... In a recent essay,... Manfredo Tafuri... concluded that the contemporary experience, embracing all of 20th-century architecture, can no longer be read in any linear form... It is only by way of [transverse, oblique, diagonal] approximations that... [we are allowed] to unstitch and unravel the intrinsic complexity of the modern experience itself...

‘Weak architecture’ [is one such] diagonal cut, slanting, not exactly as a generational section but as an attempt to detect in apparently quite diverse situations a constant...

In the classical age mimesis presents a certain manner of articulating the world of the visual... But the end of the classical age... was in reality the exhaustion of something that still inspires... (the modern project)... The project of the Enlightenment, the basis of modernity, still participates... in the idea that it is possible to discover an absolute reality, within which art, science, and social and political praxis can be constructed on the basis of universal rationality. When this system enters into crisis,... contemporary architecture, in conjunction with the other arts, is confronted with the need to build on air, to build in the void. The proposals of contemporary art are to be constructed not on the basis of any immovable reference, but under the obligation to posit for every step its goal and its grounding...

[The aesthetic:] In the system of the classical age, the aesthetic was very much a specific area, linked precisely to the practice of the concrete... In contemporary experience, the aesthetic has, above all, the value of a paradigm. It is precisely through the aesthetic that we recognize the model of our richest, most vivid, most ‘authentic’ experiences in relation to a reality whose outlines are vague and blurred... The most ‘full’, the most ‘alive’, that which is felt as being experience itself, that in which the perceiving subject and perceived reality are powerfully fused, is the work of art... In the contemporary world, aesthetic experiences... continue to occupy a peripheral position; but this peripheral position possesses not a marginal but a paradigmatic value. Aesthetic experiences constitute, in some sense, the most solid, the strongest model of a weak construction of the true or the real...

[Several] interpretations of the present situation seem to offer [unsatisfactory] responses... In the context of architectonic culture,... the first responses (1960s)... are above all fundamentalist in nature,... [operating] in 2 directions. On the one hand, there are those who, when confronted with the crisis, have called for order... (a return to the essentials of the modern experience)... [These] put forth the claim that only by going back to what was essential, germinal, and initial in the modern experience (Le Corbusier’s ‘purisme’) was it possible to find the true path... These responses, for all their good intentions, amount to nothing more than pure historicism...

In opposition to this fundamentalist illusion, Kenneth Frampton has proposed in recent years a more dialectical and thus less monist, less self-enclosed approach... [This] proposal possesses 2 clearly differentiated faces. On the one hand there is the idea... of ‘resistance’... (only by means of a critical attitude toward reality is it possible for contemporary architecture to maintain a rigorous and nonconformist position)... Alongside this notion of resistance, the idea of ‘regionalism’ seems a good deal more ingenuous (a re-interpretation of Heidegger’s work)... When Frampton [asks for the] reappropriation of the sense of place, of light, of the tectonic, and of the tactile over the purely visual,... he is undoubtedly engaged in a useful operation: that of understanding that a ‘system’ as such is no longer possible, and that it is therefore necessary to understand architectonic reality from a polycentric strategy. Nevertheless, it is naïve to accept at the same time the viability of certain tectonic categories that can only be intelligible within the [old classical] order...

Massimo cacciari... [dismisses] such excessively immediate interpretations of Heidegger’s writings. For Heidegger, Cacciari claims, the metropolitan experience is constructed not through ‘dwelling’ but through ‘desertion’... Cacciari’s critique... brings us to the concept... of ‘the archaeological’... Archaeology... [describes] the superimposed readings of tectonic reality: of a reality that can no longer be regarded as a unitary whole but appears instead as the overlapping of different layers... What confronts us is not a reality that forms a closed sphere but a system of interweaving languages... We can no longer believe that the reality of a signified responds to the precision of a signifier... Instead, it forms a magma that is at once producer and produced. Only a task of deconstruction... is capable of elucidating certain relationships.

There is no doubt that this way of thinking has a very different translation in the experience of the production of form... The experience of certain recent architectures is the experience of superimposition. The signified is not constructed by means of an order but by means of pieces that may ultimately touch; that approach one
another, at times without touching; that draw nearer to one another yet never make contact; that overlap, that offer themselves in a discontinuity...

A fundamental innovation [is]... the centrality of the notion of time... Contemporary time... is presented precisely as juxtaposition, a discontinuity... [But] time in the architecture of the classical age could be reduced simply to zero (as in the experience of Renaissance centrality)... The confrontation with and the attempt to understand this problem of the diversity of times embraces the whole struggle of art in the 20th century. Time in the cubist experience, futurist time, time in Dadaism, time in the formalist experiences of the optical and the gestalt experiences of formalism, are versions of a diversified, juxtaposed time that constitutes one of the basic conditions of modernity. It is nevertheless clear that this condition was not always fully understood by the masters of modern architecture, who in many cases thought that what was needed was a time divorced from the centralism of perspectival vision, but which might perfectly well be a time organized from the linear viewpoint... (in Le Corbusier, the 'promenade architecturale' is not a diversity but an itinerary that admits the possibility of control)... 

This diversity of times becomes absolutely central in what I have chosen to call weak architecture... These architectures transform the aesthetic experience into 'event'...

[As important in this, is] the Deleuzean notion of the 'pli', or fold... (reality emerges as a continuum in which the time of the subject and the time of external objects go round together on the same looped tape)...

Together with the precarious nature of the event and the untimely fold of reality, what I have called weak architecture is always decorative... (needing to return to the fundamental meaning of the notion of decorum that underlies that of decoration)... As it is most commonly employed,... the decorative is inessential... (accident, not substance)... [But I ask for decoration] as a discreet folding back to perhaps a secondary function... The decorative is not of necessity a condition of trivialization of the vulgar, but simply constitutes a recognition of the fact that for the work,... an acceptance of a certain weakness, of relegation to a secondary position, may possibly be the condition of its greatest elegance and, ultimately, its greatest significance and import.

In conclusion, I would like to gloss one last characteristic of weak architecture: monumentality... The monument in the classical age is the center... It is not about this monument that I wish to speak, because quite clearly this is the monument that has provoked the crisis in the contemporary situation. The monumentality of weak architecture is [related, rather, to]... the present context of the condition... The tremulous clangor of the bell that reverberates after it has ceased to ring... The lingering resonance of poetry after it has been heard, the recollection of architecture after it has been seen.

This is the strength of weakness; that strength which art and architecture are capable of producing precisely when they adopt a posture that is not aggressive and dominating, but tangential and weak.