Mary McLeod
Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism

Mary McLeod is Associate Professor of Architecture at Columbia University where she teaches design and history and theory.

"Postmodern architecture is the architecture of Reaganism." Among many leftist architects and critics, this kind of statement has become a cliché. The pseudohistorical nostalgia, the fabricated traditions, the pandering to a nouveau-riche clientele, the populist rhetoric that often sounds more paternalistic than democratic, the abandonment of any social vision — all seem related in some way to the conservative turn in American politics. On the other hand, neoconservative critics Daniel Bell and Hilton Kramer have vehemently attacked postmodernism from their perspective, claiming that it undermines social stability and fundamental spiritual values.[1] This attack on disparate fronts immediately reveals the difficulties of any simple equation between postmodernism and a political position. The relation between style and ideology has always been a complex one, but in the instance of postmodernism the problem is compounded: first, by the confusion surrounding what postmodernism *is* and, second, by the ever-quickening cycle of consumption that seems to cause political meanings to change with increasing rapidity, raising more fundamental questions about the nature of architecture's political power.

Postmodern Architecture: Some Definitions

Almost inevitably, any essay about postmodernism must confront the problems of defining this diverse and pluralistic movement. Attempts at definition have varied from broad-scale historical periodization (Fredric Jameson), to

1. Philip Johnson holding a model of the AT&T building, cover, *Time*, 8 January 1979

philosophical equations (postmodernism as the cultural equivalent of poststructuralism), to specific stylistic trends or intentions, often at odds from one field to another (autonomy and formalism, for example; are seen as modern in one field, postmodern in another). In American architecture, where the word was first popularized, the critic has the potential advantage of its widespread usage. The first, and still the most common, understanding of the term refers to the tendency that rejects the formal and social constituents of the modern movement and embraces a broader formal language, which is frequently figurative and historically eclectic. While advocates of postmodern architecture have often agreed more about what they reject than about what they endorse, certain themes have consistently been explored: historical styles, regionalism, decoration, urban contextualism and morphologies, among others. If there is any single objective that unites these various concerns, it is the search for architectural communication, the desire to make architecture a vehicle of cultural expression. Postmodern practitioners and critics have tended to seek ideological justification, not in program, function, or structure, but in *meaning*. A manifesto by the editors of the *Harvard Architectural Review* declared that postmodernism is "an attempt, and an important one, to respond to the problem of meaning which was posed but never solved by the modern movement."[2]

As architects themselves have been influenced by critical discourse and events in other fields, another understanding of postmodernism has arisen in the past few years: one that attempts to link architecture to a general epistemological situation, frequently associated with poststructuralism. Here, the objective seems almost the inverse of that of the earlier postmodernists. Whereas the first group criticized modern architecture for being abstract, arcane, and inaccessible — for having forsaken architecture's traditional communicative role — this second group accepts, even celebrates, this same disintegration of communication and consensus — the impossibility, in fact, of postulating any meaning at all. Although these two positions are dialectically opposed, the territory of debate remains the same: meaning and its dissolution. At first, this later interpretation of postmodernism seemed, in architecture, to be a one-man movement, advanced by Peter Eisenman; but in recent years a number of other architects, most notably several young "neoconstructivists," have been grouped with him in this alternative reaction to the failings of modernism. How "postmodern" this phenomenon actually is remains suspect as new labels ("schismatic postmodernism," "decomposition," "deconstructivism") are continually being introduced, juxtaposing this group to the other "postmodernists."[3]

What is immediately apparent in either of these conceptions of postmodernism, however, is that some of the distinctions that can be drawn between modernism and postmodernism in other fields cannot be sustained in architecture. Although modern architects were frequently engaged in highly sophisticated, abstract formal explorations, modernism in architecture was never commonly conceived, as it was in painting after World War II, as being "art about art" or as implying autonomy of the discipline. The modern movement was seen by both its early practitioners and its historians as intrinsically involving new techniques, mass culture, and a broader social role.[4] And if postmodern advocates have produced their own more reductive, monolithic version of modern architecture, it is one that asserts, even exaggerates, the modern movement's social concerns. Thus the commonly assumed polarity of modernism/artistic autonomy and postmodernism/mass culture (cultural "contamination") simply does not hold. Indeed, postmodern currents, whether historicist or poststructuralist, can be viewed as a return to architecture as a primarily formal and artistic pursuit, one that rejects the social engagement of the modern movement;[5] with few exceptions, the eclecticism and pluralism of postmodern architecture have operated almost entirely in the formal sphere. And yet, in delineating this retreat to traditional boundaries, it is also important to acknowledge architecture's more visible cultural role. Postmodernism has coincided with the public's increased attention to architecture. More buildings in the United States are now designed by architects; more students are enrolled in architecture schools;[6] more design criticism appears routinely in magazines and newspapers; and at least a few architects have achieved the celebrity status that earns them advertising endorsements and *Time Magazine* covers.

Architecture and Politics

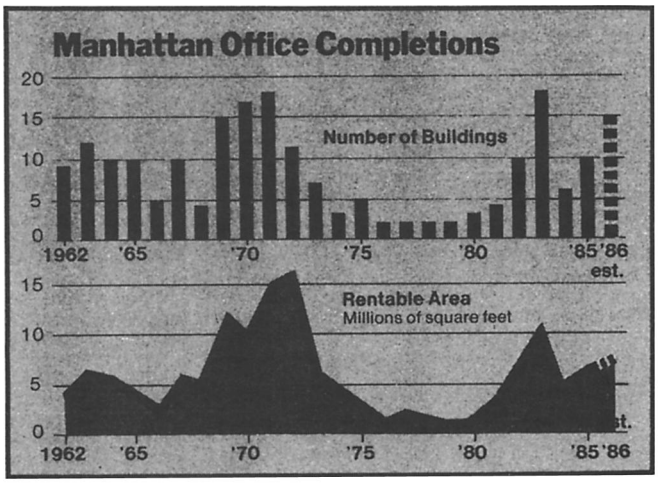
Linking architecture and politics presents certain difficulties. Neither field can be reduced to the other; nor is it self-evident that architecture's relation to politics has any major impact on power relations. It might appear that architecture is always political in the sense that anything is political, the meaning of politics being diluted to some generalized cultural association; or else that architecture is rarely political, in which case the definition is narrowly confined to those activities directly influencing power relations.[7] Notwithstanding these qualifications, it would be impossible to deny that some real, if ambiguous, connection exists between the two realms. The intersections between architecture and politics can be seen as twofold: the first involves architecture's role in the economy; the second, its role as a cultural object.

What, in fact, immediately distinguishes architecture from other arts — notably painting, music, and writing — is the enormous expense it entails.[8] Although any art form can be seen as reflecting market pressures, architecture's dependence on the sources of finance and power extends to nearly every facet of the design process: choice of site, program, budget, materials, and production schedules. These economic and utilitarian parameters ordinarily limit architecture's transgressive and transformative power, but they also inscribe areas for potential social action. In other words, architecture's production processes imply possibilities of institutional change itself. Here, architecture's connection to politics appears more direct than that of other arts.

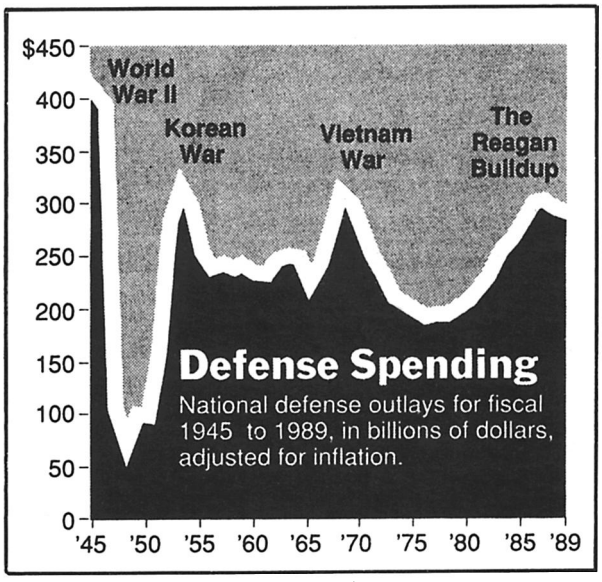
But just as architecture is intrinsically joined to political and economic structures by virtue of its production, so, too, its form — its meaning as a cultural object — carries political resonances. In this sense, owing to its utilitarian value, its political impact may be more diffuse, if more sustained, than that of other arts. Buildings are rarely perceived at once for their aesthetic qualities and "content"; rather their impact occurs gradually through use and repeated contact.[9] From this perspective, spatial configurations, tactile qualities, and functional relations are as important as figurative dimensions in architecture's reception. And as with art, this reception is always closely tied to a particular social context and historical moment.[10] These two political dimensions of architecture, production processes and formal reception, are, of course, not unrelated — building techniques can convey meanings — but their political roles can operate independently, each exerting influence at different moments and on different groups.[11]

The modern movement in architecture was deeply concerned with the first of these political dimensions. The advocacy of standardization and serial production, the emphasis on housing as a social program, the concern for a mass clientele — all were examples of the modern architect's attempt to redefine architecture's economic and social role. When Le Corbusier made his passionate plea "Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided," he was arguing not for formal isolation, but rather for an expansion of architecture's role to address social problems.[12] If in the case of Le Corbusier this position remained an issue of polemics more than practice, in the instance of many German practitioners the production of architecture radically changed. Ernst May's program for mass-produced housing in Frankfurt and Walter Gropius's experiments with standardization in Dessau are two obvious examples.

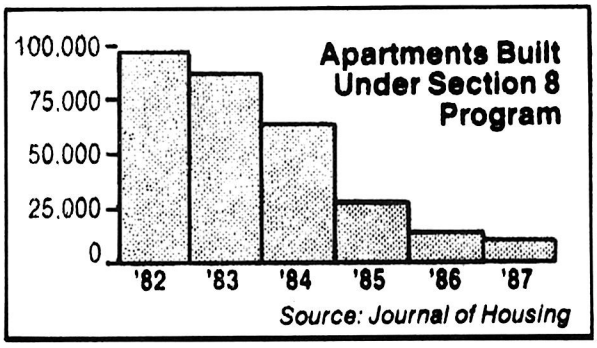
In retrospect, the forms of the modern movement can also be seen as embodying ideological positions. The rejection of monumental imagery in public buildings, the radical reorganization of the home, the elimination of explicit gender references in interior design, all challenged existing social patterns. Occasionally, such ideological intentions were specifically stated (for example, Hannes Meyer's claim that the open glazed rooms of his League of Nations project would eliminate "backstairs diplomacy," or the frequent associations of the free plan with democracy);[13] but for the most part, the architects of the modern movement did not conceive of form as an *independent* critical or utopian tool. It was seen as either the result of structural and functional concerns or an expression of the zeitgeist of the machine age. In other words, the new forms reflected either materially or symbolically the changes in production. Architecture's political role was conceived first as a question of process, and only secondarily as a question of



2. Manhattan Office Completions, "Commercial Property," special section, *New York Times*, 11 May 1980



3. Defense Spending, *New York Times*, 23 October 1988



4. Apartments Built Under Section 8 Program, *New York Times*, 1 February 1988

form, although to separate the two would have been virtually impossible in the minds of the early pioneers.[14] Both necessitated radical change, if architecture *and* society were to be transformed.

Postmodernism (in its first sense) emerged in part from a disillusionment with this social vision. The unprecedented brutality of Nazi Germany, the purges of Stalinist Russia, the advent of the atom bomb, and the increasing dominance of multinational capitalism all undermined hopes of architecture's redemptive power. But just as significant to this loss of faith were the manifestations of modernism itself. By the 1960s architects and social critics no longer saw the revolutionary zeal of the modern movement as productive, but as destructive; they cited the desolate mass-housing projects, the wasteland of urban renewal, the alienation resulting from an architectural language that now seemed arcane, mute, and of little appeal outside a narrow cultural elite. Advocacy planning and the self-help projects of the 1960s were one response to modernism's apparent failure, but the collapse of those efforts only contributed further to the architect's sense of political impo-

tence. What both the activists of the 1960s and the first postmodern critics of the early 1970s were reacting to was, in fact, the evolution of modernism in the postwar decades into a routinized corporate modernism that seemed headed in two equally unpromising directions: the expressionistic excesses of a Stone or a Saarinen, on the one hand, and the "scientific" determinism epitomized by the researches of Christopher Alexander or the technological fantasies of Archigram, on the other.[15] But if this modernism already stripped of most of its revolutionary content spawned the first criticisms of modern architecture, the focus of the attack soon reverted to the modern movement, which was seen as instigating the demise of architectural meaning and artistic expression.[16] And just as form and content were inseparably intertwined in the minds of the early modern pioneers, so too were they inextricably linked in the postmodern reaction. What was considered wrong with the modern movement was equally its forms *and* its political content. Together they had produced the failures of public housing complexes and the destruction of the center city.

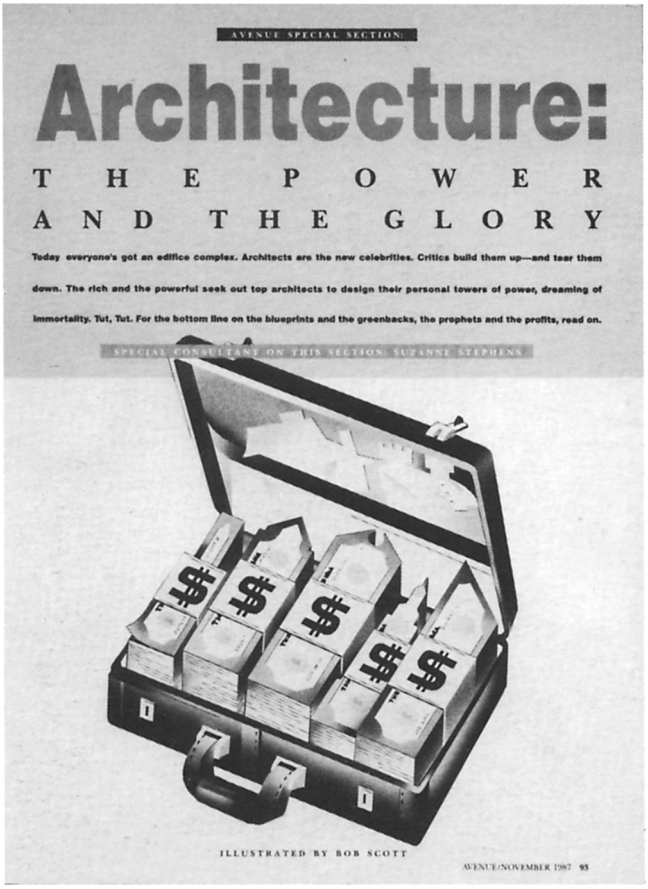
In the United States, this critique of modernism appears to be related to the economic cycle of construction itself. Numerous International Style skyscrapers were built in the 1950s and 1960s, when the economy was booming and, not coincidentally, when modernism had its first real opportunity to manifest itself in the United States (the Depression and World War II had severely limited private construction). The theoretical reassessment of modern architecture only emerged in full force during the early 1970s when young architects were almost without work. Designers such as Peter Eisenman and Michael Graves were making professional careers of an annual house addition or interior renovation (leading to epithets such as "the cubist kitchen king"); frequently, they were busier writing than building. The dismal economy not only permitted theoretical speculation, but also further fueled perceptions of the architect's diminished social role.

The result, all too familiar today, was a return to the concept of architecture as art. Architecture's value no longer lay in its redemptive social power, its transformation of productive processes, but rather in its communicative power as a cultural object. If this new perspective harked back to traditional aesthetic parameters, it also reflected a new interest in cultural signs, spurred by semiology and communication theories. Meaning, not institutional reform, was now the objective.

Postmodernism and Politics

What is immediately apparent in any survey of architectural developments of the 1960s and 1970s is that the political impulses linked to this change in perspective had mixed connotations. To critics of the traditional Left, most notably Tomás Maldonado, Kenneth Frampton, and Martin Pawley, the rejection of social engagement represented an abdication of the architect's responsibility. They criticized the split between form and social institutions as invalid and argued that a rigorous structural rationalism and functionalism were still essential to answering the mass's needs in an age of late capital. But to the early critics of modernism, not yet dubbed "postmodernists," it was exactly this position that had led to the public's alienation and to the disintegration of any sense of urban community. In the early 1970s, influenced by the social theories of Karl Popper, Colin Rowe condemned the utopianism of modernism as a form of totalitarianism akin to the apocalyptic visions of Marxism. He claimed that the universal rationalism of modernism suppressed diversity and complexity; the objective instead should be a city of fragments, a "collage city."[17] Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown also attacked the "environmental megalomania" of modern architects "as a curse on the city." In a response to Pawley in 1970 they stated, "We suggest that the architect who starts with what *is* . . . will be less harmful and more effective than the petulant rhetorician grandly and dryly continuing to evoke 'the impact of technology on Western civilization' and 'the relationship of the nascent science of design to human goals and aspirations.' We are in favor of science in architecture but not of science-voodooism, twenties *or* sixties style."[18]

This debate echoed the running argument among leftists in the late 1960s and early 1970s between those believing in the instrumentality of technology yet condemning commodity culture and those rejecting the determinacy of technology but finding in popular culture the impulses of a



5. "Architecture: The Power and the Glory," *Avenue*, November 1987

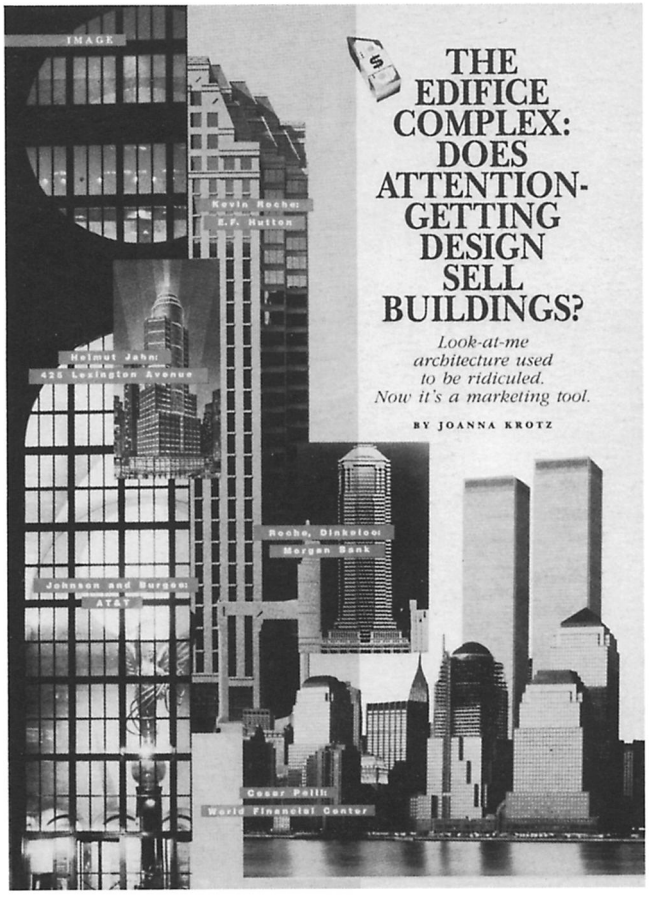
new order. Following Herbert Marcuse, many Marxists believed that technology was essential to alleviating oppressive work conditions and improving social life, but that the masses were so manipulated by advertising and the media that it was impossible to determine from contemporary culture any genuine needs or values. Many of the New Left, however, found in mass culture the stirrings of a grass-roots populism that embodied legitimate needs and aspirations, regardless of the economic and political institutions that generated them. At the heart of this conflict was the critics' relation to mass opinion: the issue of elitism vs. populism. Did the masses know what they wanted or were social aspirations to be determined only by a critical, educated elite shrewd to the forces of capital? Or were the so-called populists denying the masses' needs by restricting their vision to the image presented by a media culture? It was exactly over this issue that architectural debate took its most acerbic form. Frampton charged that Venturi and Scott Brown's interest in Las Vegas was "elitist" and "conservative," a "de facto rationalization of the polluted environment," and Maldonado condemned their position as "cultural nihilism."[19] In the pages of *Casabella*, Scott Brown caustically returned the charges, stating that European-based "armchair-revolutionary pot shots" reflected a disdain for American culture and legitimized a "repressed upper-middle-class prejudice" against a "hard-hat majority."[20]

Even among the early critics of modernism, however, the position concerning audience was hardly cohesive. Although *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) embodied clear populist sympathies, Venturi's earlier and more influential work *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) vividly illustrated the tensions between an elitist appreciation of high art and a populist embrace of Main Street that would be so characteristic of the later postmodern movement. Indeed, the balance of the argument and the number of plates (346 of 350) in the book clearly favors the former. Throughout the 1970s, Charles Moore consistently and enthusiastically embraced popular culture; but Rowe was steeped in a kind of nostalgia for nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, while Michael Graves longed for a public who could appreciate the world of Poussin and Roman villas. Whether elitist or populist, what these factions

shared, however, was a sense that modernism was failing to communicate to any group besides design professionals; in this respect, the architects' critique of the modern movement allied itself with earlier criticism in the social sphere, most notably Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of the Great American Cities* of 1961 and Herbert Gans's *The Levittowners* of 1966.[21] The populism of the 1960s led to advocacy efforts; conversely, in the early 1970s, these same impulses were channeled to the formal sphere.

A passivity vis-à-vis economic and political power has continued to be one of the major reasons for leftists' unease with postmodern architecture. However critical postmodern architects were of corporate skyscrapers and government housing projects, it was soon apparent that their focus was on form and style. With amazing rapidity, postmodernism became *the* new corporate style, after Philip Johnson's notorious Chippendale top for AT&T instantly convinced patrons of its marketability and prestige value. The office building boom, which followed on the heels of New York City's financial recovery, further fueled the acceptance of the new style. If the reassessment of modernism occurred in a tight economy, which encouraged reflection and criticism, postmodernism began to flourish in the boom economy of the early 1980s. Architects seemed to stop writing and theorizing; most reacted hungrily to the opportunities to build.

The domination of American political life by conservative forces since the advent of postmodernism has only reinforced the Left's assessment. In the private sector, the proliferation of luxury apartment towers, amenity-packed condominium developments, planned resort communities, larger suburban homes, and ubiquitous shopping centers,[22] all spurred by the emergence of the new "yuppie" class, have given postmodernism a fertile field in which to grow. In the public sector the Reagan administration's ninety-percent reduction of funds for public housing and its drastic curtailment of social programs have virtually eliminated commissions oriented toward the poor and minority groups.[23] The only public commissions have been for traditional institutions such as museums. Although nothing in the polemics of postmodernism has precluded architects from addressing social programs, neither has there been



6. "The Edifice Complex," *Avenue*, November 1987

anything to encourage architects to challenge their elimination. Collectively, postmodern architects have exhibited a marked indifference to economic and social policy.

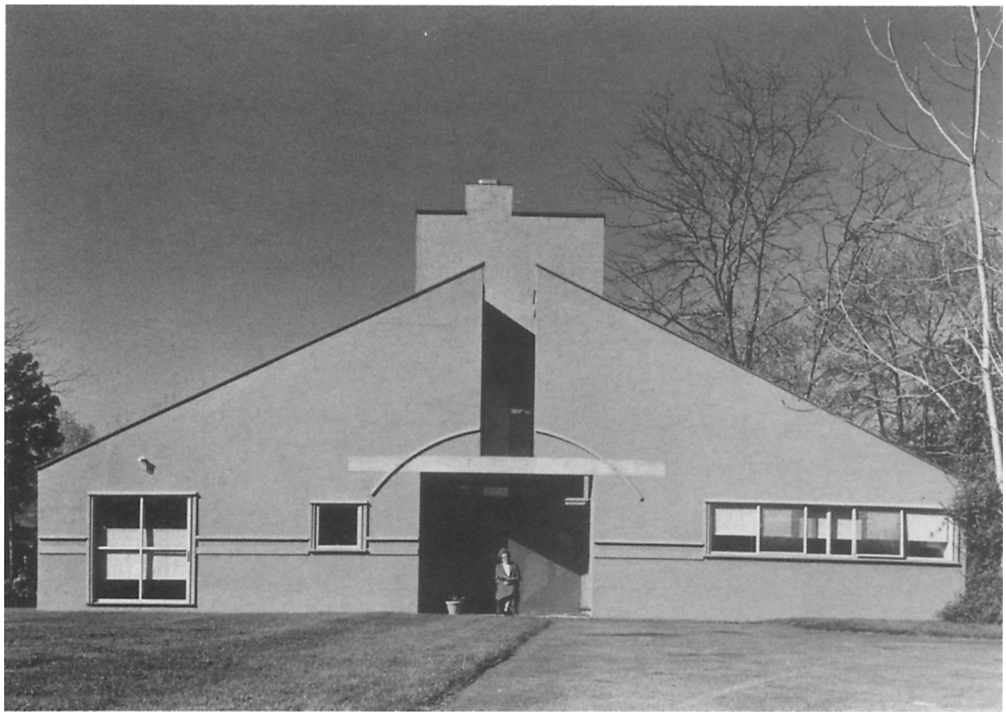
Thus, if any dialectical tension with the dominant power structures exists in postmodern architecture, it resides not in institutions but in the content of architectural forms. As already noted, most postmodern architects hold as a basic assumption some concept of architecture's communicative power; and, indeed, it is here that a few critics and architects have made political claims for their discipline.[24] After acknowledging the difficulties of finding "uplifting social content" to include in contemporary architecture, Charles Jencks states that the architect can "design dissenting buildings that express the complex situation. He can communicate the values which are missing and ironically criticize the ones he dislikes."[25] And in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Venturi more modestly asserts, "The architect who would accept his role as combiner of significant old clichés — valid banalities — in new contexts as his condition within a society that directs its best efforts, its big money, and its elegant technologies elsewhere, can ironically express in this indirect way a true concern for society's inverted scale of values."[26] This raises immediate questions, however, about the legibility of architectural forms: Do buildings convey clear messages? Is it appropriate to discuss buildings as critical or constructive in political terms at all? For our purposes here, it is probably sufficient to mention the difficulties of equating architectural forms with words, the problems of consensus concerning architectural meaning, the distracted mode of architecture's reception, and the shifting nature of any meanings that might be conveyed.[27] All of this challenges Jencks's claims that architecture can communicate clear political positions. But if it is difficult to grasp what architectural meaning might entail, it also refutes everyday experience to deny the connotative and suggestive power of forms. Architectural meaning is shifting and ambiguous, which inevitably results in ambiguous, and double-edged, political readings. Thus any analysis of architectural ideology must go beyond simplistic labels of good and bad, and must search to discover in this complex matrix instances of both social entrenchment and genuine critique.

Historical Styles

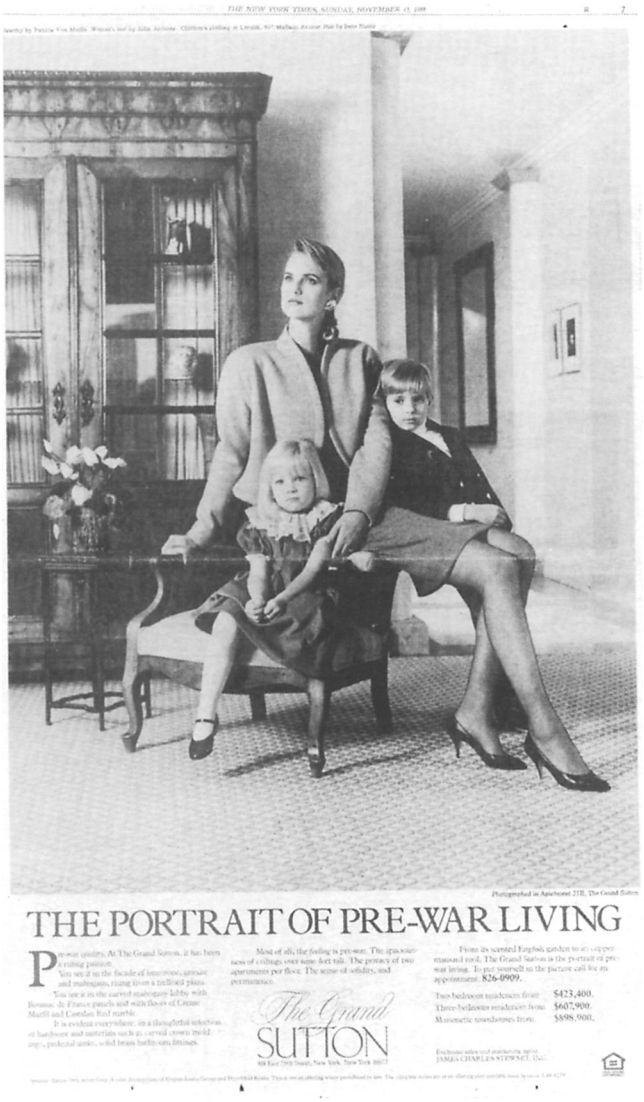
These ambiguities become immediately apparent in one of the fundamental themes of postmodernism: the rediscovery of history. Postmodern architects universally rejected the modern movement's messianic faith in the *new* and condemned the notion of a zeitgeist that obliterated the past and wiped out differences in tradition and experience. Their motives for embracing historical styles, however, varied considerably. Some postmodernists, notably Robert Stern, Allen Greenberg, and Thomas Beeby, sought to establish cultural continuities and a renewed sense of community. Quoting Daniel Bell, Stern stated that the central issue facing postmodernists was "whether culture can regain coherence, a coherence of substance and experience, not only form."[28] History provided a more communicative language; it was a means for architecture to regain the public role that the hermeticism of modernist abstraction had denied it. This historical revivalism emerged from the egalitarian and populist impulses of the 1960s' critique, but its assumptions were largely social integration and preservation, not social change. In contrast, other postmodernists, such as Venturi, Johnson, and Stanley Tigerman, saw history as promising freedom and change, if only on an aesthetic plane. Technological progress did not mandate one style, but made possible many styles, and the past offered an infinite field of possibilities. This was hardly the eclecticism of nineteenth-century architects who sought a moral fit between style and social function. Instead, for Venturi, the model was the eighteenth-century garden.[29] Historical styles offered a means to represent a variety of experiences, moods, and allusions; in other words, history provided the material for a complex and diverse vision of the present. For Johnson, stylistic eclecticism meant simply aesthetic liberation: an invitation to a new art for art's sake. As early as 1961, he declared to Jürgen Joedicke, "There are no rules, absolutely no given truths in any of the arts. There is only the sensation of a marvelous freedom, of an unlimited possibility to explore, of an unlimited past of great examples of architecture from history to enjoy. . . . Structural honesty for me is one of those infantile nightmares from which we will have to free ourselves as soon as possible."[30]

7. Robert Venturi (Venturi and Short), Vanna Venturi House, Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, 1961–65

8. Thomas H. Beeby, Harold Washington Library Center Competition, first prize, Chicago, 1988



9. Robert A. M. Stern, Pool House, Llewellyn Park, New Jersey, 1979–81



10. Advertisement for luxury apartments in the Grand Sutton designed in 1987 by Philip Birnbaum (architect, Costas Kondylis), *New York Times*, 13 November 1988

11. "The New Traditionalist," advertisement for *Good Housekeeping*, *New York Times*, 9 November 1988

There was something at once exhilarating and resigned in this rediscovery of history. On the one hand, it meant freedom and a chance to recoup lost values; on the other, it suggested that the present was no better than the past, that aesthetic and political choices might be arbitrary. In the most successful postmodern works, such as Venturi's Vanna Venturi house (1961) and James Stirling and Michael Wilford's Stuttgart Museum (1977–84), historical references are used to express just this tension.[31] Reinstating a dialogue with the past, the architecture installs and then subverts conventions in parodic ways that make explicit the inherent paradoxes and provisionality of a historical moment. The dualities of tradition and innovation, order and fragmentation, figuration and abstraction help articulate the contradictions of modernism and its ideological context. In Venturi's work especially, the very emphasis on surface and image elucidates the discursive and contingent dimensions of our present historicity. But in most postmodern architecture, such insight appears too painful to acknowledge. Historical allusion rapidly becomes nostalgia, escape, or enjoyable simulacrum — a denial of history itself. In the case of literal revivalists, such as Greenberg and John Blatteau, tension and parody are eliminated in academic recreations of the past. And all too often, the references to Lutyens, colonial plantations, and imperial monuments evoke a one-sided past, a "history of victors." For other practitioners, such as Stern and Johnson, irony looses its critical edge, as historical caricatures are openly acknowledged as diversions from the routine of daily existence. Cartooned exaggeration alternates with esoteric, mannered quotation; history is randomly scavenged to create an aura of historical depth.

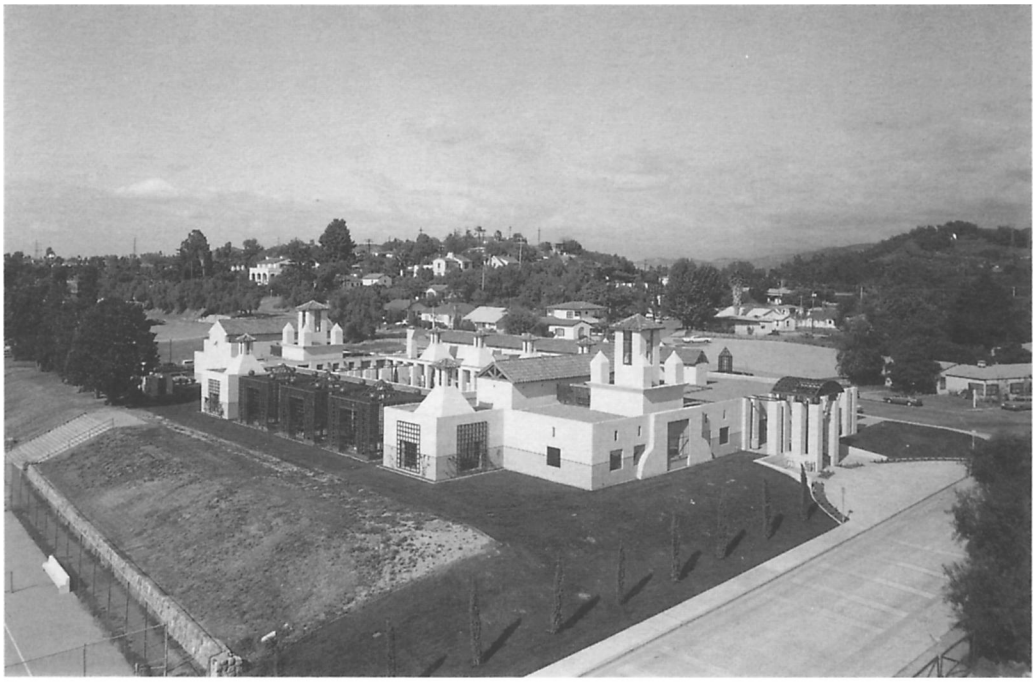
But whether in literal copybook recreations or in exuberant displays of random quotation, the rediscovery of history has reflected with uncanny ease the interests of the marketplace. More than the stripped-down forms of modernism, revived historical styles signaled the desire for the instant acquisition of the values of family, tradition, and social status that surfaced with a vengeance in the 1980s. The marketing tactics of Ralph Lauren, the period revivals in furnishings and fashion, the long-standing eclecticism of suburban development — all found aesthetic allies within the architectural establishment. Paradoxically, as the market increasingly co-opted postmodernism, the value of variety itself became suspect. Many styles and many pasts began to appear as one style and one past. By the mid-1980s, the real-estate ads had designated postmodernism a historical style in itself.

Regionalism

Postmodernism's interest in regionalism, closely linked to its historicist focus, is yet another response to the modern movement's universalizing tendencies: the latter's postulation of a method (mass production) and an aesthetic (the International Style) that would obliterate cultural differences. It is on these grounds that such ideologically opposed critics as Jencks and Frampton have placed hopes of political dissent and resistance. Jencks claims that in order to design "dissenting buildings," the architect "must make use of the language of the local culture; otherwise his message falls on deaf ears, or is distorted to fit this local language."[32] Although Frampton rejects Jencks's emphasis on sign and image, he too turns to regionalism in the early 1980s as a locus for creating an "architecture of resistance," one that will answer Paul Ricoeur's quest of "how to become modern and to return to the sources."[33]

Leaving aside difficulties of what might constitute a "dissenting" architectural message, two problems immediately present themselves: first, the paucity in the United States of vital "local" languages — especially in the major areas of new construction — and second, the difficulties of convincingly recreating or transforming these languages, given financial constraints, changes in construction processes, and new building types — often of a radically different scale. Although buildings such as Venturi's Nantucket houses or Graves's library at San Juan Capistrano are less obtrusive in traditional surroundings than the brutal structures of the two preceeding decades, the postmodern use of regionalism rarely extends beyond surface image; such designs are mere fabrications, without any real cultural roots.[34] And given the conciliatory aspirations of most designers, only occasionally do these designs gain a self-consciously critical dimension; more often they seem to be the architectural equivalents to conservative yearnings for a simpler American past.

12. Robert Venturi and John Rauch (Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown), Trubek and Wislocki Houses, Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, 1970–71



13. Michael Graves, San Juan Capistrano Library, San Juan Capistrano, California, 1980

14. Carpetland, Wheaton, Maryland

Nor have Frampton's more abstract criteria of light, topography, and technique been widely adopted; his essay "Towards a Critical Regionalism" omits American examples. And those buildings that he does cite as models — works by Mario Botta, Tadao Ando, Jørn Utzon — often share more with each other than with their respective locales.[35] This raises the question of whether "region" or some more universal criteria of artistic quality — craftsmanship, detail, quality of materials — are the source of their "resistant" qualities.[36] The homogenizing forces of mass media and the increasingly multinational scale of finance and the construction industry certainly leave little regional heritage to recover. In the United States, the large size, low budget, and rapid timetable of most (nonluxury) contemporary developments further mitigate against the kind of attentive design that Frampton prescribes.

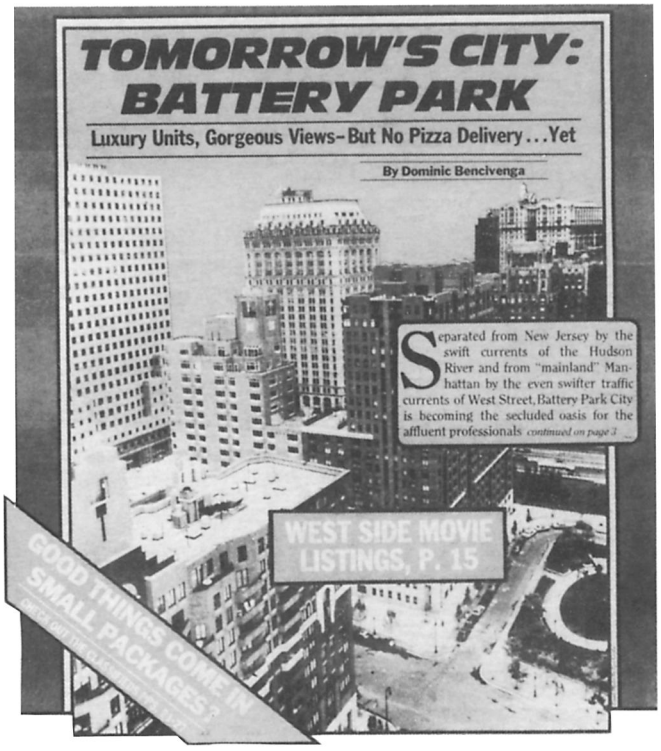
The one regional attribute of pressing political concern in this energy-consuming society is climate. But postmodernism's rejection of "biological" determinism and its emphasis on style have generally precluded the investigations of sun orientation and ventilation that were of such concern to modern architects. (As one critic at a conference on regionalism caustically noted, "The air conditioner is Florida's regional identity.")[37]

Decoration

The emphasis on ornament, color, texture, and pattern in postmodern architecture is still another response to what many architects have considered the excessive limitations of modernism: its formal monotony, repetitiveness, and narrow expressive range. By the 1960s the austerity of modern architecture no longer represented a critique of bourgeois values and oppressive stereotypes; it reflected instead the relentless rationalization and routinization of the business world. Again advocates of postmodernism claimed that advanced technology need not be so restrictive or determinate. Rather than preclude ornament or traditional styles, it made them potentially available to a broad range of people. And where costs remained prohibitive, signage and simulacra might successfully substitute for traditional forms. The initial embrace of decoration, like the rediscovery of history, thus appeared as a liberating gesture; it opened up new possibilities and broke down traditional hierarchies, whether between architecture and interior design, structure and ornament, abstraction and figuration, or "educated" taste and popular taste (as well as the "purported" modernist bias toward the former in each of these pairings). Postmodernism sanctioned a new appreciation of sensuality, comfort, and the body — almost a hedonism, which challenged the mundane, the prosaic, the matter-of-fact rationality of modernism. Even dimensions stereotypically condemned as feminine, weak, or frivolous — pink, chintz, boudoir chairs — received validation. Just as the abstract forms of the modern movement could be seen in the 1920s as dissolving traditional images of gender identity, the more sensuous, decorative forms of postmodernism could be seen in the 1970s as challenging this same abstract language, which was now associated with a masculine, corporate world — severe, removed, and mechanistic. In a tone foreign to a previous generation, Charles Moore notes, "If our century's predominant urge to erect high-rise macho objects was nearly spent, I thought we might now be eligible for a fifty-year-long respite of yin, of absorbing and healing and trying to bring our freestanding erections into an inhabitable community."[38]

Thus the first phase of postmodernism played a role somewhat akin to modernism itself after World War I: it re-

invigorated architecture's vocabulary by discovering new "pasts," new vernaculars, and new aspects of mass culture. If in the 1920s the sources were the Acropolis, the automobile, and Mediterranean villages, in the 1970s they were Ledoux, Levittown, and Las Vegas. Some architects, such as Graves, Greenberg, and Blatteau, drew on classicism and a high-art heritage; but others, such as Venturi and Moore, mined suburbia and the "strip" for new aesthetic images. And probably, it is in the realm of ornament that postmodern architecture has come the closest to the spirit of pop culture and contamination that one equates with the postmodernism of other fields.[39] But if all of this raised certain hopes, the flip side revealed another picture: pretensions, blatant materialism, pseudoculture, a level of ostentatious display that would make Veblen shiver. And what first emerged as endless freedom, by the mid-1980s seemed rigidified and codified. Mauve and gray, falling keystones, giant pilasters, and temple fronts had all become ubiquitous clichés, now mass-produced by the culture industry.



15. "The secluded oasis for the affluent professionals," Battery Park, *West Side Spirit*, 1 June 1987

Urban Contextualism and Typology

The postmodern urban critique recapitulates the themes expressed earlier — the universalizing, homogenizing, dehumanizing qualities of modern architecture — only now on a much larger scale. Although the American postmodern movement was initially more concerned with image than with urban form, by the mid-1970s both Rowe's theories of contextualism and the Italian investigations of type had had a major impact. And if Rowe's politics conjure up images of Disraeli and Queen Victoria, the Italian Rationalist movement identified itself firmly with the Left; in fact, Paolo Portoghesi cites Solidarity's document on architecture as a defense of postmodern urban aspirations.[40] In the United States the postmodern critique joined widespread public disenchantment with urban renewal, itself partially a product of leftist protests and grass-roots action in the 1960s.

It is in its rejection of the modern movement's urban vision that postmodernism has probably had its most positive social impact. It has all but eliminated the isolated block, the vast terrains of concrete, the ne'er-traveled pedestrian bridge as urban solutions; and it has contributed to the meteoric rise in preservation. Although contextualism has produced boring buildings — notably, the numerous brick boxes of Boston and the Upper West Side — it has frequently produced better urbanism, reversing the earlier priorities of building over city, private over public. This is not to deny that it may have also inhibited more exciting and challenging urban solutions: how often has Battery Park City generated the remarks "It could have been better" or "It could have been worse"? Postmodernism's urban intervention are not so much regenerative as simply resistant, an attempt to preserve, not transform, areas of community life.

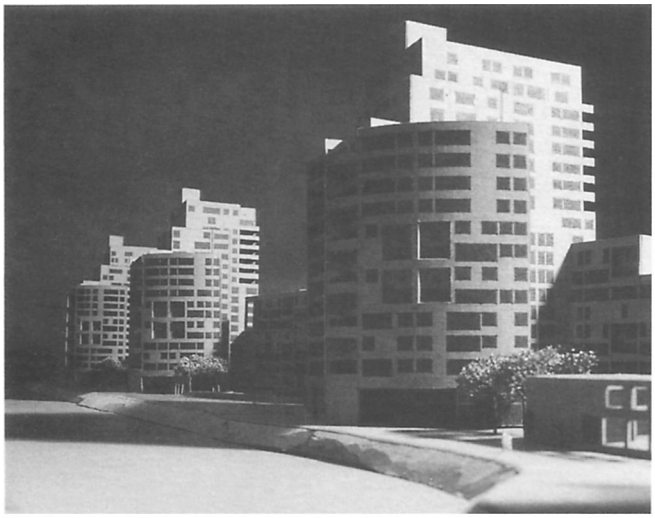
But even this claim to resistance can be challenged if one looks further at that area excluded from postmodern theories: architecture's relation to the powers at large. The revitalization of the urban metropolis has coincided with the return to the city of a young professional class. This so-called good contextualism is almost exclusively the province of the prosperous and upwardly mobile. Whatever its merits, it has contributed to the gloss of gentrification, itself slowly eroding neighborhoods and producing another more insidious kind of uniformity. In the past decade, few opportunities have been taken to explore what contextualism might mean in poorer neighborhoods or in the endless sprawl of suburbia. Certainly here, change, not continuity, of context is sometimes in order.

Affirmation and Commodification

From the 1960s to the present, postmodernism seems to have changed from being essentially a movement that criticized aesthetic and social parameters to one that affirms the status quo. However contradictory its generating impulses, postmodernism's interests in tradition and regional cultures emerged from more than a desire for novelty and spectacle; they embodied a genuine dissatisfaction with the course of modernization, one that pointed to the failures of technology and artistic novelty as social panaceas.[41] By the early 1980s, however, postmodern architecture largely abandoned its critical and transgressive dimensions to create an eclectic and largely affirmative culture, one strikingly in accord with the tone of contemporary political life. It was a trajectory traced by the careers of many architects: for Robert Stern, from a critique of public housing in the Roosevelt Island Competition to luxury suburban developments; for Charles Moore, from a sensitive search for place and a regionally responsive vocabulary at Sea Ranch to outlandish walls and amusement parks at the New Orleans World's Fair; for Michael Graves, from the startling forms of Fargo-Moorhead to the cartooned imagery of Disney Dolphin hotels; and for Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and developer Robert Davis, from the 1960s idealism that inspired Seaside to its present Victorian condominiums for Atlanta lawyers. If there were bumps and jags in this course, and moments of genuine quality and insight, the potential for opposition was soon exhausted. By the time the AT&T building was completed — the initial shock of its historicist forms dissipated — the battle with modernism was largely won; but by that time, too, postmodernism itself became subject to the forces of consumption and commodification.

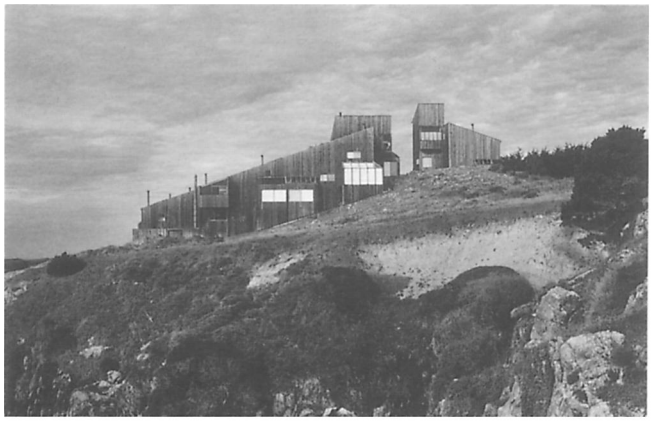
This is probably nowhere clearer than in the architecture culture itself. It is almost as if the populist bias of the movement invited new levels of publicity and promotion. The proliferation of books and labels — five different editions of Jencks's *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, architecture drawings in the art market, editions of the complete works of architects under fifty, architect-designed teapots and doghouses, glossy magazine articles, advertising endorsements for Dexter shoes — signaled architecture's new popularity and marketability. The image of the architect shifted from social crusader and aesthetic puritan to trendsetter and media star. This change in professional definition had ramifications throughout architectural institutions. In the 1980s most schools stopped offering regular housing studios; gentlemen's clubs, resort hotels, art museums, and vacation homes became the standard programs. Design awards and professional magazine coverage have embodied similar priorities. Advocacy architecture and pro bono work are almost dead.

If this bleak picture of commodification threatens to overshadow postmodernism's contributions — its critique of modernization and its renewed sense of the city and public space — it poses much broader problems about the power of architecture to counter the forces of capital, indeed, its capacity to sustain any critical role at all. Certainly, as the first critics of the modern movement revealed, architecture's role has been increasingly diminished by larger economic and social processes.[42] But it is also important to consider what role the theoretical and formal assumptions of postmodernism may have played in these processes. Commodification suggests the importance of cultural signs: that the consumption of objects is as integral to questions of power as their production. But it also suggests a process that automatically vitiates any sustained critique, a recycling of images that leaves material forces untouched. Could it be that postmodernism, by focusing exclusively

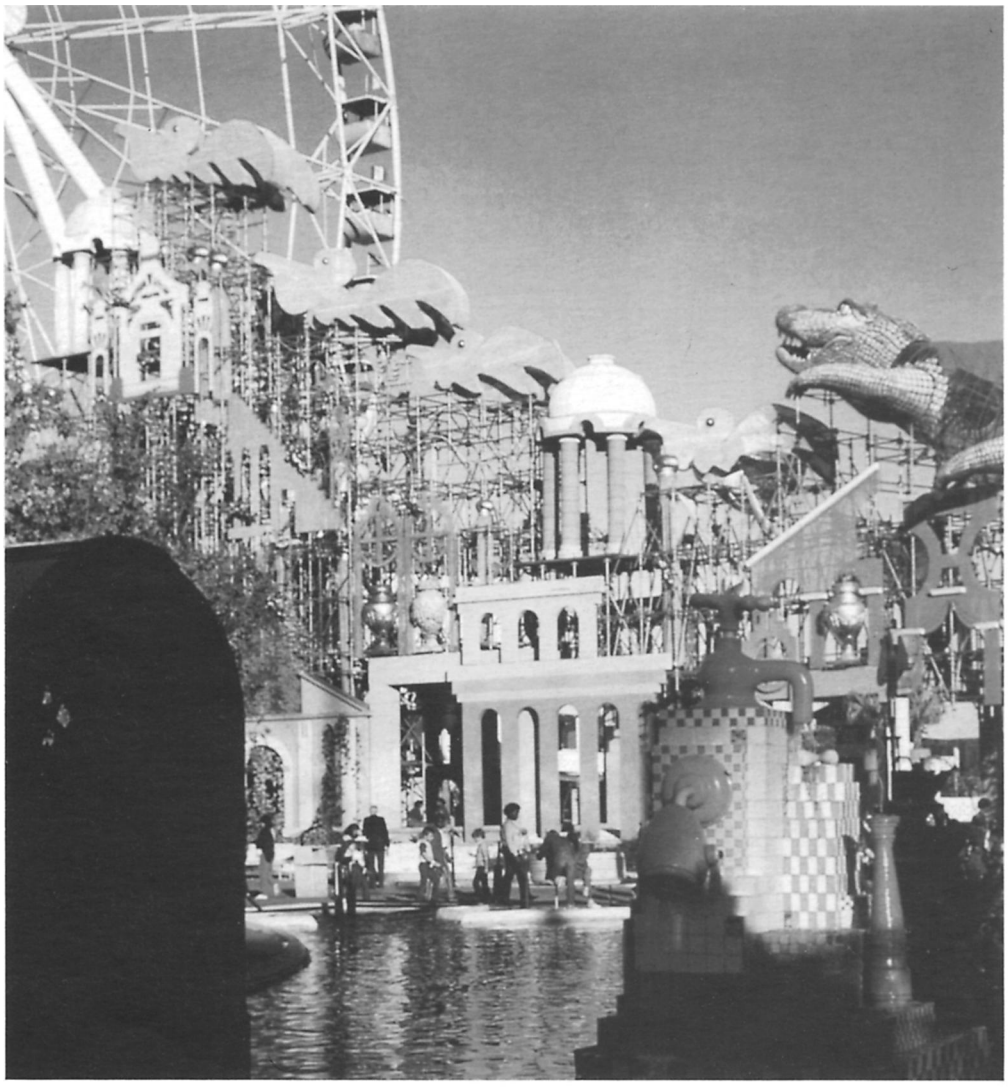


16. Robert A. M. Stern, Roosevelt Island Competition, first prize, New York, New York, 1975

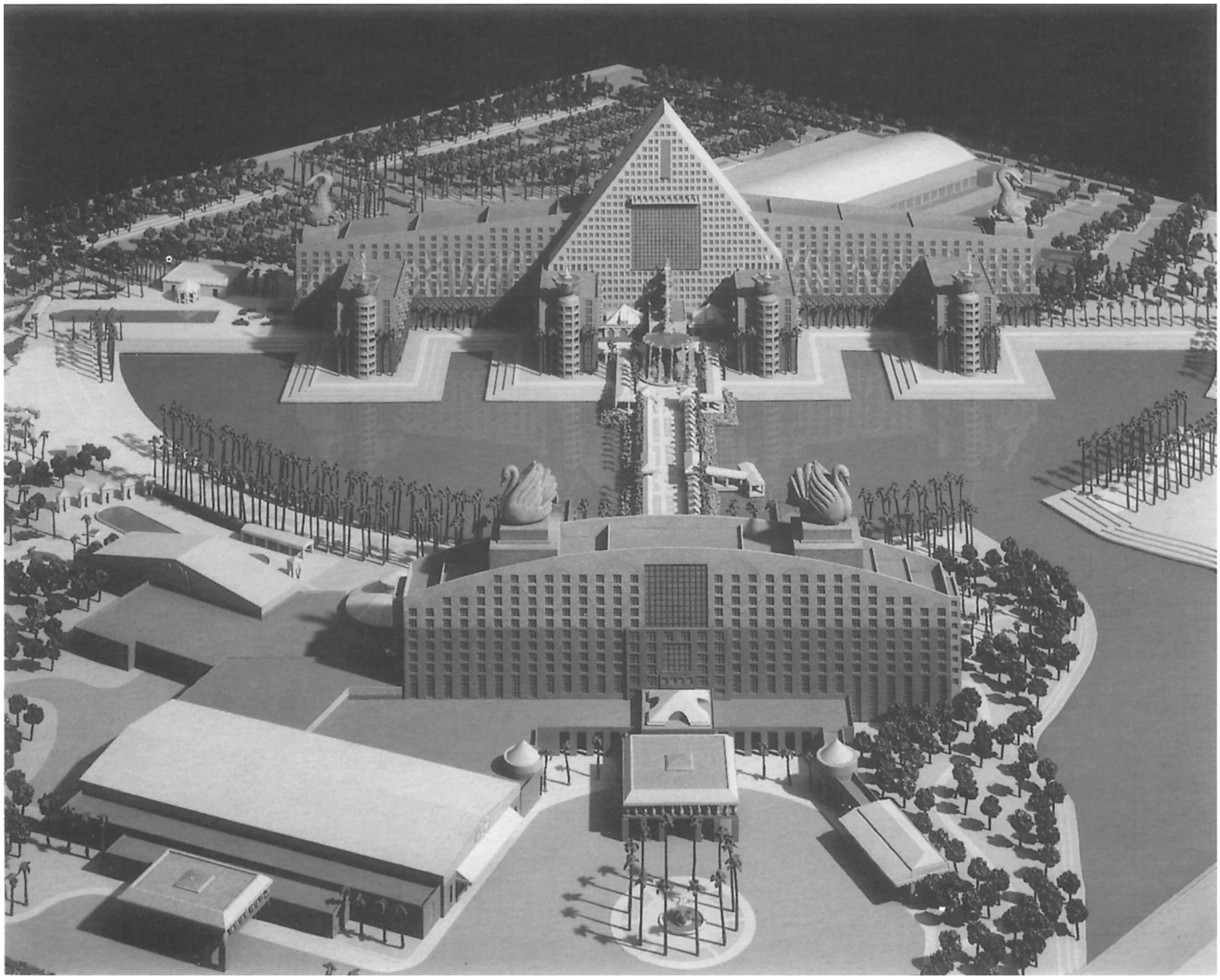
17. Stern, The Hamptons, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1985



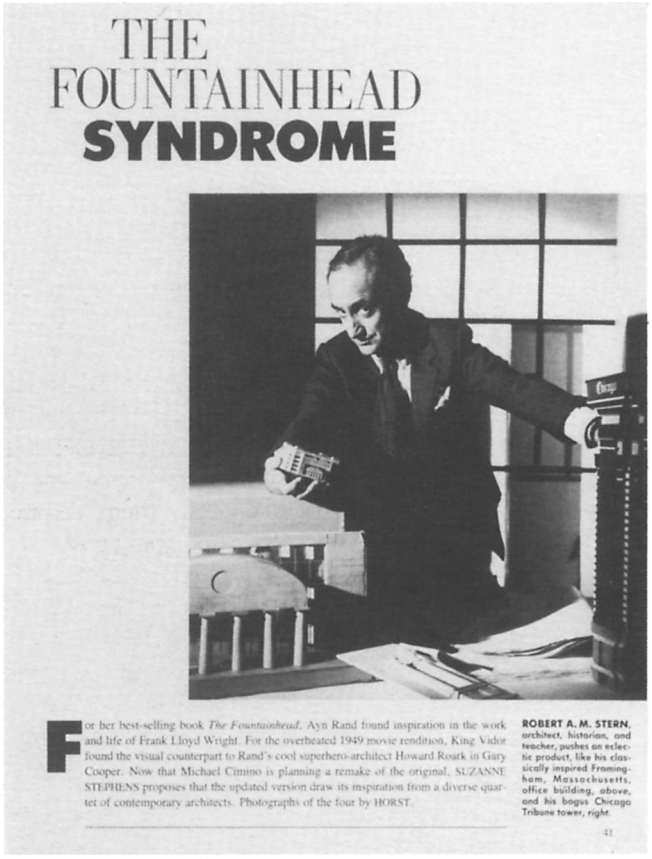
18. Charles Moore (Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull, Whitaker), Sea Ranch Condominium, Sea Ranch, California, 1963–65



19. Charles Moore and William Turnbull, Wonderwall, dismantled, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1982–84



20. Michael Graves, Walt Disney World Dolphin and Swan Hotel/Convention Complex, Walt Disney World, Florida, 1988



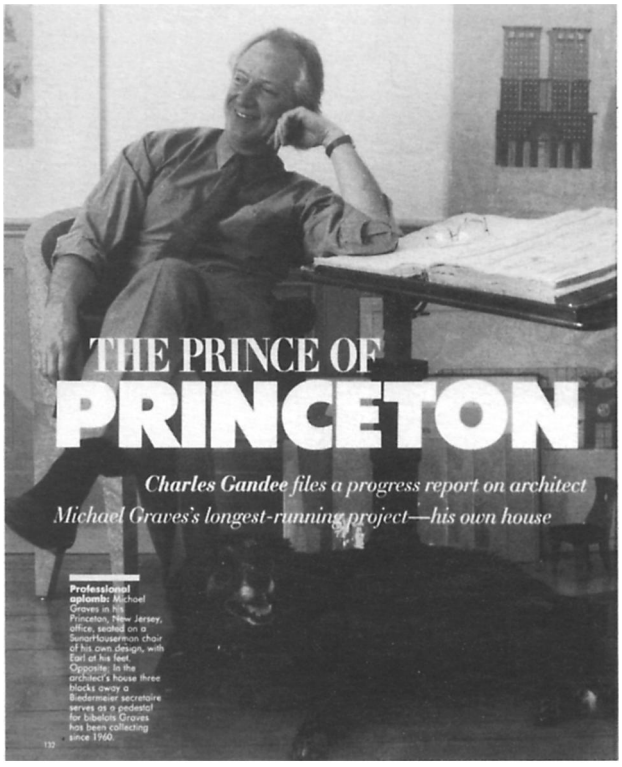
THE FOUNTAINHEAD **SYNDROME**

For her best-selling book *The Fountainhead*, Ayn Rand found inspiration in the work and life of Frank Lloyd Wright. For the overheated 1949 movie rendition, King Vidor found the visual counterpart to Rand's cool superhero-architect Howard Roark in Gary Cooper. Now that Michael Cimino is planning a remake of the original, SUZANNE STEPHENS proposes that the updated version draw its inspiration from a diverse quartet of contemporary architects. Photographs of the four by HORST.

ROBERT A. M. STERN, architect, historian, and teacher, pushes an eclectic product, like his classically inspired Framingham, Massachusetts, office building, above, and his bogus Chicago Tribune tower, right.

41

21. Robert A. M. Stern starring in Suzanne Stephens' article "The Fountainhead Syndrome," *Vanity Fair*, April 1984



THE PRINCE OF **PRINCETON**

Charles Gandee files a progress report on architect Michael Graves's longest-running project—his own house

Professional aplomb: Michael Graves in his Princeton, New Jersey, office, seated on a SunarHauserman chair of his own design, with Earl at his feet. Opposite: In the architect's house three blocks away a Biedermeier secretaire serves as a pedestal for bibelots Graves has been collecting since 1960.

132

22. "The Prince of Princeton," *House and Garden*, July 1988

23. Michael Graves in advertisement for Dexter Shoes, appearing in *New York Times*, 1987

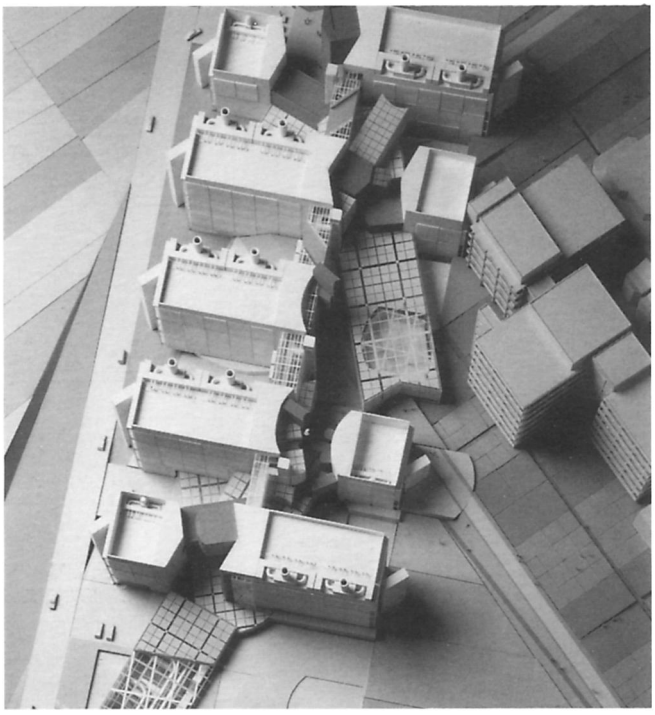
on image, by detaching meaning from other institutional issues, might have lent itself readily to commodification, even potentially spurring its development in architecture?

Poststructuralism, Deconstructivism

A new architectural tendency, associated both with poststructuralist theory and constructivist forms (in school jargon, the slash-crash projects and the Russian train wrecks), is in part a vehement reaction against postmodernism and what are perceived as its conservative dimensions: its historicist imagery, its complacent contextualism, its conciliatory and affirmative properties, its humanism, its rejection of technological imagery, and its repression of the new.[43] This recent wave of critics and designers claims that postmodern architecture does not confront the present and the current impossibility of cultural consensus (here, despite their rejection of any concept of history, many poststructuralist advocates fall into zeitgeist and periodizing rhetoric). Instead of seeking cultural communication, architecture, in their view, should make explicit its purported obliteration. Fragmentation, dispersion, decentering, schizophrenia, disturbance are the new objectives; it is from these qualities that architecture is to gain its "critical" edge.

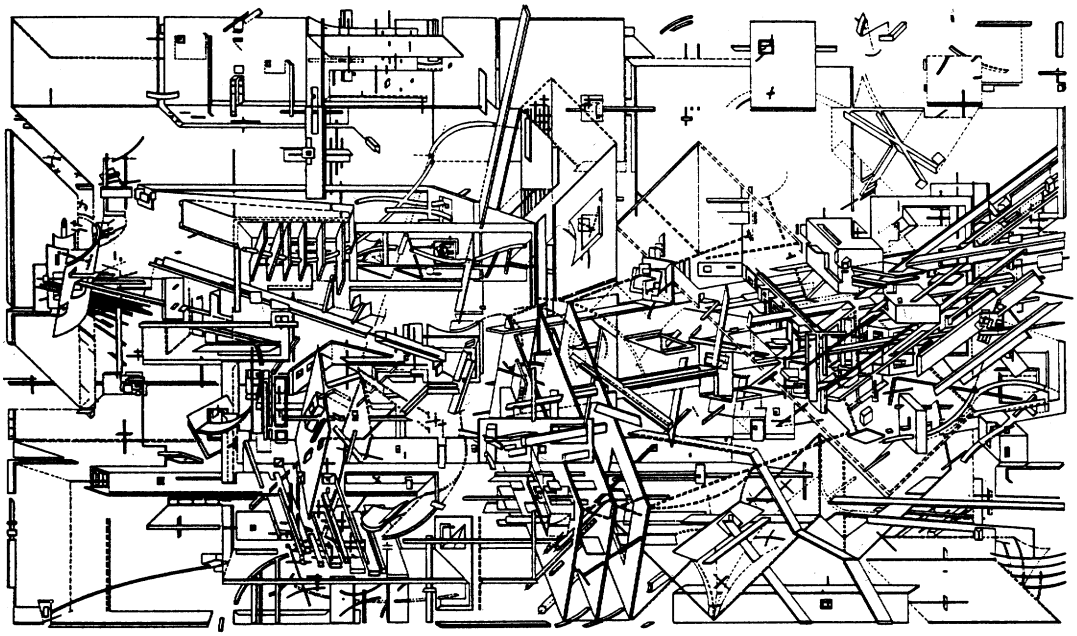
But the question arises of whether the political role of this new architectural avant-garde — this second strain of "postmodernism" — differs significantly from that of the first movement. Is deconstructivism, with its iconoclastic rhetoric, its blatant defiance of structural and material conventions, any more potent than postmodernism in countering the dominant conservatism of the Reagan era? Or is it yet another, perhaps even more extreme, manifestation of the social retreat of recent years?

Before examining some of the political claims of this new tendency and their possible ramifications, however, several qualifications must be made. Like the earlier postmodern architects, these practitioners comprise a disparate group with different styles and intentions; but unlike their predecessors, who shared a critical assessment of the modern movement and recognized their own similarities over a decade of debate and criticism, these individuals have worked independently for years — and in some instances



24. Peter Eisenman (Eisenman/ Robertson), Biocenter for the University of Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, 1987

before the full emergence of historicist tendencies. They have been connected to each other not by themselves but by a handful of critics, and through the institutional sanction of New York's Museum of Modern Art. The categorization "deconstructivists" itself presents numerous problems, not the least of which is that many of the participants in the recent MoMA exhibition "Deconstructivist Architecture" themselves reject the label. Among those included (Coop Himmelblau, Peter Eisenman, Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Daniel Libeskind, and Bernard Tschumi), only Eisenman and Tschumi publicly espouse an interest in the philosophy of Jacques Derrida; yet his theory of deconstruction — which argues that meaning is infinitely deferred and that there exists no extralinguistic beginning or end — has been widely used by critics to explain the philosophical underpinnings of this new formal trend.[44] At the same time, the implication of a single formal source — early Russian constructivism — is similarly misleading: other important formal influences on these designers include Russian constructivism of the mid- and late 1920s (Koolhaas, Tschumi), German expressionism (Coop Himmelblau), the architecture of the 1950s (Hadid, Koolhaas), and contemporary sculpture (Gehry). Of the MoMA participants, only Coop Himmelblau, Hadid, and Libeskind are involved with the extreme fragmentation of diagonal forms — the dismantling of constructivist imagery — that curator Mark Wigley claims as a basic attribute of deconstructivism.[45] Nor do these practitioners share a common cultural heritage or architectural background. In contrast to the first postmodern critique, which started as a particularly American movement and only later became associated with contemporary developments in Europe, this second tendency has been explicitly international from the beginning, with the Architectural Association in London and the former Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York, both international exchange centers, being the largest common bonds. At this moment, as only a few of these designs have been realized, "deconstructivism" exists primarily as a theoretical debate, and it remains questionable whether it will gain the widespread currency of the earlier postmodern movement — whether, in fact, it warrants the designation "movement" at all. The cost of constructing these "antigravity" fantasies



25. Daniel Libeskind, Micromegas, 2, Time Sections, Cranbrook, 1979

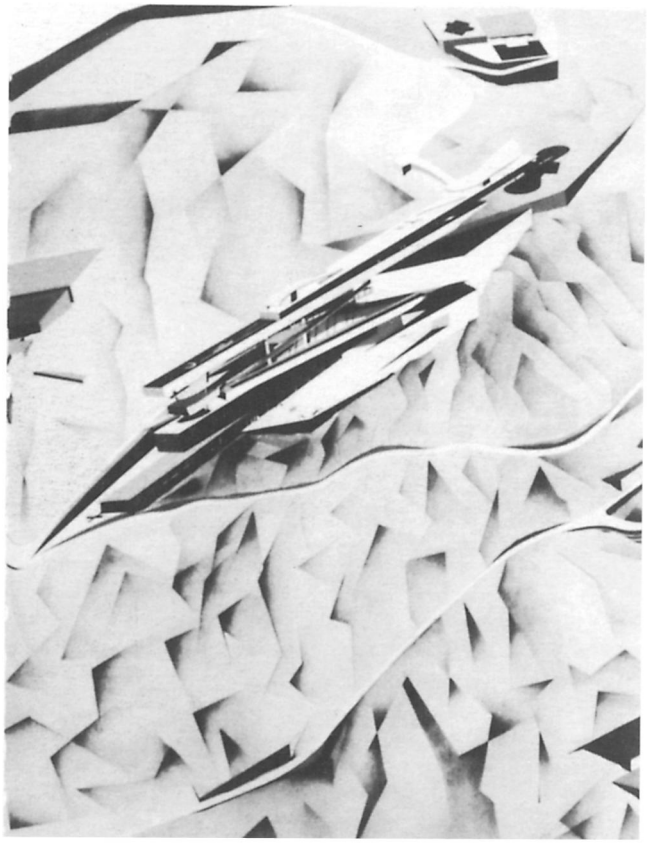
will undoubtedly either inhibit deconstructivism's extension or temper its present aesthetic.

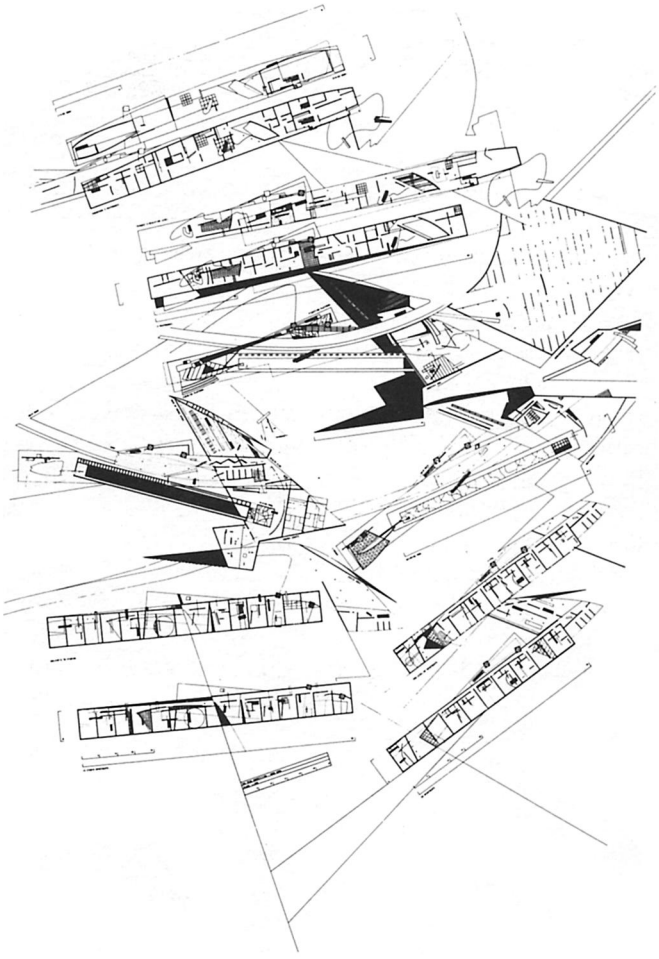
As a reaction to postmodernism, deconstructivism shares certain aspects with modernism. Its preference for abstract forms, its rejection of continuity and tradition, its fascination with technological imagery, its disdain for academicism, its polemical and apocalyptical rhetoric — are all reminiscent of an earlier modern epoch. But deconstructivism, as already suggested, also emerged from many of the same impetuses as postmodernism.[46] Like postmodernism, this new tendency rejects the fundamental ideological premises of the modern movement: functionalism, structural rationalism, and a faith in social regeneration. For all its rhetoric against historical quotation, deconstructivism also looks to the past for formal sources, only now the search centers on modernism and machine-age forms. Finally, deconstructivism, too, emphasizes the formal properties of architecture. (In this regard, it is ironic that Russian constructivism, with its political and social programs, is considered the primary source.)

Formal Hermeticism

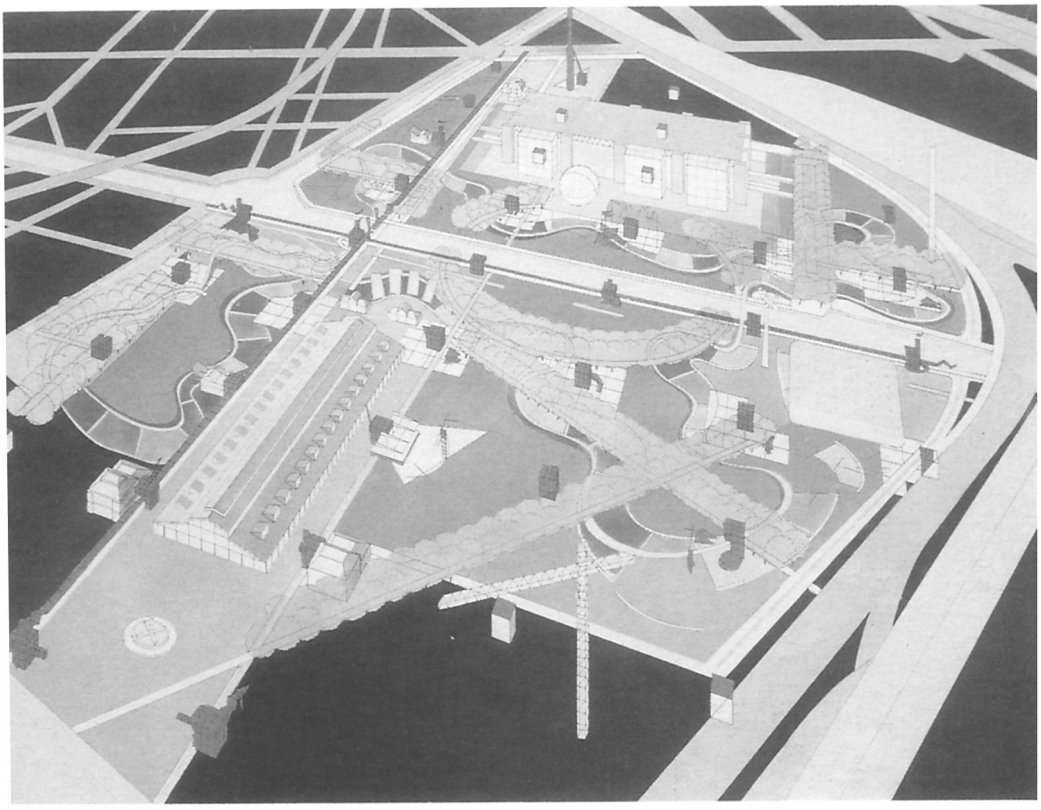
The focus on form in deconstructivist architecture, as in postmodern architecture, suggests that here, too, any political role that would challenge existing structures must reside in architecture's nature as an object. And indeed, this would seem to be the thrust of explorations by such diverse practitioners as Coop Himmelblau, Hadid, and Libeskind as well as by poststructuralist apologists such as Wigley and Jeff Kipnis. Site, client, production process, and program are rarely the subject of investigation or radical transformation.[47] In built work, existing institutional boundaries are generally accepted; in theoretical projects, they are simply ignored.

It should also be noted, however, that two of the architects in the MoMA show, Eisenman and Tschumi, have claimed to stress process over form and have used the poststructuralist notion of intertextuality to assert a new contamination that challenges the autonomy of the designed object. Initially a reaction in literary circles to the





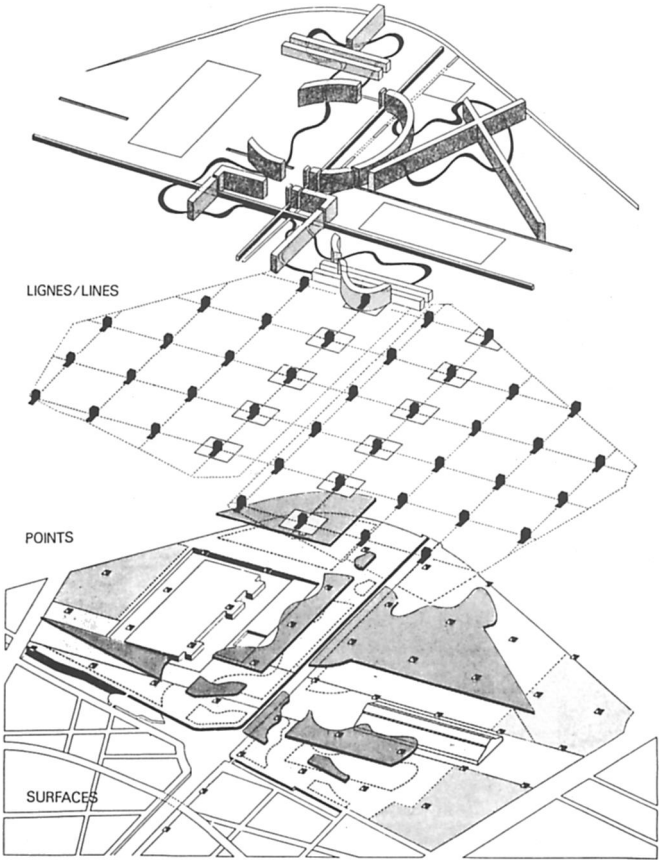
26. Zaha M. Hadid, The Peak (a gentlemen's club), Hong Kong Peak International Competition, first prize, 1982



27. Bernard Tschumi, aerial view, Parc de la Villette, Paris, 1982–85

formalism of the New Critics, this idea holds that meaning begins before and extends beyond the text; in other words, not only is literature indebted to previous texts, but a text's very existence depends on all texts. Eisenman translates this concept in architecture through a metaphor of the palimpsest; Tschumi works literally with superimpositions of systems. These excavations and layerings, however, almost always operate on a compositional rather than on an institutional plane, and all involve the architect's (as opposed to the client's or user's) role in the design process. The combining of conventional functional programs in the Follies at Tschumi's La Villette perhaps comes closest to challenging institutional boundaries; but even here it must be acknowledged that in the initial competition brief the government had largely conceded the definition of program to the architect and, further, that parks themselves lie outside of traditional strictures of utility (hence follies — and their long history in landscape design).

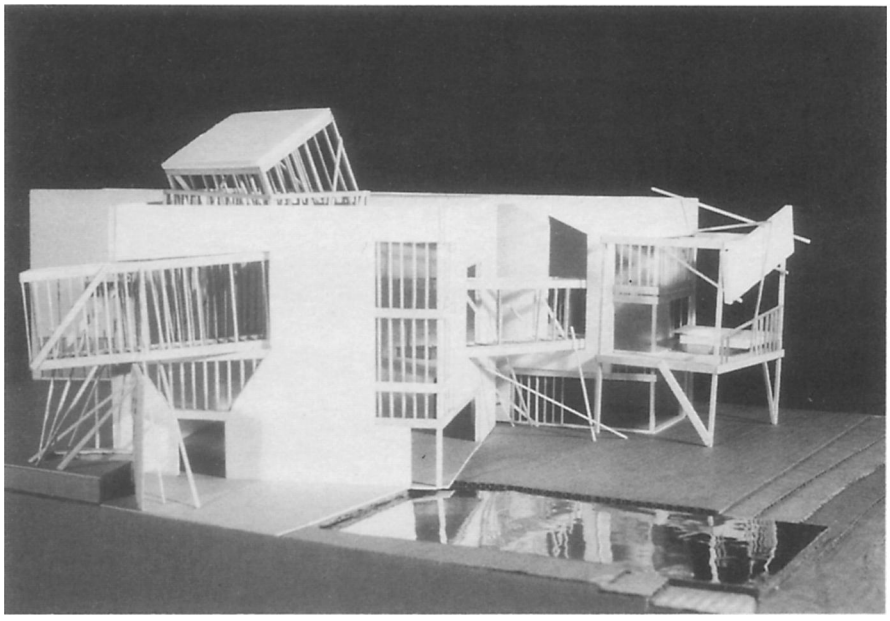
One could, in fact, readily argue that the poststructuralist influence has led to an even greater focus on form as an end in itself than was the case in the earlier postmodern experiments. The notion of communication embraced by many of the historicist postmodernists, however naïve, countered a completely hermetic conception of architecture. In contrast, architects influenced by poststructuralist theory have intentionally stressed abstract compositional procedures that tend to preclude references beyond form. In the essay "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End," Eisenman describes his objective as "*architecture as independent discourse*, free of external values — classical or any other; that is, the intersection of the *meaning-free*, the *arbitrary*, and the *timeless* in the artificial."[48] Similarly, Tschumi states that "La Villette . . . aims at an architecture that *means* nothing, an architecture of the signifier rather than the signified, one that is pure trace or play of language."[49] In its continual deferral of meaning, in its celebration of the endless signifier, poststructuralist theory appears to have produced another kind of aestheticization, which privileges form (language) and "textuality" and which refuses any reality outside the object (text). Andreas Huyssen has written that "American poststructuralist writers and critics . . . call for self-reflexiveness, not, to be sure, of the author-subject, but of the text; . . . they purge life, reality, history, society from the work of art and its reception, and construct a new autonomy, based on a pristine notion of textuality, a new art for art's sake which is presumably the only kind possible after the failure of all and any commitment."[50] This formal hermeticism seems to be doubly problematic in architec-



28. Tschumi, diagram of superimposition points/lines/surfaces, Parc de la Villette, 1982

ture, which, as already suggested, does not lend itself readily to the linguistic analogy. The poststructuralist literary critic can assert that the very process of meaning's displacement involves content, even if its presence is ultimately — and solipsistically — denied; but for the architecture critic involved with the abstract formal explorations of deconstructivist design, even this modest claim is difficult. Although architecture never completely escapes referentiality, highly abstract architecture, like instrumental music, refers essentially to itself. In other words, signification may not be so much displaced as nonexistent from a conventional linguistic perspective; instead of an endless signifier, the result may be a self-reflexive or static signifier. Intertextuality, then, is constricted to the realm of architectural form.

The aestheticization of deconstructivist architecture is certainly a further retreat from social processes, but it would be a mistake to dismiss its formal explorations as politically neutral or irrelevant. Even artistic abstraction has social implications, and, given the increasingly conservative connotations of postmodern figuration, deconstructivism may well be an instance where abstraction takes on progressive resonances, as modernism did initially. Nor are the forms always as mute as their practitioners sometimes claim them to be.[51] Compared to the tired classical images of postmodernism, these neoconstructivist forms possess for the moment a freshness and energy that embrace the present and the future. Even when the imagery harks back to Russian constructivism, it invokes (however self-consciously) the Revolution's dream of a heroic future. Technology is here a source of pleasure and play — something to be exploited and stretched in order to realize new spatial possibilities. Similarly, steel, glass, corrugated sheet metal, chain link — the signs of industrial economy — offer new options and imagery. Some of the designs in the MoMA exhibition, such as Hadid's and Libeskind's, are arcane, almost precious, space-age displays of refinement; others, particularly those of Frank Gehry, gain power from their matter-of-factness — their rough joints and inexpensive materials. Whatever despair these projects may ultimately convey on the social front, they project a vigorous optimism on the artistic front.



29. Frank O. Gehry, model, Familian House, Santa Monica, California, 1978

30. Gehry, Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, California, 1981–84

31. Daniel Libeskind, offices and housing, IBA City Edge Competition, first prize, Berlin, 1987

But the implications of other aspects of deconstructivism's formal hermeticism are more problematic. One consequence is a potential narrowing of audience. Although the general public might respond to the images' aesthetic exuberance and technological bravura, most likely only a small cultural elite will appreciate the iconoclasm of forms, the inversions of common sense and everyday expectations. This is not to suggest that this hermeticism will allow deconstructivism to escape commodification, but rather that its marketing appeal may well be to a narrower group than that of postmodern designs. Indeed, deconstructivist architecture risks the elitist charges that modern architecture faced with the postmodern critique.

Another consequence of deconstructivism's formal hermeticism has been a denial of urban context and a renewed focus on the building as object. The fragmentation and formal explosion of these works means that not only do they contrast radically with a traditional urban fabric, but they cannot join readily with other buildings to form defined public space.[52] The single building once again becomes more important than the city, individual creation more important than collective accretion. In cities such as Los Angeles this may be a realistic position, perhaps just a conformist one; in older urban fabrics it becomes an act of rebellion and opposition. And here the power of the vision is paramount. Just as in a few of the earlier postmodern works historical references could illuminate the tensions between continuity and fissure, past and present, in certain deconstructivist projects the fragmentation stands as a telling comment on banality, loss, and poverty of context. It is an urban vision of negation, rejecting past solutions and denying possibilities of reconstituted community. As marginal avant-garde gestures, these projects promise a certain critical power, but as larger endeavors — as a general strategy for the numerous and repetitive problems confronting urban space — they represent a closure, one at odds with the exuberance of many of the forms themselves.

Politics and Formal Subversion

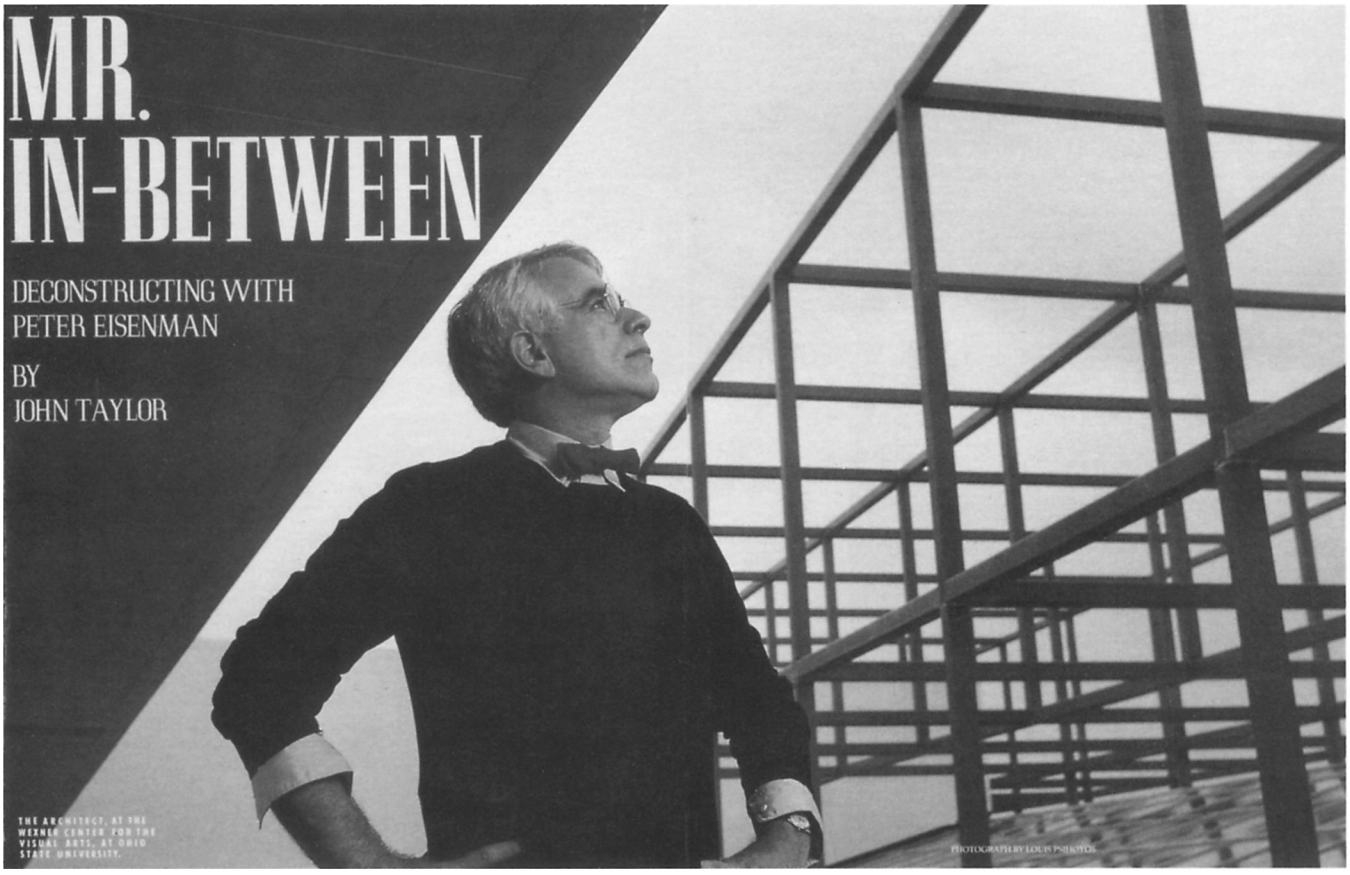
It is in this moment of negation, the disruption of both the traditional city and the conventions of architecture, that several poststructuralist advocates have made their political

claims. Using such words as "unease," "disintegration," "decentering," "dislocation," Eisenman, Tschumi, and Wigley have stated that this work challenges the status quo, not from the outside, but through formal disruptions and inversions within the object. In other words, formal strategies themselves have the power, in their view, to undermine codes and preconceptions — in fact, the entire apparatus of Western humanism itself. If architecture forsakes a political role in the sense espoused by the modern movement — one seeking the transformation of production processes and institutional boundaries — it now gains political power simply through the cultural sign, or more precisely, through revealing the disintegration of that sign. This objective is indeed an inversion of the optimistic claims of the earlier postmodern movement. Practitioners such as Moore, Graves, and Stern thought that they could reconstitute community and regional identity through the formal properties of architecture; some deconstructivist practitioners believe that they can reveal the impossibility of such reconstitutions through the cultural object. Like Jean-François Lyotard, they proclaim the death of master narratives: equality, reason, truth, notions of collective consensus, and so forth.[53] With this collapse of values, art gains a new redemptive role, one that negates utopian aspirations but finds hope within contemporary disintegration. Quite clearly this is no longer the negation of Theodor Adorno and certain members of the Frankfurt School, who called for artistic retreat in order to preserve a utopian vision of the social and political sphere.

The introduction of deconstruction to architecture *has* contributed to an atittude of critical skepticism and scrutiny, a questioning of existing conventions of composition and form. Already, deconstructivism has played a major role in undermining the pseudohistoricism, mindless contextualism, and conciliatory values of postmodernism. Here its impact can be compared to that of traditional avant-garde practices of negation and subversion. But outside of the formal sphere, the critical role of deconstructivism remains elusive; indeed, many of the more progressive political contributions of poststructuralist theory have disappeared in its application to architecture. While in literary criticism poststructuralist analyses have pointed out internal inconsistencies and irrationalities in oppressive discourse and have thus brought to light strategies of racism, sexism, colonialism, and the like, in architecture these critical possibilities are largely precluded once again by the difficulties of the linguistic analogy. To the extent that architectural meaning is ambiguous, the connections between architectural form and political oppression are rarely as self-evident as those between language and political oppression. And in those situations where the connections are more obvious (for instance, in the monumental architecture of Nazi Germany), the political and economic circumstances often mitigate against change in a purely representational sphere. Certainly in the present American context, any claims linking the formal fragmentation of deconstructivist architecture to political subversion remain suspect; any critical properties center on architecture itself.[54]

Beyond these particular problems of translation from literary theory to architecture, deconstruction raises deeper political and ethical questions that are at the heart of some of the difficulties of allying this philosophical position with political praxis. In a world of endless textuality, how can the institutional and material causes of representation — and oppression — ever be determined or examined sufficiently to be countered? In a world without truth, history, or consensus, what is the basis or criterion for action? In other words, how does one choose the objects, strategies, and goals of subversions? Is there any way to avoid total relativism — a sense that anything goes?

It does not, of course, take much imagination to envision subversions of the status quo resulting in greater inequities and injustices. Regardless of epistemological questions, some values, however provisional, and some notion of collective identity are probably essential to political action and social betterment.[55] But if these issues seem to place an unjust burden on form, it may be because poststructuralist advocates are caught in delusions of architecture's transformative power, a situation strangely reminiscent of an earlier modern period. Even more than the problem of total relativism, the political problems posed by a poststructuralist architecture reside in the paradox whereby the architect is absolved of obligations of authorship but the object is granted considerable subversive power.



32. "John Taylor Deconstructs the Architect of the Hour," *New York Magazine*, 17 October 1988

Such absolution underestimates the architect's power and precludes a political actor. Following Michel Foucault's and Roland Barthes's famous declarations of the death of the author, poststructuralists have denounced authorial subjectivity and its concomitant claims of intentionality, originality, truth, and transparent communication.[56] In part this position is an elaboration of modernism's own denunciation of idealist and romantic notions of creation. But as the critic Huyssen has asked, how radical or even useful is such a stand when few today would deny the role of external forces in creation and reception? Is it a refusal of responsibility? An inadvertent acceptance of the status quo — allied with, rather than opposed to, the processes of modernization?[57] And, finally, does the denial of authorship prohibit the emergence of alternative voices that would challenge the ideology of the architect (almost always male, white, and middle class)?[58]

At the same time, the overestimation of form's role does not take into account the power of capital to numb acts of subversion. Uneasiness, fright, a sense of disruption are hardly alien to contemporary society; they are in fact so much a part of our everyday life that they can be easily ignored or consumed — common fates of avant-garde culture. Any sensations, pleasurable or painful, instantly become fodder for both high culture and mass consumption. The brief history of deconstructivism leaves little grounds for political optimism. Just as the progressive impulses of the postmodern critique became largely swallowed by the movement's own success, so too the critique posed by these frenzied forms threatens to be undermined by its sudden fashionability. If anything, the cycle seems ever more rapid; proclamation and consumption are almost simultaneous. How subversive can a movement be when it gains simultaneous sanction from two major museums in New York City? How sustained can any challenge be when the forces that have promoted it (Philip Johnson, Century Club lunches, Princeton University, Max Protetch, and MoMA) have uncanny similarities to those that helped institutionalize what it purports to criticize — postmodern architecture? Ironically, the rhetoric of the death of the author seems not to dampen the spirit of self-promotion, hype, and commodification that became so integral to the dissemination of postmodernism.

33. "Out," *W*, 13–20 January 1984

Should deconstructivism, however, manage to sustain any subversive qualities in the face of these forces, other questions arise: Are radical formal statements necessarily the most appropriate means to shelter people whose lives are already filled with the disruption and frustration that deconstructivist architecture celebrates? Would scarce resources for public housing be more appropriately spent on day-care centers, sports facilities, and larger housing units than on structural acrobatics? The avant-garde desire "épater la bourgeoisie" may fulfill the architect's need for a radical self-image, but it does little in this era of social retrenchment to improve the everyday life of the poor and dispossessed.

Perhaps not surprising, women, blacks, and other minorities have been notably silent voices in these recent theoretical debates. While the reasons are complex and diverse, a few immediately come to the fore: the elitist atmosphere induced by both the hermetic forms and an obscure discourse, the aggressive rhetoric of subversion that rings of a new machismo, the exclusionary forums of promotion, and probably most fundamental, the denial of real institutional transformation.[59] Deconstructivist forms reject nostalgia, historicist fabrication, and the postmodern denial of the present, but they embody another kind of forgetting — a forgetting of the *social* itself. A tendency that began as a reaction against the conservative ethos of postmodernism and contemporary political life threatens to become an even more extreme embodiment of that same ethos.

A Fin de Siècle?

In 1980, summarizing architecture's new political cast, Robert Stern wrote, "Post-modernism is not revolutionary in either the political or artistic sense; in fact, it reinforces the effect of the technocratic and bureaucratic society in which we live — traditional post-modernism by accepting conditions and trying to modify them, schismatic post-modernism [i.e., Eisenman] by proposing a condition *outside* Western Humanism, thereby permitting Western Humanist culture to proceed uninterrupted though not necessarily unaffected."[60] However disturbing, Stern's assessment, made on the eve of the Reagan era, seems on the mark. But what Stern and most of his contemporaries overlooked is that the initial critique of modern architecture stemmed from a dissatisfaction with the forces that in fact constitute "technocratic and bureaucratic society." In other words, the reification and reductivism of modernism were partly a product of those forces that both strains of postmodernism have "reinforced." From the same perspective, historicist and poststructuralist advocates could not have anticipated the power of an increasingly commercialized society to control the evolution of an artistic movement, how rapidly efforts to preserve and modify a cultural situation would themselves become sterile and commodified.

What seems to be operating in recent architectural developments is a process by which a movement, whose initial critique and experimentation is vigorous and challenging, becomes increasingly lifeless and routinized as it becomes part of the dominant culture. Thomas Crow has described the avant-garde as "a kind of research and development arm of the culture industry."[61] Both postmodernism and deconstructivism can be seen as having staked out areas of cultural practice that retain some vitality in an increasingly administered and rationalized society: the postmodernists by looking to forms that predate the hegemony of bureaucratic modernization; the poststructuralists by challenging the precepts of rationality and of order itself. But just as both these tendencies discover areas not yet part of commodity culture, they make their existence discrete and visible, and thus subject to the market's manipulation.[62]

This cycle of appropriation can easily be used to justify the cynicism and social passivity that are such strong components of postmodernism in all of its colors. Indeed, it is precisely this cycle that has bred the split between politics and aesthetics: "There's nothing to be done"; hence "Anything goes." But these conclusions assume the total impotence of the cultural sphere, an impotence that is belied by the fears of both Right and Left and by the initial vitality of postmodernism itself. In some ways, the political resignation of contemporary architecture is simply a reversal of the utopian aspirations of the modern movement. Both fall into an either/or mentality that obscures the complexity of relations between form and politics. It would appear that part of the problem lies in postmodernism's criticism of

modernism itself. Both the historicist and poststructuralist tendencies correctly pointed to the failures of the modern movement's instrumental rationality, its narrow teleology, and its overblown faith in technology, but these two positions have erred in another direction: in their abjuration of all realms of the social and in their assumption that form remains either a critical or affirmative tool independent of social and economic processes. That contemporary architecture has become so much about surface, image, and play, and that its content has become so ephemeral, so readily transformable and consumable, is partially a product of the neglect of the material dimensions of architecture — program, production, financing, and so forth — that more directly involve questions of power. And by precluding issues of gender, race, ecology, and poverty, postmodernism and deconstructivism have also forsaken the development of a more vital and sustained heterogeneity. The formal *and* the social costs are too high when the focus is so exclusively on form.

Notes

I would like to thank Alan Colquhoun, Stephen Frankel, Robert Heintges, Mark Treib, Bernard Tschumi, and, especially, Joan Ockman, who all generously reviewed and commented on an earlier draft of this article. I am also extremely grateful for the insightful criticism and encouragement of Richard Pommer, Michael Hays, and Alicia Kennedy.

1. Daniel Bell's criticisms of postmodernism predate most architectural developments and consequently focus on literary and philosophical trends, which are often at odds in their rejection of representation, history, and humanism with those in architecture. Robert Stern has, in fact, cited Bell's cultural criticism as justification for his own postmodern position. But Bell's attack on the populism of Herbert Gans and his general disapproval of hedonism and experimentation suggest that he would not be in sympathy with the subsequent development of postmodern architecture. See Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 51–55, 264; idem, "Beyond Modernism, Beyond Self" in *The Winding Passage: Essays and Sociological Journeys 1960–1980* (Cambridge, Mass.: ABT Books, 1980), 288–89; and Robert Stern, "The Doubles of Post-Modern," *Harvard Architecture Review* 1 (1980): 87. Hilton Kramer's attacks on postmodern architecture can be found throughout the pages of the *New Criterion*.

2. "Beyond the Modern Movement," *Harvard Architecture Review* 1 (1980): 4. For a more extended discussion of the role of "meaning" in postmodern architecture, see Mary McLeod, "Architecture," in *The Postmodern Moment: A Handbook of Contemporary Innovation in the Arts* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 19–46.

3. Stern uses the term "schismatic postmodernism" in his essay "The Doubles of Post-Modern," 75–87, citing as examples the work of John Cage, William Gass, and Peter Eisenman. Eisenman himself employs the term "decomposition" to describe his own work, beginning with his book *House X*. The term "deconstructivism" recently received official sanction with the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Deconstructivist Architecture*. Joseph Giovannini claims to have first coined the term. See Joseph Giovannini, "Breaking All the Rules," *New York Times Magazine*, 12 June 1988.

4. In many instances, of course, these themes were more visible on a formal than a material plane. There is no equivalent in architecture criticism to Clement Greenberg's or Theodor Adorno's theories of modernism as artistic autonomy. In the first generation of historians of modernism, Nikolaus Pevsner and Siegfried Giedion created genealogies that incorporated the social vision of the Arts and Crafts movement, the structural rationalism of engineering, and the aesthetic innovations of cubism (the first two for Pevsner, the latter two for Giedion). In the second generation, historians such as Reyner Banham and William Jordy place greater stress on the symbolic dimensions and academic heritage of the modern movement, which undoubtedly more strongly emphasizes its artistic interpretation. Neither group, however, presents a teleology of form that stresses architecture's isolation as a discipline. Colin Rowe perhaps comes closest to the formalism of some art critics of the postwar period, but the social and symbolic aspirations of the modern movement are fully acknowledged in many of his essays (see especially his introduction to *Five Architects* [New York: Wittenborn, 1972] and his essay "The Architecture of Utopia," in *Mathematics of the Ideal Villa* [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976]) and in fact become a subject of criticism in the setting forth of his own polemical agenda. The involvement of the modern movement with technology and mass culture has been a topic of considerable interest among contemporary scholars, including Manfredo Tafuri, Stanislaus von Moos, Nikolaus Bullock, and Jean-Louis Cohen.

5. The word "historicist" refers in this instance, as it commonly does in discussions of postmodern architecture, to the use of historical forms and styles in designs. Until the emergence of postmodernism, the term was most frequently associated with revivalist and eclectic tendencies in nineteenth-century architecture, which rejected the static ideal embraced by the previous classical concept. Nineteenth-century stylistic eclecticism was linked to the emergence of the philosophical concept of historicism in late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century Germany, but it did not result necessarily in an acceptance of relativism. For a discussion of historicism in architecture, see Alan Colquhoun, "Three Kinds of Historicism," *Oppositions* 26 (Spring 1984): 29–39.

6. See Robert Gutman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), esp. 3–12, 21–22.

7. The growing public presence of architecture is itself an indication of a broader dissolution of the boundaries between culture, economics, and politics brought on by com-

modity capitalism. This dissolution (underscored in very concrete terms by the transformation of a movie star into a president) can be seen as having made power more diffuse, but also as having made issues of control in everyday life more critical from a political perspective.

8. See Alan Colquhoun, "Postmodernism and Structuralism: A Retrospective Glance," *Assemblage* 5 (1988): 7.

9. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 239–40.

10. What may appear oppressive and totalitarian in one situation — for instance, the stripped classicism of Nazi Germany — may appear progressive and democratic in another — for instance, the similar forms of Roosevelt's New Deal America. Within different contexts, the same forms might serve as propaganda, criticism, or tacit affirmation of values.

11. Here I intentionally do not invoke Walter Benjamin's aspiration to a complete integration of technique and content, expressed in his essay "The Author as Producer," in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 220–38. Benjamin's objective is not unrelated to that of some modern architects, especially Hannes Meyer, Ernst May, and Mart Stam, but the interface between art and politics has rarely been so clean. Often what is a progressive tendency in terms of technique may not be such in terms of content, and vice versa; and depending on the context, one dimension may take on more political importance than another. The total separation of the two, however, raises other political issues, to be discussed later in the essay.

12. Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Editions Cres, 1923); *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Praeger, 1960), 211.

13. Claude Schnaidt, *Hannes Meyer: Bauten, Projekte und Schriften: Buildings, Projects and Writings* (Teufen: Verlag Arthur Niggli, 1965), 25.

14. There are, of course, exceptions to this, notably the De Stijl group and some of the Russian constructivists of the early 1920s. Paradoxically, we might see modern architecture's challenge to existing social patterns (particularly outside Germany) as more successful on a formal rather than an economic level. The new forms and compositional strategies raised questions about traditional hierarchies that elevated the monumental over the everyday, the public over the private, the formal over the informal, the male over the female.

15. For a discussion of this division, see George Baird, "*La Dimension Amoureuse* in Architecture," in *Meaning in Architecture*, ed. Charles Jencks and George Baird (New York: Braziller, 1969), 79–99; and McLeod, "Architecture," 27–28.

16. Several historical reasons exist for the failure of the first postmodern critics to distinguish between the modernism of the 1950s and that of the 1920s and 1930s. First, the continuing presence of Gropius and Mies gave to most Americans an impression of modernism's continuity. Second, many American practitioners of the 1950s (in contrast to those in Italy, for instance) did not themselves distinguish their work from that of the prewar period, even if the forms were radically different. Third, there was little modern architecture in the United States of the 1920s and 1930s against which to compare the later works.

17. See Rowe, Addendum, 1973, to "The Architecture of Utopia," 213–17, and Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978). Rowe's language of "fragment" and "collage" in many respects presages contemporary poststructuralist discourse.

18. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, "'Leading from the Rear': Reply to Martin Pawley," *Architectural Design* 40 (July 1970): 320, 370; reprinted in *A View from the Campidoglio: Selected Essays 1953–84*, ed. Peter Arnell, Ted Bickford, and Catherine Bergart (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 24.

19. Kenneth Frampton, "America 1960–1970: Notes on Urban Images and Theory," *Casabella* 35, nos. 359–360 (December 1971): 25–37. In this essay Frampton's solution is a far cry from the "critical regionalism" that he professes a decade later. Here he questions how much legitimate populism remains in American culture and proposes the "semi-indeterminate" infrastructures of Shadrach Woods as urban design models that simultaneously accommodate technology and the specificities of place.

Tomás Maldonado's critique of Scott Brown and Venturi's position is similar to Frampton's. In a chapter entitled "Las Vegas and the Semiological Abuse," he writes: "There is also a kind of cultural nihilism which, consciously or unconsciously, exalts the status quo. We find an example of it among those who are singing paeans to the 'landscape' of certain American cities, which are among the most brutal, degrading, and corrupt that consumer society has ever created. . . . Las Vegas is not a creation *by* the people, but *for* the people. It is the final product . . . of more than half a century of masked manipulatory violence . . ." (Tomás Maldonado, *Design, Nature and Revolution: Toward a Critical Ecology*, trans. Mario Domandi [New York: Harper and Row, 1972], 60, 65).

20. Denise Scott Brown, "Pop Off: Reply to Kenneth Frampton," in *A View from the Campidoglio*, 34–37. Scott Brown argues that Frampton is caught between two contradictory positions, an endorsement of Marcuse's social critique and a rejection of Gropius's social architecture, and that he does not acknowledge their shared rejection of populist culture.

21. Also of importance were Herbert Gans's two other books *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italo-Americans* (New York: The Free Press, 1962) and *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1974). Another sociologist frequently mentioned during this period was Melvin Webber. See, especially, Melvin M. Webber, "The Urban Place and the Nonplace Urban Realm," in *Explorations into Urban Structure* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964). Scott Brown and Venturi often cited Gans and Webber in their early writings.

22. Shopping centers have provided one of the most important sites for the dissemination of postmodern architecture outside of major metropolitan areas.

23. See Richard L. Berke, "Dukakis Says He Would Commit

$3 Billion to Build New Housing," *New York Times*, 29 June 1988.

24. Many (including Michael Graves, Thomas Gordon Smith, and Steven Peterson), of course, have not. One of the strongest defenses of postmodern architecture coming from the Left is Linda Hutcheon's article, "The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History," *Cultural Critique* 5 (Winter 1986–87): 179–207. Hutcheon claims here that postmodern works are "resolutely historical and inescapably political precisely because they are parodistic" and that they expose "the contradictions of modernism in an explicitly political light." The ease with which parody loses its critical edge will be addressed later.

25. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, 3d ed. (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), 37.

26. Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), 44.

27. For a more extended discussion of some of these issues, see McLeod, "Architecture," 31–42. Paradoxically, for Walter Benjamin the distracted mode of architecture's reception is paradigmatic of the new media — film, photography, journalism — on which he places so much political hope. But in contrast to the postmodernists who stress architecture's reception as art, Benjamin seeks transformation through a gradual, almost unconscious, change of habit and expectation; in other words, a reception of distraction rather than of attention is now to architecture's political advantage. See Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 239–40.

28. Stern, "The Doubles of Post-Modern," 87.

29. Robert Venturi, "The RIBA Annual Discourse," *Transactions* 1 (1981–82); reprinted in *A View from the Campidoglio*, 109.

30. Quoted in Paolo Portoghesi, *Postmodern: The Architecture of the Postindustrial Society* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 33. Johnson wrote this letter after having read Jürgen Joedicke's *History of Modern Architecture*.

31. The word "postmodern" should be qualified in reference to Venturi's work. Certainly, his mother's house predates any public acknowledgment of the movement, although it probably influenced the subsequent development of postmodernism in the United States more than any other design. Venturi himself has been extremely critical of most postmodern architecture for its "simplistic, esoteric" use of historicist forms and for its dependence on a high-art heritage. See, especially, Venturi, "The RIBA Annual Discourse," and, idem, "Diversity, Relevance and Representation in Historicism, or *Plus ça Change* . . . plus a Plea for Pattern all over Architecture with a Postscript on my Mother's House," *Architectural Record* (June 1982): 114–19; reprinted in *A View from the Campidoglio*, 104–18.

32. Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, 37.

33. Paul Ricoeur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures" (1961), in *History and Truth*, trans. C. A. Kelbey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 277; quoted in Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 16–17.

34. For instance, the last decade has brought a proliferation of "Charleston Place," whether the context is a Westchester suburb or a Florida resort community.

35. Ando does not appear in the original essay, but is often cited in Frampton's lectures.

36. These qualities could, of course, be regional, if techniques and materials were particular to a region. But that hardly seems to be the case with the materials, such as concrete block and metal paneling, used by Ando and Botta.

37. Marc Treib, "Regionalism and South Florida Architecture," conference paper, The Architectural Club of Miami, 1986. In Florida, for example, compare the regionally responsive designs of Paul Rudolph, Rufus Nim, and Robert Brown of the 1950s and the early 1960s to the conventional wall surfaces and roof details of most contemporary postmodern architecture. Of course, some modern architects did experiment with air conditioning as one response to climatic conditions, and in the case of Le Corbusier's Salvation Army Pavilion the results were disastrous.

38. The quote continues: "I like that, but am growing impatient with fifty-year swings, and wonder whether a more suitable model for us might be Goldilocks, of Three Bears fame, who found some things (Papa Bear's) too hot or too hard or too big, and other things (Mama Bear's) too cold, too soft, or too small, but still other things (Baby Bear's) just right, inhabitable, as we architects would say" (*Charles Moore: Buildings and Projects 1949–1986*, ed. Eugene J. Johnson [New York: Rizzoli, 1986]).

39. Critics coming from other disciplines, such as Fredric Jameson and Andreas Huyssen, seem, however, to exaggerate the importance to architects of *Learning from Las Vegas*, perhaps in a desire to make connections to their own disciplines. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* had a much greater impact on architects, and the vast majority of its examples are from high culture. It was really only at the Yale University School of Architecture that Scott Brown and Venturi's interest in pop culture stimulated a major response. It is probably fair to say that most figurative imagery in postmodernism derives from historical architectural styles rather than popular culture.

40. The document states: "The architect is neither the omnipotent master nor the slave of spacio-cultural models, universal or local. His proposed role is to interpret them within the framework of the continuity of civilization. Reducing architecture to its utilitarian function is to remove its role as a means of social communication. From the moment the language of models was replaced with the newspeak of towers, bars and *grands ensembles*, the town has become monotonous, illegible and dead for its inhabitants. A town must be built on the basis of elemental housing models, roads and squares." Quoted in Portoghesi, *Postmodern*, 46.

41. See Andreas Huyssen's more general, and extremely insightful, comments about the trajectory of postmodernism, "Mapping the Postmodern," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), esp. 188.

42. Venturi, for instance, writes: "Industry promotes expensive industrial and electronic research but not architectural experiments, and the Federal government diverts subsidies toward air transportation, communication, and the vast enterprises

of war or, as they call it, national security, rather than toward the forces for the direct enhancement of life. The practicing architect must admit this" (*Complexity and Contradiction*, 44).

43. In choosing to discuss postmodernism and deconstructivism, which have both been placed by critics under a broader rubric of postmodernism, I do not mean to suggest that I am addressing the entire contemporary field. In the United States numerous architectural firms, in fact, still practice a form of "late modernism," whose vocabulary of stripped-down forms is highly indebted to the International Style. As well, among other currents, numerous practitioners are exploring an abstract architectural vocabulary, which cannot readily be classified as either deconstructivist or modernist.

44. Libeskind's philosophical stance derives from phenomenology, and Koolhaas's eclectic position seems more indebted to surrealism and the hedonism of the 1960s than to poststructuralist theories. Both Hadid and Gehry are loath to give philosophical labels to their work. The differences between Eisenman and Libeskind's position are articulated clearly in Libeskind's essay "Peter Eisenman and the Myth of Futility," *Harvard Architecture Review* 3 (1984): 61–63.

45. Certainly, Koolhaas's and Eisenman's architecture has been largely orthogonal, and any diagonals that appear (one suspects MoMA must have been hard pressed to find the "right" Koolhaas project) are within standard modern formal practice. But Eisenman's combination of orthogonal forms and diagonal "events" is more reminiscent of Le Corbusier and early Stirling than of some of his deconstructivist peers. Perhaps most problematic is the inclusion of Gehry in this group, as his use of the diagonal stems more from perceptual concerns in contemporary sculpture than from a revivalism of constructivist imagery. Influenced by the work of this group, however, a trend toward formal fragmentation can be observed among younger architects and students: the postmodern historicist forms of the late 1970s and early 1980s have virtually disappeared from student drafting boards.

46. In fact, at various moments both Tschumi and Eisenman have called for a broader conception of the term "postmodernism," one that would embrace all contemporary movements that reject the rational instrumentality of modernism and its concomitant claims of universality. See especially Peter Eisenman, "The Futility of Objects: Decomposition and the Processes of Difference," *Harvard Architecture Review* 3 (1984): 66, 81; and Bernard Tschumi, *Cinégramme Folie: Le Parc de la Villette* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1987), 7. Among the critics who have attempted to link these two tendencies is Hal Foster. See especially his essay "(Post)Modern Polemics," *Perspecta* 21 (1984); reprinted in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1987), 121–36. Like Stern's essay "The Doubles of Post-Modern," Foster's "(Post)Modern Polemics" outlines two kinds of postmodernism: neoconservative (eclectic historicism) and poststructuralist (decentering of the object), with Eisenman's work, again, serving as the only example of architecture in the latter category.

47. Both Tschumi and Koolhaas have focused on program in their urban projects; in this respect their work differs from that of the other designers in the MoMA exhibition and from most student work that embraces a neoconstructivist aesthetic.

48. Peter Eisenman, "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End," *Perspecta* 21 (1984): 166.

49. Tschumi, *Cinégramme Folie*, 8.

50. See especially the critiques of Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," 206–11, and Edward W. Said, "The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions," in *Aesthetics Today*, ed. Morris Philipson and Paul J. Gudel, rev. ed. (New York: New American Library, 1980), 113–29. One of the most cogent political critiques of deconstruction is Barbara Foley, "The Politics of Deconstruction," in *Rhetoric and Form: Deconstruction at Yale*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (Norman, Okla: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 113–34.

51. Here, the deconstructivist model of "no meaning/endless meaning" risks being as deceptive as the postmodern assumption of "transparent communication."

52. Eisenman specifically precludes the creation of place as an objective. In an unpublished manuscript of 1987, he states that "if architecture traditionally has been about 'topos,' that is, an idea of place, then to be 'between,' is to search for 'atopos,' the atopia within topos" (Eisenman, "The Blueline Text," 5). I am grateful to Sharon Haar for alerting me to this text.

53. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

54. That efforts to construct an architectural model of "logocentrism" exclude more of architectural history than they include raises doubts about whether anything other than the latest architectural style is being "deconstructed" or disturbed at all. For instance, in the exhibition catalogue for the MoMA show Mark Wigley writes, "Buildings are constructed by taking simple geometric forms — cubes, cylinders, spheres, cones, pyramids, and so on — and combining them into stable ensembles, following compositional rules which prevent any one form from conflicting with another. No form is permitted to distort another; all potential conflict is resolved." Mannerist, baroque, picturesque, and German expressionist architecture — not to mention many areas of non-Western architecture — are ignored in this reductive and ahistorical account. See Mark Wigley, "Deconstructivist Architecture," in *Deconstructivist Architecture*, ed. Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988).

55. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's term "strategic essentialism" seems especially appropriate in this context. See *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

56. See Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113–38; and Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–48.

57. Huyssen argues that the rejection of authorship in poststructuralist theory "merely duplicates on the

level of aesthetics and theory what capitalism as a system of exchange relations produces tendentially in everyday life: the denial of subjectivity in the very process of its construction. Poststructuralism thus attacks the appearance of capitalist culture — individualism writ large — but misses its essence." (Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," 213).

58. Ibid. The feminist Sandra Gilbert has labeled such "subjectless" theory "father speech," because it once more refuses women a public basis for speech and solidarity. See Gerald Graff, "Feminist Criticism in the University: An Interview with Sandra M. Gilbert," in *Criticism in the University*, ed. Gerald Graff and Reginald Gibbons (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985), 119; see also Bruce Robbins, "The Politics of Theory," *Social Text* 18 (Winter 1987–88), 11. Although many feminist and minority critics have found aspects of poststructuralist theory liberating as far as it dismantles unspoken assumptions of patriarchal discourse — older, oppressive categories such as "race," "women," "the people" — many of these same individuals also fear that poststructuralist theory subverts the categories of resistance itself.

59. For an insightful analysis of recent deconstructionist rhetoric in architectural discourse, see Joan Ockman, "Some Rhetorical Questions/In Response to Mark Rakatansky," Conference on Architectural Theory, SOM Foundation, Chicago, 9–11 September 1988. (The proceedings of this conference are to be published in the coming year.)

60. Stern, "The Doubles of Post-Modern," 82–83.

61. Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture," in *Modernism and Modernity*, The Vancouver Conference Papers, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Solkin (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 253. The following argument draws on Crow's analysis.

62. The same, of course, can be said of the critic, and in writing this article, I have often wondered whether I am only fueling the fashionability of deconstructivism by giving it so much attention. But for the critic, as for the architect, the only means to counter this cycle is continual scrutiny and questioning. This may not prevent cooptation, but it may slow its processes and raise new possibilities for cultural and political exploration.

Figure Credits

7, 13, 18, 19, 24, 27, 28, 30. Courtesy of the architects.

8. Photograph by Rollin R. Lafrance.

9. Photograph by Peter Aaron, ESTO.

12. Photograph by the author.

14. Photograph by Paschall/Taylor.

16. Photograph by Ed Stocklein.

17. Photograph by Cymie Payne.

20. Photograph by Wiliam Taylor.

25. *Forum* 30, no. 2 (1985–86): 82.

26, 29, 31. *Deconstructivist Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988).

All other illustrations from publications as noted in captions.