is the essence of war.”<sup>5</sup> The First World War, which began five years after Marinetti’s founding of Futurism, thus provides the ideal opportunity for the Futurists to realize their goal of destructive renewal.



Umberto Boccioni, *Dynamism of a Man's Head* (1914) and *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913)

In contrast, Le Corbusier avows that he is no anarchist; instead he seeks the perfect geometric form to embody his principles of reason and order: “To introduce uniformity into the city, we must industrialize building. It has [thus far] escaped the march of progress.”<sup>6</sup> One of Le Corbusier’s earliest attempts to introduce mass production into housing resulted in his celebrated archetype, the *Maison Dom-ino*, in 1914. **The simple concrete slab and column design frees the interior structure from the walls and partitions - a revolutionary move in architecture at the time.** Ironically the design was prepared with post-World War I housing needs in mind, therefore realizing the destruction-renewal paradigm of the Futurists – many of whom never made it back from the war. In addition the material used was concrete, which allowed for faster building – fulfilling another condition of the Futurists. Le Corbusier even dwells on the automobile and the airplane as examples of the rational machine that the house must eventually become.<sup>8</sup> However, it is Le Corbusier’s relationship with science, technology and the economy, embodied in the straight line and the rational plan, which truly sets him apart from the Futurists.

## Cities of the Future

Le Corbusier's vision in *The City of Tomorrow* is largely a response to the urban condition of Paris at the time. While Le Corbusier prized the logic of the straight line, circulation in Paris was defined by narrow, meandering roads or "capillaries." The city's organic growth had led to extreme densification in the center, which meant poor living conditions.<sup>9</sup> Life in Paris therefore, had all the underlying volatility required for social unrest and violent revolution. Le Corbusier's *City of Three Million* was an avant-garde attempt to quell the discontent. His plan proposes the densification of housing/offices into autonomous rational blocks that would utilize newly created open space for nature. The plan would incorporate multiple levels of wide straight streets for fast traffic, which are set back from housing. The entire system is based on a 400 yard "gridiron" for maximum spatial efficiency. When the plan was eventually developed into the Plan Voisin for Paris, Le Corbusier even suggested that a blank slate was required, and existing buildings be demolished. Needless to say, the Plan Voisin generated much debate and was never implemented.

Antonio Sant'Elia's *La Citta Nuova*, in comparison, is a less outlined but equally transformative vision. Sant'Elia writes: the Futurist house should be built "with the aid of every scientific and technical resource, of fulfilling to the limit every demand of our way of life."<sup>10</sup> His meticulously drawn city excludes nature and consists entirely of massive autonomous forms - factories, power plants, and apartment blocks - linked by circulation. *La Citta Nuova*'s primary emphasis is on speed, and it utilizes exterior elevators, catwalks and conveyer belts in addition to highways, subways and rail lines. These elements that carry movement are often foregrounded in his drawings and structure Futurist architecture. They come together as infrastructural nodes that facilitate flow on multiple levels and continue on to become part of a larger network, a far reaching vision that anticipates today's layered, networked society. *La Citta Nuova* is very much an embodiment of Futurist principles. However, the unresolved tension between Sant'Elia's monumental forms and Marinetti and Boccioni's stated Futurist principles of lightness and plasticity suggest that *La Citta Nuova* was perhaps a work in progress. As a result, Sant'Elia's proposals may have been eclipsed by Marinetti and Boccioni in the avant-garde movement at the time. For the immediate future at least, it was Le Corbusier and not Sant'Elia that helped trigger a revolution in architecture. ■



Le Corbusier, *Voisin Plan for Paris* (1925)

- 1 Boccioni et al., Manifesto of the Futurist Painters (1910), p. 25
- 2 Sant'Elia, Antonio and Marinetti, Filippo. *Futurist architecture* (1914), p. 34
- 3 Le Corbusier. Architecture or Revolution, *Towards a New Architecture* (1923), p. 7
- 4 Marinetti, Filippo. "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909), p. 23
- 5 Virilio, Paul. *Speed and Politics* (1977), p. 149
- 6 Le Corbusier, "A Contemporary City", *The City of Tomorrow* (1925), p. 176
- 7 Colquhoun, Alan. *Modern Architecture* (2002), p. 144
- 8 Le Corbusier. *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 109
- 9 Le Corbusier. "The Pack-Donkey's Way and Man's Way", *The City of Tomorrow* (1925) p. 7
- 10 Sant'Elia, Antonio and Marinetti, Filippo. *Futurist Architecture* (1914), p. 34

## Freewheeling: A Critique of Top-Down Rationalization and the Grassroots Backlash

Arch 532, Spring 2009. Instructor: Alexander Eisenschmidt



Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30* (1950)

*Architecture or Revolution*, Le Corbusier famously proclaimed in 1923. His dictum ushered in the modern era of architecture and communicated his conviction that adopting modernist principles of function, circulation and the utility of the straight line meant revolution would be avoided. Yet many of the socioeconomic challenges afflicting 1920s cities - including congestion, crumbling infrastructure and crime - strain modern cities today. Other trends such as the hybridization of functions and the birth of new networks and communications are in tense conflict with the modernist paradigm of top-down rationalization of the city. A Jackson Pollock “drip” painting reflects the new urban experience that architects are confronted with: freewheeling, multilayered and frenetic; lacking formal structure yet projecting subliminal control. This essay critiques rationalization and its discontents, with the underlying premise that **not only did rationalization *not* avoid revolution, but actually created conditions that made revolution *more* likely.** In particular, I will highlight Henri Lefebvre's concepts of alienation and spectacle and the novel response of various grassroots movements such as the Situationists in the 1960s.



Rick Steves, *Traffic in Tehran* (2008)

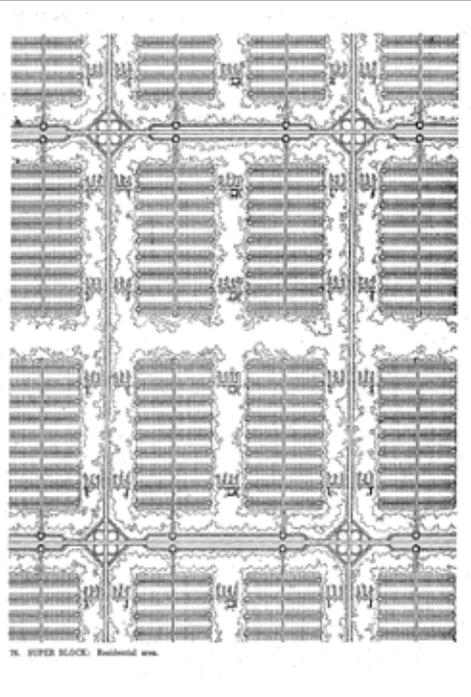
It is a situation not recommended for the faint of heart: cars merging at high speeds through major intersections without traffic lights, swerving blithely before oncoming traffic, pedestrians and sometimes animals. Tehran's notoriously high-risk driving culture is a familiar scene to just about anyone navigating traffic in the developing world, offering a primer in traffic violations. Each miraculous near-miss indicates a driving population **acclimated to their own rhythm and rules**: making a left turn from the right hand lane; driving the wrong way down a one-way street; taking advantage of the tiniest of pauses by the neighboring driver to thrust their car before his. As contemporary cities – repressively organized and hermetically zoned – prove limited in their opportunities for inventiveness, playing chicken on Tehran's streets offers one form of emotional reprieve.

Tehran's mayhem contrasts sharply with the sanitized modernity of American cities. **Whereas the spectacles of American capitalist society (such as Disney World) are characterized by a risk-averse population that parks their vehicles in orderly rows outside, in Tehran the cab-driver reversing down the freeway is the spectacle.** Mundane predictability is particularly potent in American suburbia, the nexus of hermetic zoning laws and techniques of mass production. Once envisioned as a tool to systematize urban expansion, the subdivisions of single-family homes and gated communities became clusters of self-enforced segregation along class and racial lines by the 1970s.

“Urbanization cannot be conditioned by the pretensions of a preexistent aestheticism: its essence is of a functional order.

This order consists of three functions: dwelling, producing, and relaxation. Its essential objects are land subdivision, regulation of traffic, building legislation.”

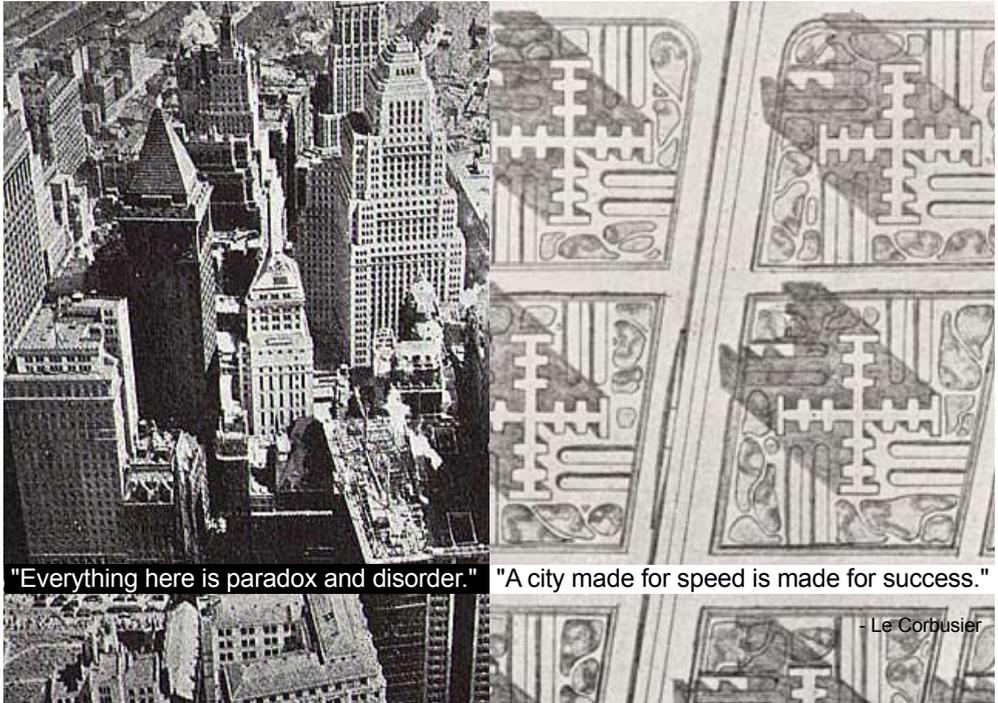
- CIAM Congress, La Sarraz (1928)



Ludwig Hilberseimer, *The New City* (1927)

The emergence of rationalization as the dominant urban model in Western Europe and North America can be traced to late 19th and early 20th century concepts. The German sociologist Georg Simmel argued that the 19th century metropolis was a kaleidoscope that over-stimulated man’s senses, thereby forcing a permanent alteration in his mental state from emotive to coolly rational. His counterpart Max Weber regarded rationalization of law, morals and social interactions as the drivers of Western society, providing *liberty* and *autonomy* to the people. Finally, deteriorating 19th century living conditions coupled with the advent of the machine age provided the impetus for modernist architects to formally rationalize the city. Ludwig Hilberseimer’s 1927 plan for the future city exemplified this new order: a series of autonomous superblocs with distinct zones for housing, industry and commerce, all anchored by a hierarchical street system and a main traffic artery. **By eradicating the congestion of the center and eliminating visual contrasts, the 1928 CIAM was hailed rationalization as liberating and humane.**

In the history of the international modernist movement, New York City is alternately admired and derided. It was the city quickest to embrace new technologies such as the elevator and new techniques of construction, yet its irrational grid and ad hoc growth of skyscrapers



Left: Aerial View of Lower Manhattan (1932)  
Right: Le Corbusier, *Plan Voisin* (1925)

facilitated congestion. Le Corbusier condemned the jumbled New York skyline as "immoral" and the triumph of "individual liberty" over "collective liberty." He felt entrepreneurship should be subjugated to reason and order, with benefits for society as a whole. His Plan Voisin for Paris - "Voisin" translating literally to "neighbor" - sought to restore community through a series of cruciform towers adhering to principles of green space, efficiency and openness. **The radical shift to straight lines, flat planes and static configuration set the tone for a generation. It took until the 1978 publication of Koolhaas' *Delirious New York* to retroactively rehabilitate the city as an incubator of social and architectural experimentation.**

In a memorable sequence from Jacques Tati's 1967 masterpiece *Play Time*, the protagonist Monsieur Hulot attempts to navigate his way through a stereotypical modernist office building. With comical unease, Hulot reacts in succession to the bright lights and shrill sounds emitting from high-tech gadgetry; the "whoosh" of a seat cushion; the hollow reverberation of footsteps on the shiny floor; glass doors, hidden elevators, and a never-ending labyrinth of cubicles and hallways, all indistinguishable from one another. Tati's satirical portrayal of the **modern metropolis as sterile and dehumanizing** was simply an extension of the 1960s public narrative.



Jacques Tati, *Play Time* (1967)

Although modernism was rooted in Corbusier's egalitarian ideals, its very efficiency now seemed exploitative of the working masses. The growing commodification of the arts and leisure added to a sense of besiegement from the capitalist machine. In their rush to make the city accessible to all through technology and rationalization, the modernists had neglected the lived experience. The Marxist intellectual Henri Lefebvre popularized the narrative of alienation and spectacle in France. In his *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre assessed the retreat of French society into the domestic arena and their passive compliance with mechanization. For example, a 1955 Metro map of Paris advertising unlimited possibilities for urban exploration could be substituted by a map plotting the self-contained trajectories of an actual student. While Marx had critiqued alienation in relation to the capitalist labor process - whereby workers are gauged by the value of their production instead of social worth - Lefebvre extended the paradigm to the social, intellectual and political spheres. He argued that although all modern activity begins as spontaneous and free-form, its transformation into a rational structure eventually hardens into an oppressive ideological system.



Top: *Student Protests, Paris (1968)*

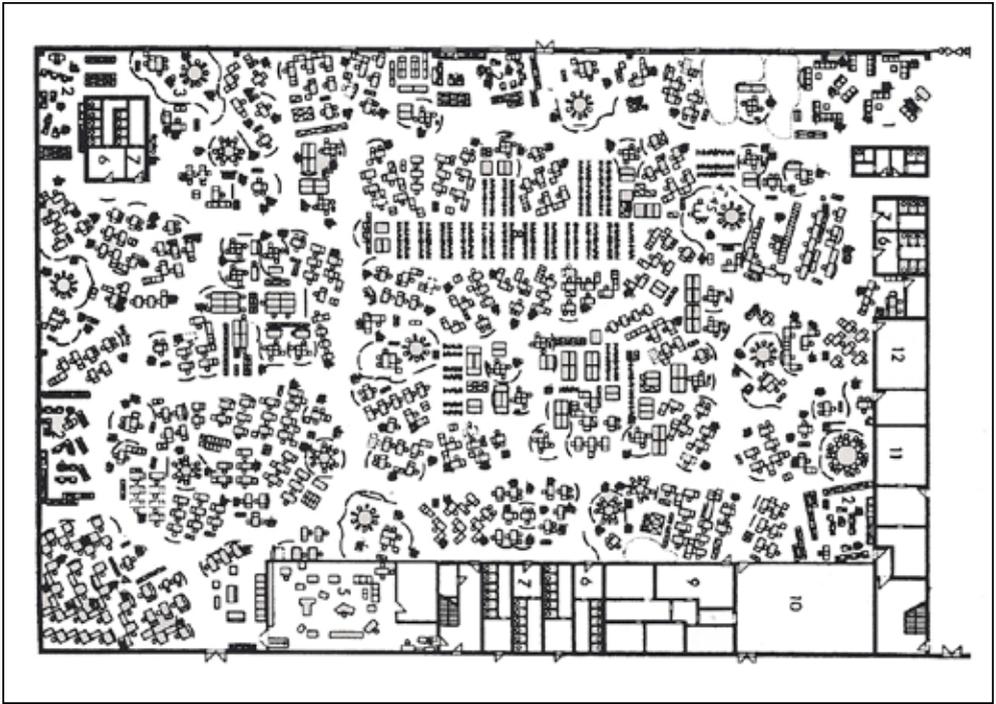
Bottom: Reuters, *Riot Police attempt to break into a house where protesters found shelter, Tehran (June 14, 2009)*

Lefebvre's ideas on reclaiming the social consciousness through festivity filtered seamlessly to anti-establishment figures such as Guy Debord, who envisioned **transcendent moments or situations**. When popular revolt erupted in Paris in May 1968, it constituted a reclaiming of individual passions and desires. Top-down rationalization and mass consumerism were symbolically obstructed by an unlikely grassroots union of intellectuals, student protesters, striking workers and counter-culture movements interested in establishing an alternative social reality. Graffiti proved to be a particularly effective medium for expressing the various sources of urban discontent; one notable inscription sought to highlight all the perceived ills of rationalized urbanism: "*we refuse to be highrised, diplomaed, licensed, inventoried, registered, indoctrinated, suburbanized, sermonized, beaten, telemanipulated, gassed, booked.*" The continuing relevance of Lefebvre's concepts was illustrated in the 2009 Iranian election, from the spontaneous carnival atmosphere beforehand to sheltering from the police afterwards in an elaborate game of urban cat-and-mouse. Amid the chaos a young student exclaimed: "It was as if we were seeing each other for the first time!"



Constant Nieuwenhuys, *New Babylon Sectors superimposed upon a Map of Amsterdam* (1963)

Guy Debord's Situationist International (SI) was founded in 1957 with the single goal of banishing the poverty of urban life. The Situationists developed *psychogeography*, or mapping urban geography according to its emotional effects using the practices of *détournement* (diverting existing resources into new contexts) and *dérive* (drifting in search of varied ambiances). In opposition to top-down rationalization, this was bottom-up urbanism regulated by the individual. While **advocating playful constructed situations as an antidote to the 'spectacle' of capitalist culture**, the Situationists also sought to break down CIAM's rigid functional zoning and **dissolve the boundaries of public and private, work and leisure**. These collective principles (unitary urbanism) formed the basis for New Babylon, the Situationist city. Seeking to subjugate technology, the Dutch artist Constant proposed a city of automated labor-production to eradicate work. Zoning was abolished by raising the entire city on pilotis to free the ground plane for traffic. To allow for infinite expansion and continuous drift, it was laid out as a **network of sectors differentiated by atmospheric or spatial effects, such as yellow light or movable elements**. Thus, situationism as a state of mind offered unprecedented freedom of choice to its users. However, Constant's attempt to supplant one utopia (rationalization) with another (sensory stimulation) left New Babylon vulnerable to the same charges of totalitarianism leveled against modernism.



German Quickborner Team, *Bürolandschaft Model* (1963)

New Babylon was also one of the earliest forms of cybernetic architecture, utilizing integrated high-tech feedback systems to control the flow of information and communication. Constant's attempt to mold architecture into a medium of social contact rather than a machine for living in heralded a new approach to the built environment. Concurrently, Oliver Selfridge's 1958 Pandemonium model mimicking human cognition provided the perfect segue into the post-1960s informational economy. The model introduced the notion of *parallel processing*, where specialized programs called demons analyzed multiple levels of data simultaneously to uncover patterns. Pandemonium's experiment with recasting hierarchical and sequential relationships was mirrored in the 1963 Bürolandschaft model - an office landscaping movement that sought to "expedite communication flow" by mapping information exchange throughout the office and configuring the floor plan accordingly. Organizational variables were controlled by a list of 68 rules. Bürolandschaft, like New Babylon, experienced mixed success. While it disposed of the top-down, rationalized grid depicted in Tati's Play Time, the model also crystallized existing communication flows, creating zones of homogeneity and manifesting new power hierarchies within them. Despite its limitations, the Bürolandschaft constituted a groundbreaking shift from *plans* to *rules* to guide architecture and urbanism – a decisive move towards re-injecting spontaneity into space.



West 8, *Schouwburgplein* (1991)

The paradoxical nature of the 21st century city is epitomized by Mumbai, India, where a sprawling slum dominates the center, juxtaposed against a backdrop of modernist tower blocks comprising the city's business district. Such squatter cities - independent of established spatial norms, entirely self-organized and self-constructed, are a global phenomenon cited by some as the face of the future. While modernists segregated functions, slum-dwellers work from their living rooms. Modernists offered purity, utility and consumerism whereas squatter cities celebrate impurity, hybridity and a post-consumer recycling economy. Thus, 21st century reality bears little resemblance to the futuristic utopias projected by 1960s pop culture shows. **West 8's *Schouwburgplein* in Rotterdam strives heroically to reconcile this gap between the primitive authenticity of grassroots urbanism and the megalomaniac visions of city designers.** The plaza is flexibly designed as an empty stage to view the city, thereby placing the onus for inventive behavior on its users. Its hydraulic (lighting) arms are freely controlled by visitors. This question of control and who retains it is key to future cityscapes. Top-down rationalization has been thoroughly discredited in an age where overlapping urban currents more closely resemble an improvisational jazz ensemble. It may be prudent to **embrace the fragmentation of the landscape** and relinquish greater autonomy to urban dwellers to foster innovation. The difficult business of formulating new rules is only just beginning. ■

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S, M, L, XL

## Bigness, Or the Problem of Large

Arch 531, Fall 2008. Instructor: Robert Somol



### How Rem Koolhaas sought to liberate us from the failures of modernism

*“Only through bigness can architecture dissociate itself from the exhausted artistic/ideological movements of modernism.” - Rem Koolhaas*

Registering at a staggering 1,376 pages, Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau’s architectural tome *S,M,L,XL* (Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large) reinvents the concept of a monograph. The book is far from a traditional treatise on the work of Koolhaas’ firm, the Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA); instead it is **a multilayered creation designed to reflect the “chaotic adventure” that is architecture.** Packed with a range of imagery, personal anecdotes and meditations on the modern metropolis, as well as the graphic design sensibilities of Bruce Mau and a healthy dose of offbeat humor, *S,M,L,XL* appears to invert Mies’ refrain “Less is more.” Despite the book’s seemingly disparate collection of components, its overarching message emerges through its main organizational tool: size.

So what does bigness mean to Koolhaas and what implications does it have for us? Koolhaas’ interest in bigness was already apparent in his earlier book, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*. In the critically acclaimed manifesto he analyzes the revolutionary experiment in bigness that took place – and was initially overlooked – in New York. For Koolhaas, this out-of-control bigness meant that architecture had morphed from an art into “the brutal skyward extrusion of whatever site the developer had managed to assemble” (p. 88, DNY).

While this sight may have been jarring to others, Koolhaas instead saw the potential for a break with traditional urban development, and a new wave of modernization. “In Bigness”, he says, “Issues of composition, scale, proportion, detail are now moot...” (p. 500, S,M,L,XL). S,M,L,XL is thus Koolhaas’ paean to the 21st century metropolis. His belief that bigness is an utter break from the past leads him to seek a new post-post-modernist paradigm for architecture. Leading by example, Koolhaas uses both full-color format and the “horizontal stacking” of his XL book to embody his exposition on bigness, altering our perception of a monograph in the process.

### **“Freedom from Context”**

Koolhaas defines bigness as a modern revolution that began over a hundred years ago with “conceptual breakthroughs and supporting technologies.” Specifically he points to the new mechanical relationships made possible by the elevator, and the distance between the core and building envelope that allows the façade to hide what goes on inside. Both innovations render aspects of classical architecture redundant. The sheer size of big architecture, he argues, means it becomes an autonomous, independent domain for its inhabitants. When employed on a grand scale as it was in New York, bigness results in freedom from urban context and competition with the classical city.

The condition created by this break is the tabula rasa, or blank slate, for a project uncompromised by context. The power of bigness is such that it can compete with, represent and supplant the classical city. Koolhaas argues that bigness should not be feared because it facilitates the activities of urbanism and simultaneously protects against the unchecked ambition of architects through its complexity. As bigness must depend on a large team of experts to become reality, the process becomes “impersonal” and releases the architect from his starring role.

In his chapter on Globalization, Koolhaas insinuates that future architects will be less equipped with the knowledge to operate in international contexts, and will see a further decline in their standing. He goes so far as to predict an “Armageddon– the violent birth of a new architecture (p. 368, S,M,L,XL).” He touts bigness as the final bastion for the profession: “Bigness, through its very independence of context, is the one architecture that can survive, even exploit, the now-global condition of the tabula rasa” (p. 515, S,M,L,XL). Although he decries architects generally for being in a state of denial, Koolhaas hails the

American architects who began the large-scale movement as the true avant-garde; their European counterparts meanwhile remain entrenched in ideology and historicism:

“USA: postmodernism triumphant

Europe: historicism on the rise – the “new” suspended, maybe forever

USA: freedom from context

Europe: context is all

USA: everything big

Europe: everything small” (p. 518, S,M,L,XL)

It is all well for Koolhaas to condemn the European mindset for their reluctance to embrace bigness, but how does he answer their complaint that bigness devoid of urban context has rendered cities soulless, ironically, the same charge he has leveled at modernism? To get to the roots of European skepticism and Koolhaas’ response, two other chapters of his book, *The Typical Plan* (M) and *The Generic City* (XL), are worth examining more closely.

### **The Typical Plan and The Generic City**

By *Typical Plan*, Koolhaas refers to the modern American invention of a standardized floor plan, used to best effect in large office towers. To Koolhaas, the *Typical Plan* represents a triumph over modernist formalism because it represents the most abstract program possible. By its mere emptiness, simply “a floor, a core, a perimeter, and a minimum of columns,” it embraces all possibilities. It is the “End of Architectural History,” a vision of a “post-architectural” future. The *Typical Plan* lacks the control and specificity that characterize modernist architecture, and therefore projects an air of neutrality. It is characterized not by quality but by quantity and repetition to create a critical mass.

Europe’s resistance to typical plans stems from identity, and the *Typical Plan*’s perceived lack of it. “In Europe, there are no typical plans,” says Koolhaas. “The one really new architectural subject this century has been endlessly denigrated in the name of ideology – its occupants ‘slaves,’ its environment ‘faceless,’ its accumulations ‘ugly.’” He goes on to castigate European obsession with historic substance and atypical plans, lamenting that the *Typical Plan*, “an environment that demanded nothing and gave everything,” became a byword for the loss of identity and character in modern cities.

This brings us to “The Generic City,” Koolhaas’ essay on identity and context at the XL scale. The chapter features another attack from Koolhaas on efforts to preserve the past at the expense of developing the future. He defines the Generic City as a new urban model stripped of the need for collective sharing of the past. Opposition to the Generic City in Europe stems from efforts to cling to historical identity and a shared past in the face of a new urban reality. Koolhaas dismisses this as an outdated concept. **Instead of concentrating on the potential “loss” of identity, he prefers to concentrate on the advantages of tabula rasa.** The Generic City is a stable model to accommodate the current population explosion, and he lists its many virtues: “The Generic City is the city liberated from the captivity of center, from the straightjacket of identity...it is nothing but a reflection of present need and present ability. It is the city without history. It is big enough for everybody. It is easy. It does not need maintenance.” (p. 1249, S,M,L,XL)

The genius of The Generic City, as with the Typical Plan, is repetition, meaning a single module that can be repeated over and over again. This would be the reality of post-architecture. He envisions a future city in which our primary residences will be in blocks of hotels, designed in the style of the office building, which can double up as shopping malls and from which we can work. There would be no need for a public domain, or for “bureaucratic planning.” In deference to Walter Benjamin, he also discusses the notion of aura in the Generic City: “In an age that does not generate new aura, the value of established aura skyrockets.” By established aura he refers to existing icons, such as the Eiffel Tower.

In describing this somewhat apocalyptic vision of the future metropolis, Koolhaas appears to be humoring, indeed mocking the arguments that drive hostility to bigness. None of the new cities currently emerging almost overnight “at incredible speed, and conceived at an even more incredible pace” (p. 1260, S,M,L,XL) in Asia and the Middle East reflect this Armageddon-style ending of the classical city. All show evidence of planning (though it *has* been criticized as lacking) and all strive to showcase iconic architecture and create public domains for the population. The main distinction from the current classical cities is that they seek to create *new* identities rather than preserve existing ones.

The essay points out the constraints that come with the desire to preserve historical identity. **Identity centralizes; it stifles innovation and expansion through fear of loss.** By illustrating the absurdity of predicting the nature of the future metropolis solely on current trends, Koolhaas rejects the politics of identity as a force behind architecture. His argument for a new paradigm centers on his belief that modernism as a movement has become too traditional, too institutionalized, *too failed*, to deal with the reality of a new global urban condition.

### “A New Newness”

Koolhaas declares: “Modernism’s alchemistic promise – to transform quantity into quality through abstraction and repetition – has been a failure, a hoax; magic that didn’t work...A collective shame in the wake of this fiasco has left a massive crater in our understanding of modernity and modernization” (p. 961, S,M,L,XL). Thus, modernism’s attempt – and failure – to create a new beginning has resulted in a retreat from all attempts at a new beginning, to the detriment of architecture and urbanism. This retreat explains urbanism’s current preoccupation with order, permanence and the virtues of the classical city in a world where impermanence, uncontrolled chaos and new modes of living are the order of the day. Koolhaas stresses the urgency for a new beginning now that “pervasive urbanization has modified the urban condition beyond recognition” and “‘the’ city no longer exists” (p. 963, S,M,L,XL).

Koolhaas implies that blame for the failure of modernism falls on the narcissistic generation of architects; architects with too much power, ambition, and averseness to the “regime of complexity that mobilizes the full intelligence of architecture and its related fields.” Bernard Tschumi is more specific in apportioning blame in his book, *Architecture and Disjunction*. In the 1970s, he says, architects “re-introduced political discourse into architecture, advocated a return to pre-industrial forms of society... and still others cynically took the analysis of style and ideology by Barthes, Eco or Baudrillard...and injected meaning into their buildings artificially, through a collage of historical and metaphorical elements.”

Koolhaas claims that bigness will reassert the value of team over individual architect, relieving the architect of his powers and thus assuring ideological neutrality. This is an ironic proclamation when Koolhaas himself has thrived in a global environment and his individual star power is greater than ever. Instead of making the process impersonal, bigness has only appeared to elevate the brand of Koolhaas. His recent large-scale commissions, CCTV for example, also cast doubt on whether the “pure chill of megalomania” (that bigness was meant to negate) is absent from his projects.

In conclusion, S,M,L,XL is successful in teasing out the inadequacies of our current thinking on urbanization. Koolhaas makes a convincing case for bigness as a liberating force from the modernist polemic concerned with history and context. He provokes us to ponder whether “bigness” will actually supersede “architecture” and “the city.” He is primarily concerned with suggesting the possibilities and potential of new thinking. The book itself, aided by Bruce Mau, exemplifies new thinking: through the chaos of its format, the colorful collage of words and images, it defies the stereotype of bland generality associated with

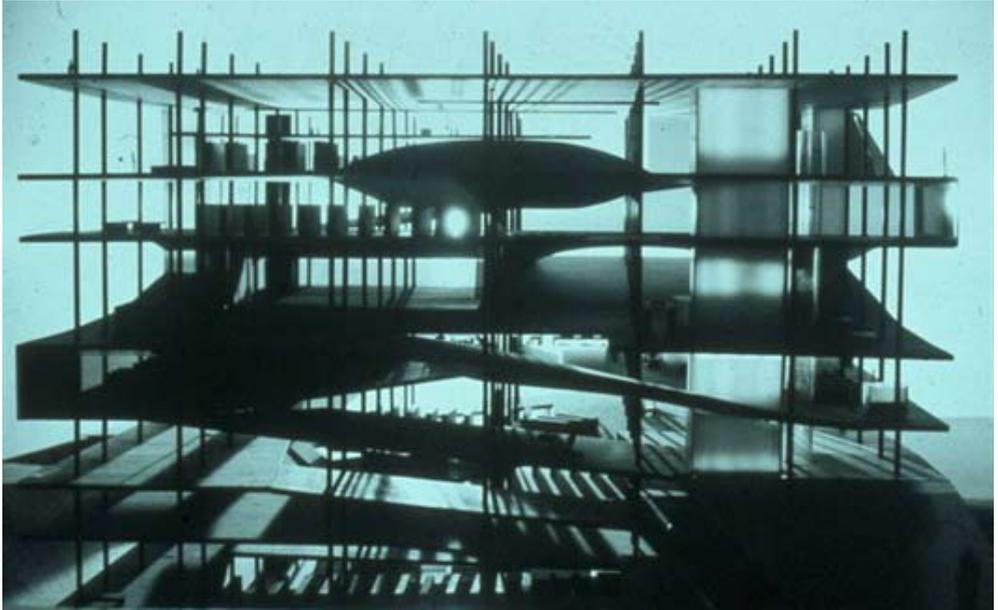
modernism. The erratic nature of the text however is a metaphor for the unresolved tensions, even contradictions, which are present throughout. In his essay on Globalization for example, Koolhaas writes that “globalization exponentially depletes the imagination” but also that “globalization exponentially enriches the imagination” (p. 367, *S,M,L,XL*). To cite another case: **modernism’s failure to convert quantity into quality through repetition and abstraction does not preclude him from touting the virtues of the Typical Plan and Generic City.** There is not enough explanation on why repetition and abstraction will work the second time around. Koolhaas is unapologetic. “Contradictions are not avoided,” he writes in his introduction to *S,M,L,XL*, “the book can be read in any way.” ■

### ***S,M,L,XL***

Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, The Monacelli Press, 2nd ed. 1998

1376pp, ISBN 9781885254863

Dim. 7.5 x 2.9 x 9.5; Wt. 6.1 lbs



Rem Koolhaas, *Jussieu Libraries* (1992), Strategy of the Void, S,M,L,XL

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## 2 Genealogy

or what Nietzsche said about history:  
yours is the only version that matters

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## Architecture

## History, Precedent, Repetition

Arch 531, Fall 2008. Instructor: Robert Somol



Plan and perspective of the Acropolis at Athens in *Philip Johnson: History, Genealogy, Historicism*

In *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, the influential post-war critic Colin Rowe stretches back his narrative five hundred years to Palladio, firmly situating modern architecture in a historical context. Rowe links Palladio's classical tradition to the modern architecture of Le Corbusier by pointing out their similar adherence to mathematical configuration and compositional rules in Villa Malcontenta and Garches respectively: "In other words, free plan is exchanged for free section" (p. 11). His thesis proves to be one of the opening rounds in the twentieth century battle between the ancients and the moderns, so to speak. **The debate centered on the identity of the modern movement as a *rebellion* against the historicism of the 19th century, thereby requiring the use of architectural language that is not steeped in past traditions.** The post-modernist movement, in response, sought to move beyond modernism by reestablishing the validity of utilizing historical styles and precedents in architecture, albeit in an ironic way. The architecture of the 21st century (made possible by technological innovation) aspires to be risky and generate unique geometries and use materials as they have never been used before. But 21st century architecture's proclivity towards mimesis and iconography also reveals comfort with repetition.

Before Colin Rowe, Walter Benjamin considered the question: is the repetition of a form in the way of mechanical production a destruction of its authenticity, its aura? In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, he writes, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be...The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (p. 220). Benjamin concludes that although the reproduction is inferior because it lacks the aura of the original, he is excited about the potential uses of mechanical reproduction, particularly in how they confer power to the masses, negating the need for specialist knowledge, and proving useful against political fascists: “By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object produced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition.”

Gilles Deleuze distinguishes between such exact, or mechanical, copies and distorted copies, finding the latter to be far more compelling. In *Plato and the Simulacrum*, he traces the history of the term “simulacrum,” or representation of likeness, and examines philosophy’s treatment of it. It was Plato who first cast image-making into two types: an iconic copy, which is an exact reproduction, and a phantasmic simulacra (semblance) which is distorted but can appear faithful to the original depending on the spectator’s viewpoint. Since the Platonic model extols traits such as Justice and Courage which are singularly understood and resistant to abstractions, Plato views simulacra as “false copies” that distort the truth and idea of the original. Like Benjamin, Plato accepts iconic copies at having at least some productive function, but he believes simulacra are worthless. Deleuze redefines simulacrum in the context of aesthetics, arguing that it “contains a positive power” by destroying the linear Socratic hierarchy (user, producer, imitator) associated with icons. To Deleuze, a simulacrum is not simply a “copy of a copy” or a “degraded icon” as the philosophers of old saw it, but the essence of modernity, where the nature of the original is changed to forge something new: “Modernity is defined by the power of the simulacrum” (p. 55). In Deleuze’s view repetition is the foundation of the modern movement.

This concept of repetition through *interpretation* is echoed by Michael Hays. In *Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form*, he writes, “Each architectural object places itself in a specific situation in the world, so to speak, and its manner of doing this constrains what can be done with it in interpretation” (p. 272). As a solution to having historical contingency but remaining autonomous from it, Hays introduces the concept

of “Resistant authority.” He uses the example of Mies who, by continuous repetition and refinement in changing contexts, manages to obscure the historical origins of his work: “From the skyscraper project of 1922 to the Barcelona Pavilion, Mies’s architectural program was a persistent writing of a few themes...He reused them in changing circumstances; he modified and refined them over time. This sort of repetition renders the issue of origins or first causes unproblematic, one arbitrary *cantus firmus* being imitated and repeated so many times as to lose its primacy” (p. 282). In this manner Mies ensures the autonomy of architecture, even as he produces architecture that is a cultural product based on history. However in “Five Easy Mieses”, RE Somol shows how this can also go awry by analyzing the attempts of prominent architects in an international competition at IIT to preserve Mies’ legacy in their designs. As a result of their goal of seeking preservation, they were unable to achieve the transformation in state (through repetition) that Mies was so successful at.

In *Philip Johnson: History, Genealogy, Historicism*, Craig Owens proves that Mies’ method of repetition also applies to Philip Johnson’s Glass House, which is often regarded as the original post-modernist building because of Johnson’s emphasis on tradition. Owens claims instead that it is the ultimate icon of modernism, taking copies of historical elements and recombining them in such a manner that the “earlier meaning or purpose are obscured or lost.” He writes: “To view the Glass House as either Miesian or romantic-classicist would be to situate it in terms of its logical continuity, a tradition. To see it, as Johnson encourages us to, as the result of an interplay of multiple, overlapping forces, is to perceive its fundamental modernism - original and traditional; autonomous and dependent (p. 10).” Having argued that Johnson’s Glass House was not necessarily historicist in nature, Owens considers whether “genealogy” is a more appropriate characterization of Johnson’s work. Nietzsche defines genealogy as a gradual progression without a fixed origin, and therefore conceives of it as being “in opposition” to history. To Owens, this is a perfect characterization of Johnson’s work: through repetition, it proves modern architecture’s debt to historical precedents without becoming historicist in nature.

The prevalent anti-historicist mood of modernism is also reflected in *Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential Sign* by Peter Eisenman. In his essay, Eisenman disputes Rowe’s assessment of Le Corbusier, arguing that Rowe’s thinking was colored by his humanist attitude to architecture. Eisenman instead concludes that Le Corbusier’s inclusion of self-referential statements, which he defines as “an idea only about itself” in his architecture (using the example of Maison Dom-ino)

is uniquely modernist because it is independent of human context or function: “When the column locations act to reinforce the original A B relationship which in itself is so clear as not to need reinforcement, one interprets this as an intention to underscore a condition of being that is as significant as redundancy. The redundancy of the mark thereby signals that there is something present other than either the geometry or the function of the column or slab.” (p. 117)

In *S,M,L,XL*, Koolhaas envisions a world beyond modernism and post-modernism. Repetition is essential to his vision. The invention of the Typical Plan, he writes, is the “End of Architectural History,” heralding a “post-architectural” future where anyone can create architecture through repetition. By this he means that a single module that could be repeated over and over again, and for this an architect would not be required. The Typical Plan lacks the control and specificity that characterize modernist architecture, and therefore projects an air of neutrality. It is characterized not by quality but by quantity and repetition to create a critical mass.

Most recently, architects have begun to revisit the question of repetition and historical precedent in the 21st century. In *Real What?* Zago argues for a new discourse on authenticity, using tectonics as an example of erroneous definitions of the term: “The association made between authenticity and traditional tectonic expression is an unfortunate legacy of postmodernism – an effort to recuperate a condition in which resonance and integrity were givens rather than questions (p. 102).” Zago seeks to define what is real, but cannot use the term authenticity because he feels it is too weighted a word. Therefore he coins the term “Postironic Authenticity” as a way to overcome the traditional associations of the word authenticity. He believes the way to formulate this new authenticity is to “reexamine the nature and potential of technique” in order to “configure geometries and materials in new relationships.”

Collectively, these conceptualizations involve utilizing existing knowledge to develop new configurations, showing that architectural history and precedent are the basis on which alternative futures for architecture are projected. And yet as W.J. Neutlings notes in *On Laziness, Recycling, Sculptural Mathematics and Ingenuity*, architects fearing the dead weight of iconic copies on their field continue to attempt to flee history: “The history of architecture contains an incredible wealth of concepts and typologies. But architecture seems to be one of the few disciplines in which new developments seem not to rely on earlier achievements.” ■

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Toyo Ito and SANAA  
Red School, White School

Arch 585, Fall 2009. Instructor: Penelope Dean



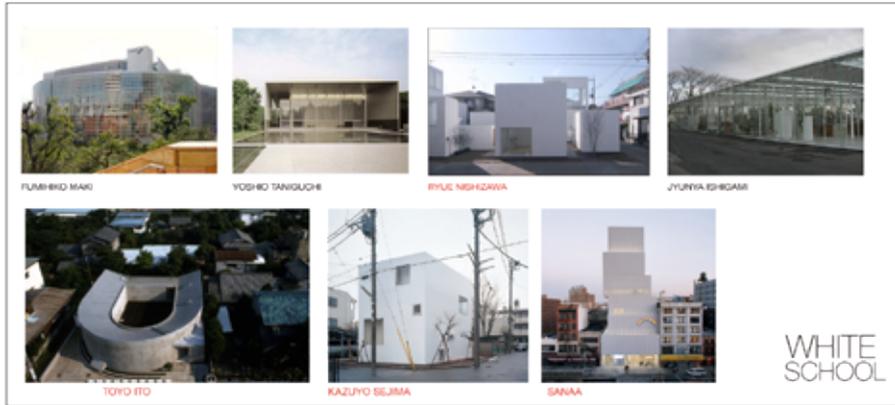
Toyo Ito



Ryue Nishizawa and Kazuyo Sejima

For decades, Toyo Ito has held the honorific of “Father of Japanese Architecture,” inspiring two successive generations of designers with his light diaphanous spaces. Ito himself worked in the office of the Metabolist architect Kiyonori Kikutake<sup>1</sup> after his graduation from Tokyo University, before establishing his own practice just six years later, going on to mentor many of Japan’s rising stars. Among Ito’s high-profile protégés are Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa of SANAA who met during their period at Toyo Ito Associates before establishing SANAA in 1995.

Following the collapse of the Metabolist movement in the 1970s, Ito became interested in more modest spaces that “expressed abstraction from physical reality” and reduced “structure and materiality to zero.”<sup>2</sup> Ito’s role in shaping “The White School” of Japanese architecture, defined by Tokyo University architectural historian Terunobo Fujimori as “celebral, cool, light, sharp, transparent and machined”<sup>3</sup> is well-documented – beginning with his celebrated White U House in 1976, a minimal sanctuary with seamless white interiors. Fujimori defines the other recognized school of Japanese architecture as the more “subversive Red School” which is concerned with the “visceral, warm, heavy, thick, rough and handmade.”



Sejima and Nishizawa - only the most high-profile adherents of Ito's White school - not only inherited Ito's minimalist agenda, but sought to advance it to a new level. Their works have garnered critical acclaim for level of refinement, bordering on "ethereal." Paradoxically however, Ito himself has since abandoned his own theoretical approach of generating weightless spaces for a nomadic population. Fujimori explains the transformation in the context of his relationship to Sejima: "Ito's sensitivity is that of a centimeter and Sejima's sensitivity is of a millimeter. Toyo Ito cannot keep up with Sejima and he is no longer interested in White school architecture."<sup>4</sup> He adds, "Since the turn of the millennium Toyo Ito seems to have abandoned purest White for a trajectory through ever-deepening Red."<sup>5</sup> In a twist on the expected evolution of the master-disciple relationship, it is the mentor figure, Ito that has sought to distinguish himself from his followers, and the mentee, Sejima, who carries forward his original disciplinary agenda. In 1998, Ito published an essay strongly criticizing the "anemic minimalism" of new Japanese architecture, while admitting his own culpability for the state of affairs: "I am aware that due to my advocacy of lightness, ephemerality and transparency, I must bear some of the responsibility for this syndrome among my colleagues born only twenty years after me."<sup>6</sup>



In reality, Ito may have been referring more pointedly to SANAA, the Whitest of his architectural “children.” Other prominent designers that have passed through Toyo Ito Associates have taken alternative “red” approaches, from Klein Dytham Architecture’s (kDa) “pop” architecture to Mikangumi’s vernacular “street” approach of using found objects such as wire hangers to project a rougher ambience in their installations. Akihisa Hirata in particular can perhaps be clearly identified as a “Red School” adherent with his interest in primitive architectural forms.

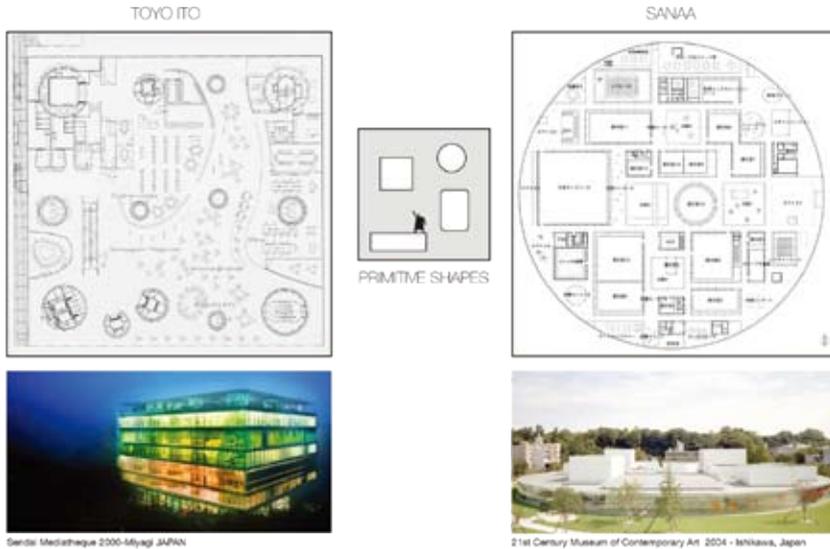
### The Transition: Sendai Mediatheque

Since 2000, and the landmark completion of the Sendai Mediatheque, Ito has displayed a growing engagement with the “forceful physicality of the structural and material dimensions of architecture” of the “Red School.” In an interview, he admits to alternating between a conflicting duality of “pure, modernist spaces” and “organic, three-dimensionally curved spaces” throughout his career. His success at Sendai



Mediatheque proved to be a watershed moment: “I was going back and forth until in Sendai Mediatheque I was able to integrate both tendencies for the first time. I created horizontal and vertical, so-called “Dom-ino” spaces using flat slabs and randomly arranged tubes, while giving the tubes themselves organic configurations.”<sup>7</sup> The project was “technologically sophisticated”, “primitive” and “both a light and a heavy construction” all-in-one. Ito was able to use the most modernist of concepts, the Dom-ino, to create non-uniform spaces with a “ripple effect.”<sup>8</sup> The resulting fluidity increased his desire to transcend the limitations of modernism with physicality rather than lightness.

Some examples of Ito’s recent transition to structural, material and organic forms include Island City Central Park, Taichung Metropolitan Opera House, and Torre Vieja. Instead of the pure geometry expressed by SANAA, Ito seeks “a dynamic geometry, such as spirals and complex three-dimensional surfaces.”<sup>9</sup> His newfound agenda is an extension of structural engineer Cecil Balmond’s view that “geometry is the locus of movement,” and dynamic structure is the pathway to generating dynamic spaces. Sejima, on her part, declines to identify an explicit theoretical approach to the discipline, preferring instead to immerse herself in the process of design and approach



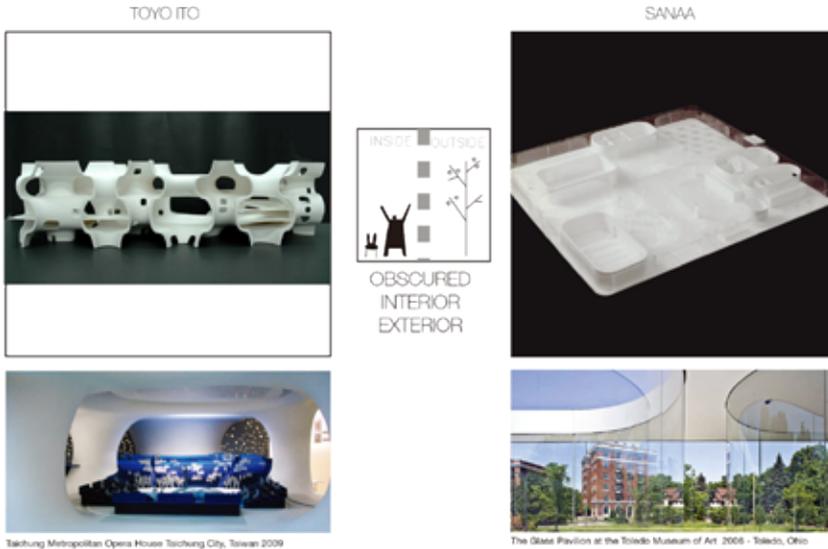
each project on its own merits.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly Nishizawa reveals in the same interview that their project approach evolves from initial study models; in contrast, Ito's process involves a technologically intensive lead study, which results in a model closer to the end of the design process.

### Parallels

While Ito and SANAA have diverged in recent years, many of their projects share similar formal, volumetric and urbanistic attributes. Some of these include:

- **Form: Primitive shapes**

Sendai's use of abstract tubes generated floor plates with dynamic and open public spaces. Similarly, SANAA's 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art at Kanazawa is a perfect circle, with no discernible front or back, which allows it to be approached from every direction.



- **Volume: *Three-dimensional curvature***

Ito's White U House and SANAA's Toledo Glass Museum both display a continuity of space made possible by the three-dimensional curvature of various interior volumes. The ambient environment within White U is reflected within the connections of double glass walls of the Toledo Glass Museum.

- **Urbanism: *Blurring Interior-Exterior***

The Forum for Music, Dance and Visual Culture at Ghent uses "tubular spaces" and a displaced grid system with stacked plates to generate a continuous urbanism that integrates interior and exterior. This concept was repeated in the new Taichung Metropolitan Opera House in Taiwan also. Similarly the Toledo Glass Museum uses transparency and sight lines to maintain a constant relationship with the exterior courtyards. A similar approach of obscuring the boundary between interior and exterior is used for all these.



- **Landscape: *Undulating Floor***

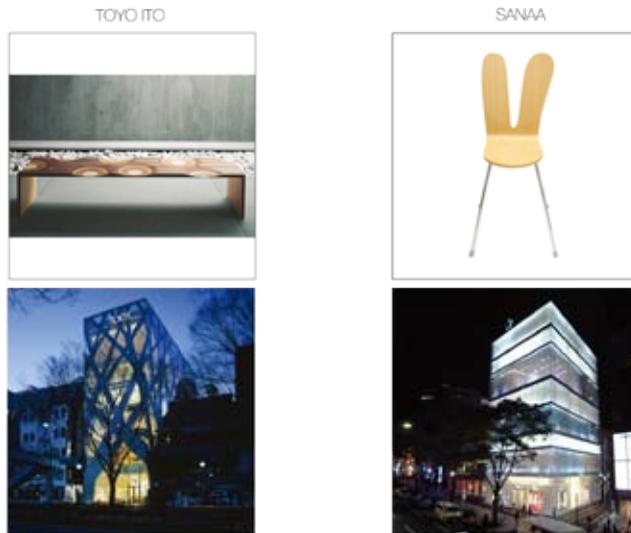
Ito's 2006 Exhibition *The New "Real" in Architecture* was designed with a dynamic undulating dunescape, a feature that is reflected in SANAA's Rolex Learning Center.

### Contrasts

The clear contrasts between some of Ito's newly "pink" or "red" projects, and increasingly white SANAA projects are as follows:

- **Material: *Physicality - Dematerialization***

Ito's collaboration with Cecil Balmond on the Serpentine Gallery is especially clear in the structure of the project; although the pavilion is white in color, the spiraling squares provide a clear physical presence and spatial tension to the pavilion. In contrast, SANAA's free-form canopy is made of aluminum supported by 115 stainless steel columns. It is "an essay in dematerialization."<sup>11</sup>



- **Surface: *Fluid-Static***

Ito's Ripple Bench is predicated on fluidity in design. The SANAA Chair design appears static in comparison.

- **Skin: *Structural Ornament - Transparency***

Ito's recent design for TODs department store utilizes structural ornament as a surface treatment on a minimalist box to provide the appearance of a heavier exterior. SANAA's DIOR design suggests lightness through transparency and filtering light.

- **Structure: *Algorithm - Pure geometry***

Ito's Selfridges project uses mathematical rules devised by Balmond as the basis for its structural system of angled columns. The structural dynamism is in stark contrast to SANAA's New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, which stacks minimalist boxes with a simple structure to explore transparency and access through setbacks.



At the heart of Ito and SANAA's divergence in architectural thought is their concept of the 21st century man. Ito no longer believes in lightness and transparency as the soothing answer to the "unstable equilibriums" of the modern metropolis. Instead he believes that there is a need to "reassess the relationship between materials and people in order to **reclaim a more fully human sense experience.**" Sejima and Nishizawa on the other hand continue to believe in and advance Ito's old paradigm. But for how long? The historian Fujimori speculates: "Sejima has the energy for this right now but she might quit the school later on." ■



- 1 Ourossoff, Nicolas. "Inside His Exteriors," *New York Times* (July 8, 2009)
- 2 *Design Addict Magazine*, December 2007 Issue, p. 32
- 3 Daniell, Thomas. Minority Report: Osamu Ishiyama's 12 Architectural Visions, *Artscape International*
- 4 *Design Addict Magazine*, December 2007 Issue, p. 32
- 5 ibid
- 6 Daniell, Thomas. "Toyo Ito: The New 'Real' in Architecture," *Artscape International*
- 7 Interview with Toyo Ito: invisible process, *A + U*, June 2005 Issue, p. 8
- 8 Sakamoto, Tomoko. *Toyo Ito: Sendai Mediatheque*, p. 15 (2003)
- 9 Interview with Toyo Ito: invisible process, *A + U*, June 2005 Issue, p. 10
- 10 SANAA, *El Croquis*, p. 24
- 11 Hill, Christopher. The Dematerialization of Form: Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, *Detail Magazine* (2009),

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2012 Young Architects Architectural League Prize  
 Hard Science, Soft Science

Arch 587, Fall 2012. Instructor: Robert Somol



Left to right: MMX Studio, Bureau Spectacular / Jimenez Lai, WEATHERS / Sean Lally LLC

The theme for the 2012 Young Architects competition “No Precedent” signals emergent practitioners’ lack of interest in historical narratives as a way to position their projects. As Architecture’s escape from history is only ever illusory, it is productive to realize what the illusion serves: namely a reaction to the present dominant trends in the field. The operative techniques and methodologies used by the five winning architects are meant to result in work that is “unfounded, ungrounded, and suspect,” therefore **standing in opposition to truth and fact**. If architectural precedent as we know it is no longer on the table, then an alternative genealogy must present itself.

*Architecture is an art and a science.* The cliché has so often been used to explicate the discipline to those outside it that it has become deeply embedded into the architectural consciousness. If architects can no longer escape this framework due to its long history, they must learn to situate themselves within it as best they can. With everyone largely in agreement about half of the equation, namely that architecture is an art, the debate then centers on how scientific architecture must be. Under the guise of sustainability and the green movement as well as algorithmic form, the last decade has been very scientific indeed.

And neither has this phenomenon been limited to architecture. The elevation of the scientific method as the only tool with credibility available to disciplines today has accelerated the ascension of the hard sciences and engineering in the eyes of the public and the labeling of fields lacking mathematical rigor and quantifiability (ie. the social sciences) with the pejorative *soft sciences*. As a result every discipline, from economics to psychology, has sought to remake itself into a “harder” science.

Yet it is precisely in the arena of soft science that the five architects position themselves. In other words, they are driven by *sensibility*, pushing off of the existing paradigm that relies on factual research and empiricism. In this sense the eclecticism of the work (a reflection itself of the state of the field today) is remedied by its collective embrace of soft science along a spectrum of scientific-ness. Their designs incorporate everyday human behavior, relationships and environments; these are achieved through representational strategies such as diagrams and cartoons, as well as effects that are atmospheric as well as material.

Both MMX Studio’s “iterative compositions of everyday materials, such as rope or credit cards” and “origami surfaces” to STPMJ’s furniture that can be “folded into briefcases” innovatively merge architectural techniques like folding with technological prototyping to address culture. Two other architects, Sean Lally of WEATHERS and Michael Szivos of SOFTLab concern themselves with the creation of metaphorically soft environments and literally soft sculpture or objects respectively to enhance the experiential aspects of space through temporal elements. Finally, Jimenez Lai and Ksutsui’s work represents two highly divergent approaches to the social: the former through cartoon drawings that tell stories and project new worlds and the latter by linking social structures to geometry.

Taking a page out of the feminist playbook, architecture’s proud reclamation of the term soft science offers a productive opportunity to reinvent itself as a field. By pivoting away from the hard to the soft, architecture would manage to cast off in one fell swoop its multiple albatrosses associated with the natural sciences that have overtaken the field today. Too much to hope for? Post-modernism did it on modernism. ■



## 3 Polemicism

or why a little irreverence never hurt anyone  
and is a Good Samaritan thing to do

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## Requiem

## Complexity and Control in Architecture

Arch 587, Fall 2012. Instructor: Robert Somol



### Why Sanford Kwinter is in two minds on how to save architecture and the city

*“Architecture at its most potent is performative: it is the concrete manifestation or deployment of a design matrix or servo-mechanical diagram.”* - Sanford Kwinter

The problem with cities, according to Sanford Kwinter’s *Requiem: For the City at the End of the Millennium*, is not that they are dead, or even dying, but that they are not what they used to be, and neither can we be entirely sure what they are now. The book largely ignores the city in its concrete-object sense, save for a few offhand references to the redundancy of classical concepts of urbanism. Instead it concerns itself with the **city as a historical, cultural, social, and material archive and its modern day expression as a set of unseen forces.** Kwinter both sounds dire warnings against these modern rationalizing forces, or *regimes of control*, and exhorts us to comprehend and engage them. In this dizzying dance of approach-avoidance lies the schizophrenia at the heart of *Requiem*: it seeks to simultaneously expose the “invisible hands” at work in the world for resistance purposes even as it desires to elevate architecture itself into an invisible hand that incorporates its environment.

The book is therefore a stand-in for architecture; its design embodies the aspiration towards invisibility, with a cover made from “plastified, dirt-resistant white Comolux paper stock” and a subtitle that is silkscreened over it in “white matte ink.” Similarly, its content fulfills Kwinter’s epistemological framing of architecture as “research, activism”

and “an affair of thought, speculation, ideas.” Organized in a non-hierarchical manner to eradicate difference, *Requiem* is composed of nine essays of varying length and a short introduction by Thomas Daniell, who affirms Kwinter’s self-image as “agent provocateur and conscientious objector.” The subject matter is as eclectic as a rereading of Centre Pompidou through Deleuzian concepts, to a lament on architecture’s wasted opportunity to reshape consciousness itself after 9/11. **Part autobiography, part manifesto, part apologia, everything in this diminutive book is a multiplicity.**

Kwinter’s witty essay titles are none-too-subtle hints of his extreme ambivalence towards modernizing forces. In *How I Learned to Stop Worrying, Yet Still Not Quite Love the Bomb*, he equates the nuclear bomb painted with a happy face in Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove* to the threat posed by a marriage of *market liberalization* and *globalization* in the contemporary era: “assuredly there is a war going on today – an invisible, insidious and savage war that cannot be stopped.” In what amounts to a semantic argument at best, he asserts that markets are no longer social; instead societies “exist as an adjunct to the market.” Yet a scant ten pages later, attempts by mall owners to further embed commerce into social activity are denoted as “fantastic contemporary transformations” and **the bigger threat is “half-baked and imagination stunted mediocrity at the hands of internet geeks”** from whom we must safeguard this future. What happened in between? Kwinter’s *personal involvement* in overseeing the information architecture is enough to convince him of the productive potential of these developments and displace his ire onto the geeks. The newly envisioned social-economic apparatus allows us to function as “servo-machines” in which the production of wealth is automated through our communications and leisure activities – a sort of commerce-driven realization of the Situationist New Babylon constituting a fourth dimension of the universe. The logic seems intelligible only when conceived as **a collapse of irony and earnestness.**

At other times, Kwinter erects straw men in order to advocate for a divergent approach, for example claiming that there is a “campaign to impose a single market.” Who is running this insidious campaign? The IMF? Lloyd Blankfein? It helps to specify your bogeyman, if you’re going to put him on trial. He argues that our task should be to allow “indigenous forms of capitalist organization”, and that “interconnected economies do not mean identical ones – they never have and never will.” Well yes, who would disagree? The world economy has always been understood as an amalgam of local economies. His other antagonisms include “disintermediation processes” which, through self-directed communication technologies, remove middlemen from transactions and

by association the "urban matrix" of shopkeepers, cafes, taxis that form our cities. Perhaps he would be less averse if it were described in his own terms: creative destruction as analogous to revolutions in science where the discovery of anomalies triggers paradigm shifts, necessitating the replacement of old economic systems with the new – and the resulting potential for an ever more creative cultural milieu.

Kwinter's distate for *laissez-faire* is better understood as an extension of his opposition to self-organization, or rather a fear of the automatization or routinization of life, a point that is made clearer in *Urbanism: An Archivist's Art*. In the pre-war modernist city, he writes, the "technology of rational administration" meant social space was ordered by principles of labor, which ensured a parallel knowledge archive. In the last four decades, in contrast, automatic unregulated data processing has transformed the archive into one that reflects "serendipity, miscellany and diminished authoritarian unity of social existence." **But this newfound complexity, he suggests, has led to a surrender to these forces, and thereby a lack of systematic reflection and design intention.** Applying old methods to master new conditions is futile: an exhaustive inventory of the city today would yield incomplete knowledge, like the parable of the three blind men and the elephant, each concluding that it is a different object. A holistic approach requires "identification of the forces and directions and regimes that are currently shaping developments, not the...substrates upon which these historical forces play" - presumably to engage them. But his next essay, *Clouds*, reverts to avoidance, attacking Cloud computing as yet another manifestation of a system of "disembodied wills that direct and organize" our lives. The dance must remain forever ongoing to stay ahead of tomorrow's nascent regimes.

**Although Kwinter is architecture's leading warrior-protector against external regimes of control, you never know when he will without warning turn his weapon on his fellow defenders and engage in some casual fratricide (or sororicide – it's gender neutral).** In *The Improbable Multiversity*, he takes aim at the coterie that made up the core of ANY - of which he was part - as an "overly self-assured mandarin group less interested in finding out what marvelous and unexpected things were out there in the wide world than in providing a *narrow, paternalistic example* for their hosts to follow." He is excoriating of ANY's inability to listen and to self-transform, singling out Peter Eisenman, Saskia Sassen and Anthony Vidler for their advocacy of the "imagined virtues of discipline-bound expertise." Instead he wisely aligns himself with Koolhaas – always a safe choice in times of uncertainty. This does not mean his underlying reasoning is not cogently argued, for Kwinter always covers his tracks. He marshals a cute globalization story involving water

gardens, kimono textile shops and Basho's fireflies as evidence for the unparalleled power of direct experience, counterintuitively connecting Koolhaas' observations of Lagos with his experiences in Kyushu as **evidence for the peaceful coexistence of parallel worlds – a multiversity (otherwise known as *compartmentalization*).**

The accumulated dissonance of the other essays culminates in *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Architecture (Long-Live Architecture!)*, Kwinter's collection of characteristically oxymoronic insights on how to save the discipline. Even as he acknowledges that design has come to permeate everything - "ideas, routines, contexts, environments, processes" - he reckons that architects will become redundant in thirty years, due to design having been appropriated by "administrative apparatuses." He **prescribes an "explosive disfiguring transformation" in order to save the discipline - only if it doesn't accidentally destroy it in the process.** But never mind that, let's set off the bomb (or induce other impressionable souls to do the job) and see what happens (then disown the results). Tellingly, the book's most interesting essay is also the shortest and least prescriptive. *Rumor* examines the transmission of techniques and messages within cultures (from amoeba to birds as well as humans), which we are to understand as a mode that resists predetermination. Less hijacked by battles over complexity and control, the essay is able to offer a refreshing perspective that positions rumor as a vehicle for new and surprising directions.

Despite its numerous shortcomings, *Requiem* remains an eminently readable and though-provoking book. One is obliged to admire Kwinter's energy, flexibility and openness – or disdain his lack of commitment – depending on which reading – a more generous or less generous one – you're willing to give. **Being subjected to such vacillation of opinion, the reader may be inclined to return the favor.** Kwinter seems to anticipate this and indulges in several highly explanatory and self-referential passages, taking pains to point out the nuance in his thinking. Though often maddening in his pessimistic optimism and optimistic pessimism, lacking in self-awareness he is not. ■

### ***Requiem: For the City at the End of the Millennium***

Sanford Kwinter, Introduction by Thomas Daniell, Actar, 2010, Rice University

122pp, ISBN 9788492861200

Dim. 0.4 x 4.7 x 6.4; Wt. 5 oz

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The Poetry Foundation  
 Mies, Weese and Sejima Walk into a Bar...

Arch 587, Fall 2012. Instructor: Robert Somol



John Ronan Architects, *The Poetry Foundation*

Chicago's Poetry magazine celebrated its centennial last month. A DJ was hired and a concert was held in John Ronan's newly designed space for the Poetry Foundation. I try to imagine the scene as I stand in the gallery next to the Code of Conduct, which threatens arrest and prosecution for criminal trespass for "intentionally disrupting the planned programming of the Foundation in any way," amongst other infractions. I'm assured by the courteous receptionist that this is a liberally enforced stricture and open to wide interpretation.

She then helps me narrowly interpret all of the architect's design and programmatic intentions. Ronan has thought of everything you see, including every possible interpretation; as presumably enlightened consumers of poetry, visitors follow a slow progression through the courtyard and building and **digest its meaning "in stages" (like a poem - in case you missed it, you dolt)** and savor the architect's intent (because poetry is never misinterpreted - someone kindly inform the critics). That is not to say there is no opportunity for surprise – **it's just...controlled surprise – a Code of Surprise.**

To be fair, the architect was handed a brief by his client to make the building "about poetry and for poetry." The brief, though prescriptive, is also the main reason

anyone is enticed to make the pilgrimage - to see what a building about poetry looks like. What Ronan has served up is sophisticated by most measures, and yet surprisingly lacking in passion for a building predicated on poetry. Nothing is left to chance; even the programmatic redundancy (as a single typology building perfect for double and triple entendre) is not exploited. The over-determination leads it to read somewhat like the instruction manual for understanding a poem, rather than as poetry itself. The inadvertent result is a vehicle for clichés about what constitutes poetic design that is far too content to rely on its predecessors for its content.

Ronan's mastery over space and control over detail recalls the early masters of modernism. As one approaches the Foundation from the east, they could be forgiven for mistaking the cubic form for **an out-of-focus Miesian structure**, courtesy of the perforated sink wall that wraps and shields the building from the street; **at night, the sink wall disappears and Crown Hall emerges**. Not only does the wall mark the perimeter for the "verse" within, it also keeps prose out, lest the effect be ruined. The entry is equally staged, requiring graceful ascent up a pair of deep, wide steps (less graceful is the descent for many of those exiting the space,<sup>1</sup> but the unfortunate spills signify rare instances of uncontrolled surprise).

To get from this symbolic entrance to the actual door, a direct route is not possible. A series of moss patches and six trees are staggered throughout the courtyard to force the visitor to strike a meandering path to the doorway. Ronan intends to make you slow down, reflect, and take a little time to understand. It is all a little stultifying in its gravity, even as it manages to be banal in its associations (poetry equals tranquility equals garden). But the modernists take ritual seriously. Having paid my respects, I am ready to get back to living again; an increase in tempo inside the structure would be just the right reward.

But the gallery floor is blasted concrete, embedded with the same pebbles as the gravel outside; the reception desk is similarly ringed with loose pebbles. More trees occupy the space beside the gray carpeted staircase leading to the private office floor. **Exterior and interior are designed as a single continuous space whose glass boundary is tempered by material effects, in an echo of the humanist tradition of second generation modernist Harry Weese.** "Good poems use simple words," Ronan proclaimed in his talk at the Foundation this summer, deploying yet another banal association (good poetry equals simplicity). For Ronan materials - meaning concrete, wood, steel and glass - are a building's words, and he employs these very literally as the parts of his design.

To the right, a library with floor-to-ceiling shelves clad in birch plywood houses the

Foundation's collection of contemporary poetry. On the second floor, the birch wraps all around from end to end mimicking the sink wall outside. The multiple levels of activity all visible from this single second floor vantage point speak to Ronan's remarkable skill at devising ideal perspectives. His extensive use of wood as his primary interior material is his most obvious nod to natural materials, human scale and comfort as driving principles of his design (and his hiding of electrical outlets inside a custom-designed wooden table an admission of his annoyance with details that muddle his poetic message).

To the left, the performance space is inhabited by perfect rows of bamboo chairs fashioned from single planks of wood. The chairs are indeed as feather light and the acoustics as terrific as advertised by the architects. A clear view is afforded across the courtyard into the library space. The layering of frontal planes across volumes, interior and exterior, is the embodiment of Rowe's conception of double transparency - literal and phenomenal. But the transparency, intended to create "spaces that speak to each other" is also reminiscent of SANAA's Toledo Glass Museum. The multiple transparent enclosures appear as spaces within spaces, all visible through a garden that is also conceptualized as interior space.

Officially, Ronan describes his design as compressed layers of materials and volumes, but a more accurate description is that he compressed two generations of modernists and a minimalist, each of which - absent of transformative recombination - is politely jostling the other to move over and give it some more space. Had the architect taken on his predecessors' visions of architectural poetry and sought to actively rewrite them rather than contenting himself as mere disciple, well that would have transformed the Poetry Foundation into actual poetic design, instead of prose masquerading as poetry. ■

### ***The Poetry Foundation***

61 West Superior Street  
John Ronan Architects



1 According to Curbed Chicago, The Poetry Foundation was forced to post an employee outside to warn visitors after numerous people missed the steps on their way out. Boyer, Mark, "John Ronan's New Poetry Foundation Unfolds Like, Well... a Poem." *Curbed Chicago*, June 27, 2011.



# 4 Transdisciplinarity

or when it's ok to covet and move  
into your neighbor's house

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## Architecture and the Interior

### Super Décor

Arch 566, Fall 2011. Instructor: Penelope Dean



Messrs. H. Bartholomae & Co., W. Hitchcock & Co. and Whittals, *Louis XV Drawing Room*, New York City  
 Source: Groeber, Paul. "Art versus Business in Decoration." *The Decorator and Furnisher* 25, no. 5 (1895): 175.

## 1895

The result of a collaborative effort between wall-paper manufacturers, drapery manufacturers and carpet manufacturers, the drawing reflects Empire décor in late 19th century America. The formal design scale of the room is apparent in its strong symmetry and **emphasis on harmony through repetitive motifs and patterns** in the wallpaper and furnishings. With heavy use of draperies and a carpet the room conveys a soft tactile expression. Finally the division of the room into three sections with a draped alcove in the center and flat symmetric surfaces on either side reveals a desire to infuse rhythm into the space. Although it is lacking overall, some contrast is also afforded by the placement of a sofa on the left side and a single chair on the right, and the density of ornament at the top compared to the spartan decor at the bottom. At a time when the market had begun to offer a plethora of conflicting decorative products, the designers considered their unifying composition to be a triumph over exclusively commercial interests and **a fulfillment of the highest ideals of interior decoration.**

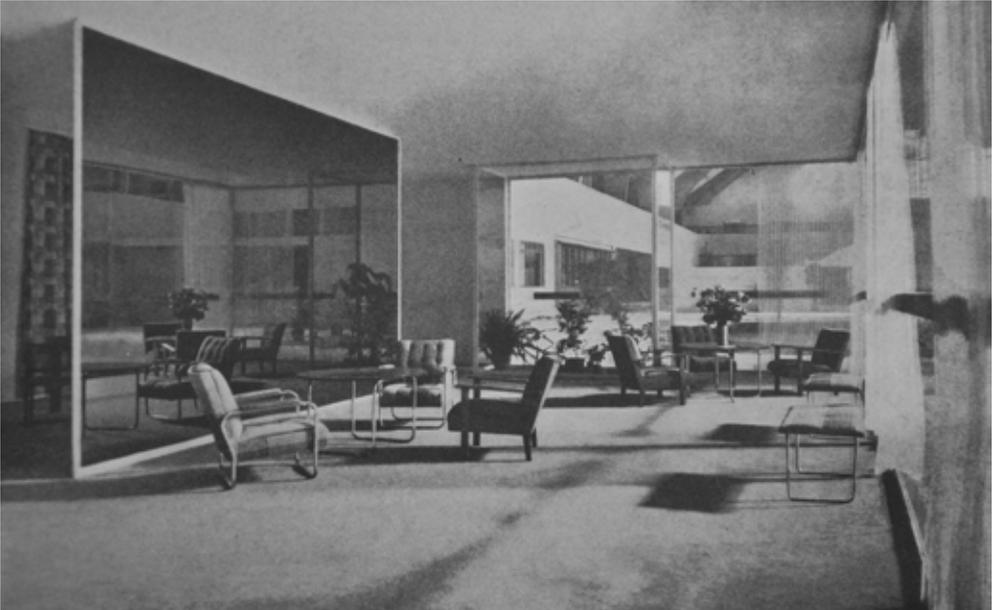


Hans Ofner, *Card Room*

Source: Sheppard, Martin. "The Art Revival in Austria." *Arts and Decoration* 1 (1911): 296.

## 1911

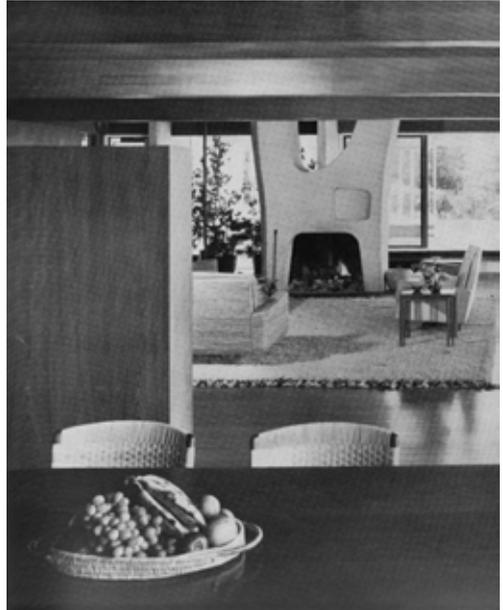
The birth of the Arts and Craft movement replaced the eclectic interiors conceived by individual collectors with a **totalizing interior** conceived by designers. The movement surfaced simultaneously in three disciplines (art, architecture and embroidery) and incorporated elements of all three in a new idealized interior. This Austrian interior demonstrates the integration of the table, chairs, walls and paintings into a single unified environment. The architect utilizes a **single geometric motif** - the panel - and proliferates every aspect of the interior with it to relate all the elements to each other. The slit-like panels in the chairs echo in the screen and the decorative panels in the screen echo the wall panels containing revivalist art. The only non-geometric component of the room is an organic two-toned rug which generates contrast. Form, color and ornament are all balanced with functionality and any superfluous elements that do not enhance the harmony of the whole are excoriated.



Robert Vorhoefer, Max Wiederanders and Walter Schmidt, *Lounge in a German Boarding House*  
 Source: *Architectural Review* (1932): 28.

## 1932

By the 1930s, the rejection of decorative ideals in favor of a machined aesthetic was complete. Materiality and furniture were central to the architect's vision for the interior. **Femininity and craft were banished, masculinity and industry reined.** In this German lounge, prominent use of glass and stainless steel transform the room from a 'soft' to a 'hard' space. **The large mirror creates an illusion of extended spaciousness.** An absence of flowered friezes or cornices on the walls or geometric motifs on the floor advances the perception of a 'dematerialized' interior. Finally, the chairs and tables are freestanding and industrially manufactured in tubular steel. By producing their own minimalist furniture designs, architects were able to control the spatiality and abstractness of their interiors. The architect's foray into interiors also allowed him to sell a **'modern ideal'** to the public that signaled architecture's new ethos as a democratic and accessible endeavor.



Marcel Breuer, *Villa Gagarin*, CT

Source: Breuer, Marcel. "The Issue of Architecture Today." *Architecture, Formes et Fonctions* 9, (1962-63): 10.

## 1962

As a father of Modernism and a leading practitioner of Brutalism, Marcel Breuer's interiors demonstrate the evolution of the modern movement away from simple transparency and a solely glass and steel material palette. Breuer stressed inventiveness in structure, plastic modulation, a preoccupation with scale and a general emphasis on experimentation within the constraints of formal and functional concerns. His personal area of investigation was "individualism unified by discipline". However, when it came to individualism, it was the architect's individual expression that mattered, not the user's. In this domestic interior, the interior space is connected to the exterior with a glass wall, like in early modernism. However the language of permanent structural elements is also now prominent. A short concrete wall clearly demarcates the dining and living spaces by function. At the same time, **the fireplace is curvy and sculptural**, transforming it into a "soft" plastic element, even though it is concrete. The dull gray/beige color palette of the furniture and rug is intended to **convey the dominance of concrete in the composition and reinforce the overall heaviness of the interior.**



Rurik Ekstrom, Research and Design Institute, Charles Tilford, *The Antioch/Columbia College*, Maryland  
 Source: JM, *Progressive Architecture* 52 (1971): 95.

## 1971

The 1970s turn to “environments” reveals the decade’s preponderance with the politics of design. The 60s had laid bare the conflicts inherent in contemporary design and a new generation of designers now grappled with the socio-cultural context their designs were intended to occupy. A backlash ensued against the formal object as well as the utopian. Instead the daily life of the individual and their active participation in the creation of space was pushed to the fore. The Antioch bubble interior is one such example. Designed as a “pneumatic environment for learning”, **the design confronts the permanent architectural edifice with a quickly erected, semi-mobile inflatable structure.** Instead of a roof, only a thin membrane separates interior and exterior. The inflatable incorporates an ambitious program of administrative functions, classrooms, resource areas, theater, art studios and a college green for three hundred students, which are laid out to encourage a nomadic path through the interior. An explosion of pop elements, color and lights demonstrate additional expressions of human involvement.



Zaha Hadid, *Bar and Restaurant in MoonSoon*, Japan  
 Source: Baracco, di Mauro, "Zaha Hadid: Bar Ristorante MoonSoon." *Domus* 54, no. 8 (1991): 729

## 1991

At a time when the underlying economics of architecture in the United States favored safe, "big box" design, Asian countries such as Japan offered alternative sites of experimentation for star architects. The MoonSoon Bar and Restaurant offered one such opportunity to Zaha Hadid to reconstitute the relationship between art, architecture and interior design. Inspired by avant-garde artists, Hadid uses deconstructivist techniques to **disassemble the interior into fragments of suspended, undulating forms**. The project consists of two levels, a first floor bar and a ground floor restaurant designed according the motifs of fire and ice respectively. The image shows the bar, and uses materiality (vinyl, fabrics and paint) and warm colors (yellow, red and orange) to achieve the desired effects.

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## Architecture and Photography Process and Projection

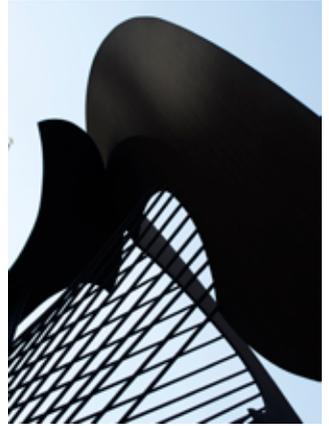
Arch 522, Spring 2011. Instructor: Michelle Litvin



*“One sees a picture only in sections; always just one section at a time: thus for example the head, not the body, if it is a portrait; or the eye, but not the nose or the mouth. Therefore each deformation is correct, for exactly that reason.” - Pablo Picasso*

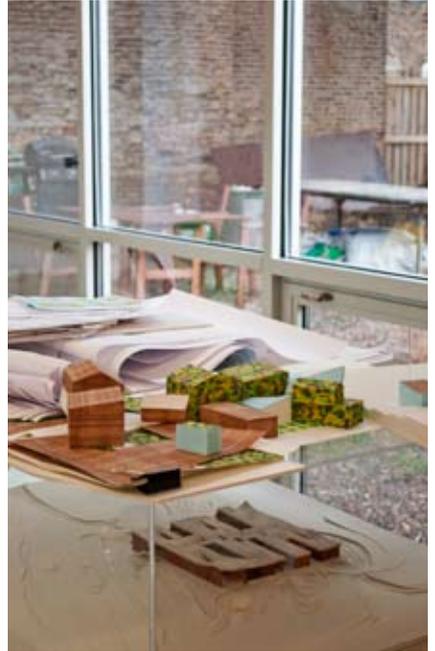
### From Dawn till Dusk

With its three-dimensional fragmentation and reassembly of form, Picasso’s iconic sculpture in Daley Plaza offered the opportunity to explore light and shadow from multiple perspectives simultaneously. In the study I used triptychs to present sections of the sculpture in morning, afternoon and evening light. The first triptych depicts the geometric volumes silhouetted against the morning sky from the east and afternoon sky from the west, and a twilight image in between. The second triptych investigates perspective from the vantage point of the ground-up. The one-point perspective also allows the sculpture to be framed in relation to surrounding buildings and the sky and thus generate an equal amount of negative and positive space to balance the composition. The third triptych investigates the voids and permeable sections of the sculpture as potential vehicles to frame the context behind the sculpture.



Process: Architect - UrbanLab





Process: Studio - A&A Building





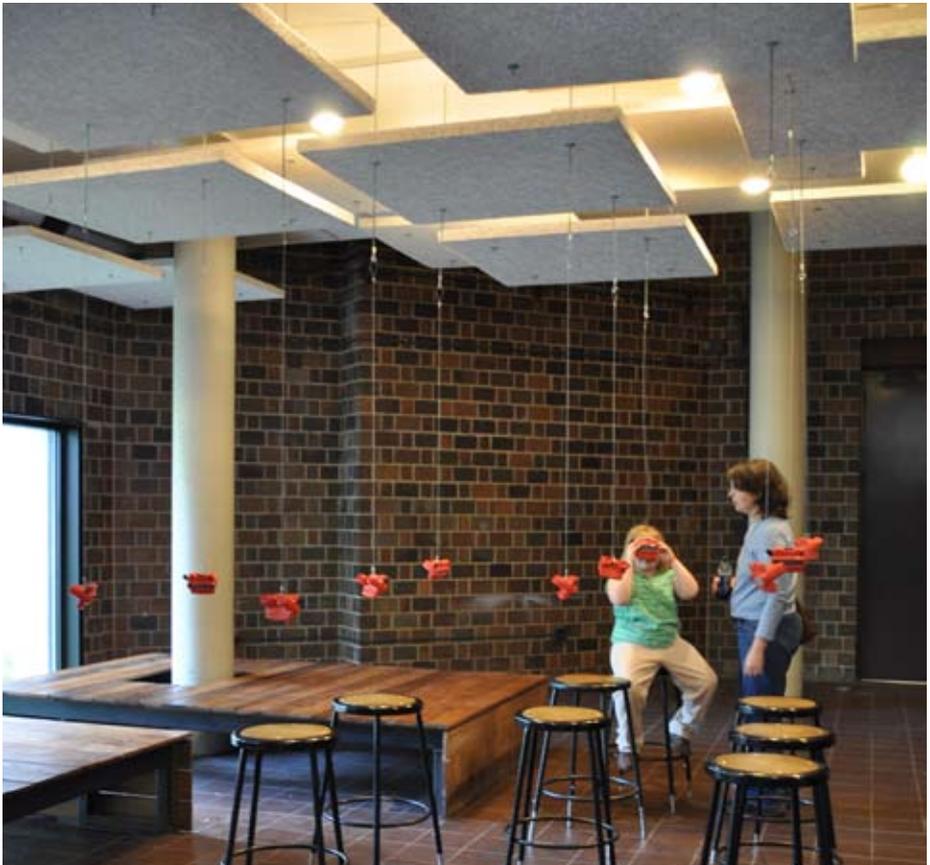
## VIEW MASTERS

Arch522 – Architectural Technologies, a.k.a. Field-Work  
Instructor: Michelle Levin

Stereoscopic images trick our perceptions of depth and make us feel like we are seeing spaces such as the Eiffel Tower and iconic Mickey Mouse in three dimensions. If you can shoot it (with the vantage points of the left and right eyes) then you can fake it. As architecture students, we theorize on how to build spaces through our discipline. In Arch 522, we have used photography as a tool to represent space. The analog technology of the VIEW-MASTER™ allowed for millions of people to experience a projected reality through stereoscopic images. For exhibiting our final project, we used our skills as architects to create an installation that would display our representation of the A+A building in a novel way, both visually and curatorially. Maybe kitsch, maybe avant-garde, but totally immersive, we wanted to ditch the go-to white walls, work displayed 52" on center by hanging image-3D viewers with stereoscopic reels from the ceiling of the south lobby. We invite guests upon entry to peer into our perceptions of *is Being John Malkovich*. We have created sets of stereoscopic images specifically for our installation in the Year-End Show to more directly control a viewer's perception.

### Stereoscopic Images by:

Agne Balistrabas	8	Dolly Davis	1+9
Alejandro Franch	7	Emilia Bernatowicz	12
Andrew Santa Lucia	6	Jacob Gay	11
Catherine Crooke	3	John Pellegrino	2
Cole Monaghan	4+5	Zehra Ahmed	10

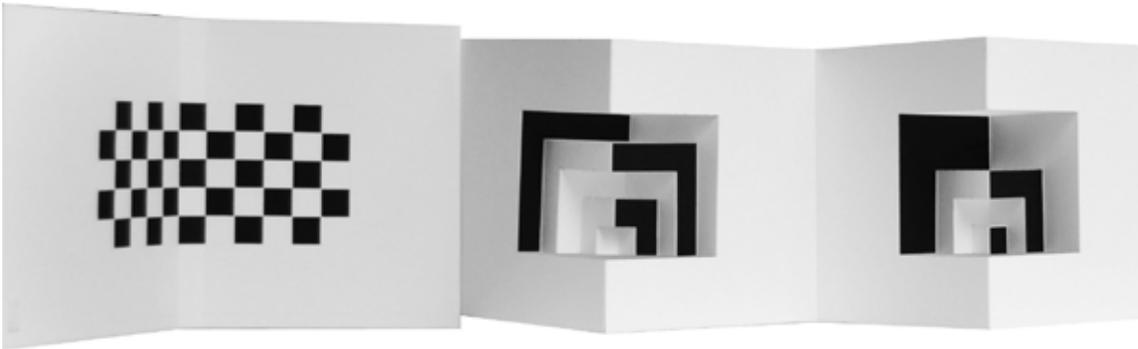


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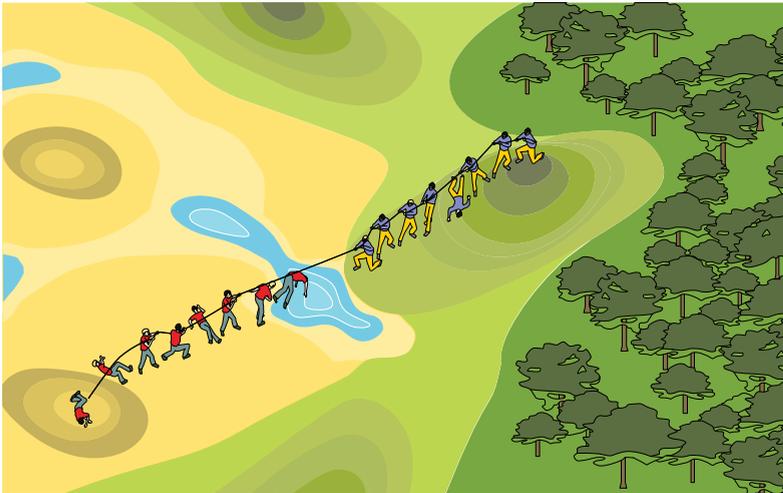
## Reductive Techniques of Representation

### Child's Play

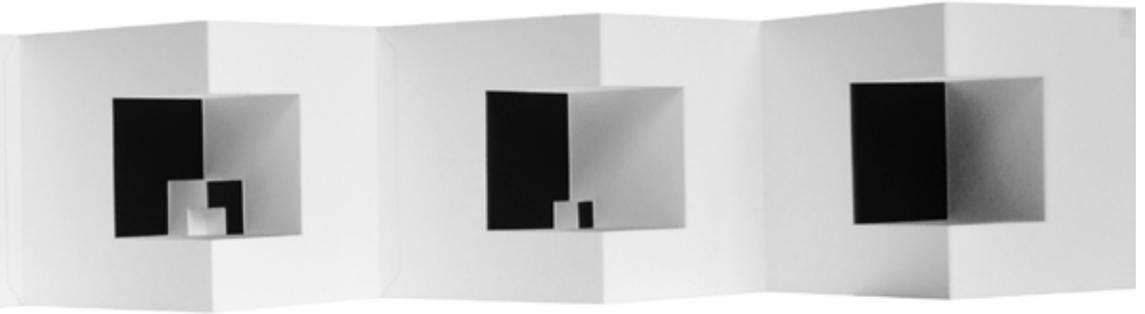
Arch 522, Fall 2012. Instructor: Thomas Kelley



**1 Pop-up book** - The story of a cube in 5 folds



**2 Cartoon** - Tug-o-War landscape



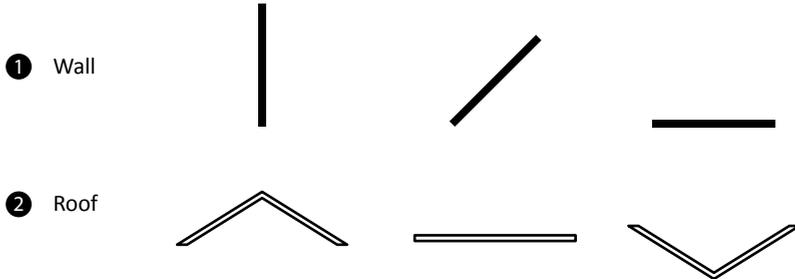
**3 Building Blocks** - 3-D train tracks

## 4 Dollhouse - The Lazy House

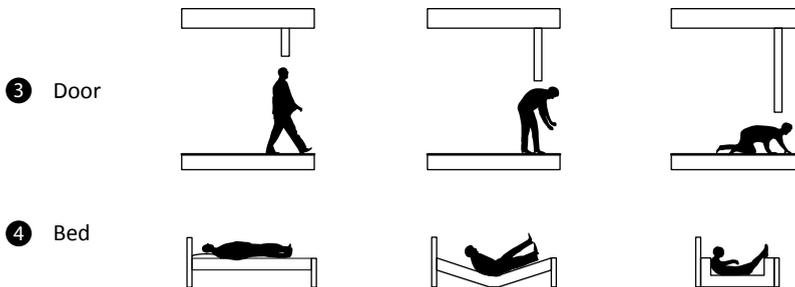
Riddle: "I was felled by a wall that was too lazy to stand up for itself." - Steven Colbert

Concept: Form and Function Follow LAZINESS

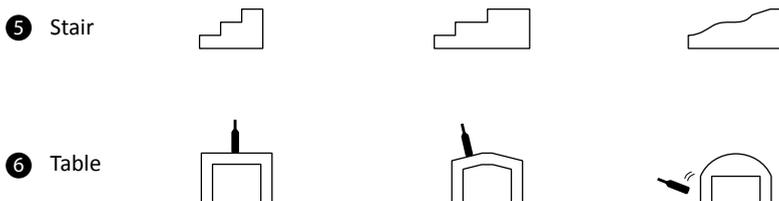
### Orientation



### Posture



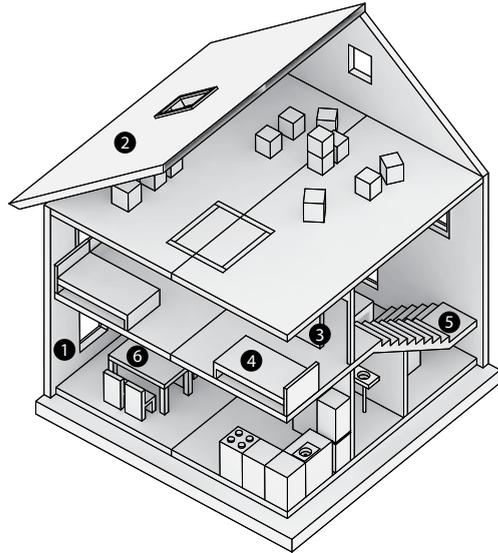
### Resolution



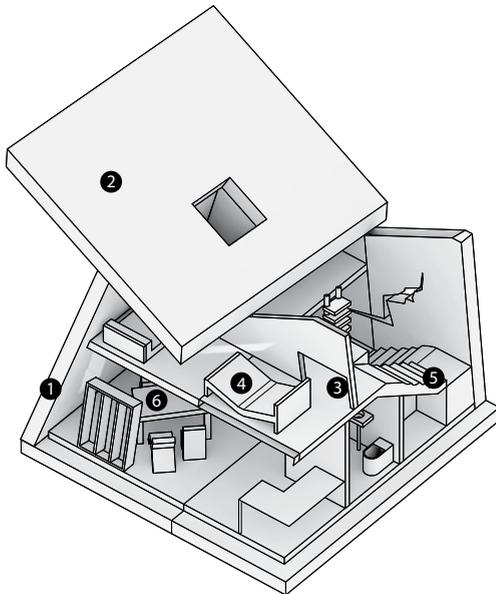
NORMAL

LAZY

TOTAL SLOTH



Normal



Lazy

As an attorney, you'll be working with a variety of clients, including individuals, businesses, and organizations. You'll be responsible for providing legal advice, drafting legal documents, and representing your clients in court.

Attorneys are also responsible for staying up-to-date on the latest legal developments and changes in the law.

Attorneys are also responsible for providing legal advice, drafting legal documents, and representing their clients in court. They may also be involved in negotiating settlements and mediating disputes.

Attorneys

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