Unhomely Houses

By far the most popular topos of the 19th-century uncanny was the haunted house. This house provided an especially favored site for uncanny disturbances: its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast with the terror of invasion by alien spirits. Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ was paradigmatic: “With the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit…” And yet the House of Usher, while evoking premonitions of ‘shadowy fancies’, exhibited nothing untoward in its outer appearance. Its “bleak walls” and “vacant-eye windows” were stark, but any sentiments of doom were more easily attributed to the fantasies of the narrator than to any striking detail in the house itself. The house has, particularly uncanny… [because of] the absolute normality of the setting, its veritable absence of overt terror… [One thing is true,] the site was desolate, a museum… preserved in memory of a family… that was almost extinct… (the house was a crypt, predestined to be buried in its turn).

Other abandoned houses, real or imaginary, have a similar effect on the viewer. Among these ‘dead houses’, one in particular fascinated Victor Hugo, an empty house in the Guernsey village of Pleinmont. Drawn in brown ink and wash, this small, 2-story stone cottage seemed to have little out of the ordinary about it. With its 4 windows, walled up on the ground floor, its single door, pitched roof, and chimney, it seems no more than the archetypal ‘child’s house’. Nevertheless, it had the reputation of being haunted, and despite its simplicity, “its aspect was strange”. Firstly, the deserted site, almost entirely surrounded by the sea, was perhaps too beautiful. Then the contrast between the walled-up windows on the ground floor and the open, empty windows on the upper floor, gave a quasi-anthropomorphic air to the structure. An enigmatic inscription over the closed-up door added to the mystery and told of a building and abandonment before the Revolution: “ELM-PBILG 1780”. Finally, the silence and emptiness contributed to the aura of a tomb. Mysteries, adding to local lore, contributed to the haunting (who were the original inhabitants? Why the abandonment? Why no present owner? Why no one to cultivate the field?)

[Vidler, Anthony; The Architectural Uncanny; 1992]

These houses lead to a ‘terror’… [that does not fall neatly into] the hierarchy of romantic genres. The uncanny is intimately bound up with, but strangely different from the grander and more serious ‘sublime’ (the master category of aspiration, nostalgia, and the unattainable). Edmund Burke, in 1757, had included this ill-defined but increasingly popular sensation among those associated with the obscurity that provoked terror, along with the night and absolute darkness… [It is associated with] ‘unknown forces’, wherein “there is supposed to lie an undecipherable truth of dreadfulness that cannot be grasped or understood.” More than 80 years later, Freud recognized that the uncanny was… [a particular] aesthetic category. Freud approached the definition of ‘Unheimlich’ by way of that of its apparent opposite, ‘Heimlich’… and found that, while Heimlich is associated with the intimate, ‘the friendlily comfortable’… [it also alluded to things that are] concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know. Freud was taken by this unfolding of the homely into the unhomely, pleased to discover that Himlich is a word, the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, Unheimlich. The Unheimlich seems to emerge beneath the Heimlich, so to speak, to rise up again when seemingly put to rest, to escape from the bounds of home… ‘Unheimlich is the name for everything that ought to have remained… secret and hidden but has come to light’.

Among the foremost practitioners of the uncanny, Hegel cited the writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, who had for all intents and purposes made the uncanny a genre of his own. There are numerous haunted houses in the tales of Hoffmann. The house of the archivist Lindhorst in ‘The Golden Pot’, for example, is to all intents and purposes a house like any other on its street. Only its door knocker displays signs of the uncanny within. But inside, what might seem to be familiar spaces of libraries, greenhouses, and studies might turn at any moment into fantastic, semiorganic environments. The uninhabited dwelling described in ‘The Deserted House’ presents itself to the street, like Hugo’s ruin, with its openings blocked, its dilapidation strange in comparison with its magnificent boulevard setting. None of these houses exhibits the structure of the uncanny as well as that described in the tale of ‘Councilor Krespel’, however. The story opens with an apparently incidental description of the building of a house. A Councilor had proceeded to amaze his neighbors by refusing all architectural help, directly employing a master mason, journeyman, and apprentices on the work. Four walls were built up by the masons, without windows or doors, just as high as the Councilor indicated. The the Councilor began a most strange activity, pacing up and down the garden, moving toward the house in every direction, until, by means of this complex triangulation, he ‘found’ the right place for the door and ordered it cut in the stone. Similarly, walking into the house, he performed the same method to determine each window and partition. The result of his maneuvers was a home ‘presenting a most unusual appearance from the outside,… but whose interior arrangements aroused a very special feeling of ease’… This house is a structure that in fact reverses the general drift of the uncanny movement from homely to unhomely, a movement in most ghost stories where an apparently homely house turns gradually into the site of horror… Art is uncanny because it veils reality, and also because it tricks. But it does not trick because of what is in itself. Rather, it possesses the power to deceive because of the projected desire of the observer. As Jacques Lacan
Buried Alive

... Another familiar trope of the uncanny:... the uncovering of what had been long buried... Of all sites, that of Pompeii seemed to many writers to exhibit the conditions of unhomeliness to the most extreme degree. This was a result of its literal ‘burial alive’... but also of its peculiarly distinct characteristic as a ‘domestic’ city of houses and shops... (the pleasures of Pompeii, in comparison with those of Rome, were, all visitors agreed, dependent on its homely nature)... And yet, despite the evident domesticity of the ruins, they were not by any account homely. For behind the quotidian semblance there lurked a horror, equally present to view: skeletons abounded... In the literary and artistic uncanny of the 19th century (l’étérage, l’inquiétant, das Unheimliche), all found their natural place in stories that centered on the idea of history suspended... Pompeii... possessed a level of archaeological verisimilitude matched by historical drama that made it the perfect vehicle for... l’idéal rétrospectif,... a retrospective vision that merged past and present... Pompeii evidently qualified as a textbook example of the uncanny on every level, from the implicit horror of the domestic to the revelations of mysteries... that might better have remained unrevealed... The brilliance of the light and the transparency of the air were opposed to the somber tint of the black volcanic sand, the clouds of black dust underfoot, and the omnipresent ashes. Vesuvius itself was depicted as benign as Montmartre,... in defiance of his terrifying reputation. The juxtaposition of the modern railway station and antique city; the happiness of the tourists in the street of tombs; the ‘banal phrases’ of the guide as he recited the terrible deaths of the citizens in front of their remains...
refuses to remain at a proper distance).… This hope is expressed… in the elaborate figures of the ‘Two Curious Houses’, the one an emblem of the decadence and artifice of the late Roman Empire, the other an emblem of the intensity of the new Christian culture.… The first dwelling… was… overshadowed by the haunted ruins of Cicero’s villa, its blandness and daintiness effacing the otherwise sublime and terrifying rusticity of the natural surroundings.… The façades of the houses were by contrast a model… ‘of hopeful industry, of immaculate cleanliness, of responsive affection’…. The foundations of the house were deeply embedded in the catacombs… that provided resting places for ancestors… The immediate spatial connection between the abode of the living and of the dead sustained the aura of authenticity.

Architecture Dismembered

The idea of an architectural monument as an embodiment and abstract representation of the human body, its reliance on the anthropomorphic analogy for proportional and figurative authority was, we are led to believe, abandoned with the collapse of the classical tradition and the birth of a technologically-dependent architecture. In this context it is interesting to note a recent return to the bodily analogy by architects as diverse as Coop Himmelblau, Bernard Tschumi, and Daniel Libeskind, all concerned to propose a re-inscription of the body in their work. But this renewed appeal to corporeal metaphors is evidently based on a ‘body’ radically different from that at the center of the humanist tradition… (a body in pieces, fragmented, if not deliberately torn apart and mutilated almost beyond recognition)…. This body no longer serves to center, to fix, or to stabilize. Rather, its limits, interior or exterior, seem infinitely ambiguous and extensive; its forms, literal or metaphorical, are no longer confined to the recognizably human but embrace all biological existence from the embryonic to the monstrous.

At first inspection, this cutting of the architectural body might appear to be no more than an obvious reversal of tradition…. But closer examination reveals a more complex relationship… The history of the bodily analogy in architecture, from Vitruvius to the present, might be described in one sense as the progressive distancing of the body from the building… Three moments… seem specially important for contemporary theory:

1. The notion that building is ‘a body of some kind. In classical theory the idealized body was directly projected onto the building. The building derived its authority, proportional and compositional, from this body, and, in a complimentary way, the building then acted to confirm and establish the body (social and individual) in the world… (exemplified by the celebrated figure of a man with arms outstretched inscribed within a square and a circle, navel at the center; Alberti’s proposition that “the building is in its entirety like a body composed of its parts”…. Francesco di Giorgio’s figure superimposed literally on the plan of a cathedral and of a city; and Filarete’s comparisons of building cavities and functions to those of the body, its eyes, nose, mouth, veins, and viscera)…. 2. The idea that the building embodies states of the body, or, more importantly, states of the mind based on bodily sensation. Beginning in the 18th century, there emerged an expanded form of bodily projection in architecture, initially defined by the aesthetics of the sublime… Edmund Burke, followed by Kant and the romantics, described buildings… in their capacities to evoke emotions of terror and fear… (aesthetic based on experience rather than artifice; if any bodily attributes remained in the building, they were the result of projection, rather than of any innate qualities)…. The slender bodies of the Renaissance are replaced “by massive bodies, large, awkward, with bulging muscles and swirling draperies”… Movement becomes less articulated but more agitated and faster… But the end of bodily projection… is feared to be the end of architecture itself.

3. The sense that the environment as a whole is endowed with bodily characteristics… For the modernists,… there seems to be no fear that the body is entirely lost. Rather the question is one of representing a ‘higher order’ (of movement, forces, and rest)…. Analytical science was the necessary and prophetic armature of a new awareness but not a total dispersion of the body… The sense of the city as bodily organism;… a kind of animism… But here we sense none of the positive aspirations of the 1st avant-garde. For, side by side with the continuity and gradual extension of the bodily metaphor, from the corporeal to the psychological, we can also detect… a decided sense of loss.

[Postmodern architecture makes us feel] contorted, racked, cut, wounded, dissected, intestinally revealed, impaled, immolated…. There is an uncanny strangeness evoked… by the apparent return of something presumed lost but now evidently active in the work:… the return of the body into an architecture that had repressed its conscious presence… Sartre, in ‘Being and Nothingness’, offers the definition of the self and its body as a function of the perception of resistance that objects in the world have to the self… “The body,” he concludes, “is not a screen between things and ourselves; it manifests only the individuality and the contingency of our original relation to instrumental-things”…. The body participates in a world within which it has to be immersed and to which it has to be subjected even before it can recognize itself as a body… “It is only in a world that there can be a body”… We are at once precipitated into a world of absolute danger and at the same time made to understand that this threat exists only insofar as we are in this world.

Losing Face

In a recent article on the architecture of James Stirling, Colin Rowe observed that the new Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart was to all intents and purposes comparable to Schinkel’s Altes Museum, but “without a façade.” This lack of façade Rowe found troubling… A building without façade… lacked, in Rowe’s terms, an essential ingredient of representation. Like the face, the façade operated for Rowe as “a metaphorical plane of intersection between the eyes of the observer and… the ‘soul of the building’”… This lack of interest in the face, Rowe has consistently argued, has been a lack of face might be an extension of the understanding… that Renaissance building owed its special qualities as an “architecture of humanism” to its direct analogies… to the human body… in Rowe’s criticism of Stirling’s museum, however, the demand was not necessarily for a body but rather, for a face… (a more figurative and mimetic correspondence than one based simply on abstract qualities of height, weight, stability, instability, and the like). Looking for a more direct understanding of the face/façade analogy, we might find it in the more precise physiognomical analyses of the late 18th century that compared, sometimes all too literally, a building’s front to a human face… But this tradition would not explain Rowe’s reference to the question of a building’s ‘soul’ (physiognomy as a guide to the inner states of the souls was, after all, largely discredited,… following Hegel’s devastating attack on physiognomy and phrenology in the ‘Phenomenology’ of 1807)… [Rowe might be implying] a less religious and more aestheticized notion of ‘soul’,… something closer to that sketched by Georg Simmel in 1901, in an essay entitled ‘The Aesthetic Significance
It is significant, with respect to the Barthesian notion of text, that Tschumi proposes, as the instrument of his play, a work on ‘notation’… (marks used
over identity. Simple manipulation of the internal codes of traditional or modern architecture, but rather by their confrontation with concepts drawn from outside
it is something already distant from us… This said, however, the conditions of ‘textuality’… would be… difficult to determine;… derived not by the
An architectural ‘work’… is closed, a suitable object for nostalgia or consumption but nothing more. It does not enter into play. In Barthe’s terms
enjoyment of writing as well as reading…

In Rowe’s critique[,] we are presented with an apparently clear set of oppositions, between classical humanism and modernist antihumanism… The
implied parallel between Shinkel’s Berlin Altes Museum and the new Stuttgart Staatsgalerie [is deeper, however, as] suggested by a comparison made by Rowe much earlier, in a note appended to his essay on ‘The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa’, that brought side by side (for the purposes of tracing the traditional roots of modernism)… Schinkel’s Altes Museum and its ‘formal’ reconstitution in Le Corbusier’s Assembly Building at
Chandigarh. Implicitly, then, Stirling’s building… produces a transformation of the classical prototype into the postmodern assemblage, with traces of
modernist typology… Stirling seems to take away the façade of the Altes Museum,… turning the original palace into a U-shaped block,… replacing the
original stoa with a terrace,… turning the stair… into a ramp,… and the rotunda, without dome and open to the sky,… into a ‘shell’ of the
Pantheon. But the type of Schinkel’s Altes Museum was not available for Stirling,… without having been submitted to considerable transformations
during the modern period… Between the Altes Museum and Le Corbusier’s Palace of Assembly,… we notice the transformation of the original stoa
into a… freestanding proch,… the formation of the U-shaped block [by fragmented elements,…] and the displacement from the center of the central
circular volume… In view of this preliminary transformation, the Stirling Staatsgalerie might be said to be a 2nd-degrees version of the Schinkel
prototype,…

We might inquire, by way of conclusion, to the specific causes of Stirling’s apparently ambivalent attitude toward monumentality… With his
‘dismantling’… it is as if Stirling were commenting on the reuse of an already ruined 19th-century monument… And yet the very citation of Schinkel, however ruined, is in itself suspect, and especially in the context of a new museum dedicated to memory, and one that, despite the fragmentation of its parts, evidently aspired to and attained a form of monumentality of its own… (certainly, the building of a ‘ruin’ by a British architect, in the
center of a city itself devastated by war, seems to have overdetermined its negative reception;… the notion of an effacement of monumentality would seem to turn back on itself, implying the… monumentalization of any institutional form, however veiled its ‘soul’…). Stirling’s monumentality, weaving the museum back into the city, dispersing its architectural contents as so many half-ruined elements that resist any integration into a
classical unity, reflects what the German philosopher Arnold Gehlen has termed ‘post-histories’… Posthistoire would privilege the internal discourse of an architecture turned on itself… The fragments of architectural types all too neatly exploded by Stirling are, in the end, pieces of a history itself
constructed artificially… A history resulting in the endless circulation of signs… The crystallization of culture… Against such a bleak future of endless
repetition,… the history of the modern museum offers at least one alternative understanding of architectural representation: the recognition that the
construction of a contemporary architecture has to remain entirely distinct from the history that it shelters… (as in Louis Kahn’s Kimbell Art Museum
at Fort Worth, which highlights the relationship between structure and lighting,… or Raphael Moneo’s museum of Roman artifacts at Mérida, where a
simple repetitive wall and arch structure create a haunting ambience that, without citation or mimicry, is entirely appropriate to its contents)… In
the modern museum, as Bataille has noted, ‘one must take account of the fact that the rooms and objects of art are only a container, the content of
which is formed by the visitors’.

Trick/Track
Contemporary architecture… seems increasingly to be caught in the dilemma of Alice playing croquet with the Queen: she knew what the game was
called, but there did not seem to be any fixed rules, and, to complicate matters, the equipment was in continuous and random movement… Some
such game is no doubt to be played on and between ‘les cases vides’ of Bernard Tschumi’s Villette board (La Villette Park; Paris)… Here, empty and
awaiting the play, places… are reduced to the status of markers… Both the ‘event’ and ‘time’ have, in this context, been reconceived. In a historicist
vision of the past, present, and future, time moved inexorably toward a goal… Neither modernism nor indeed postmodernism has sought radically
to change this sense of temporality directly; they have simply tried to endow it with different significance and new ends (nostalgic and apocalyptic). [In Tschumi’s park, each position] becomes not just a square but also a compartment,… filled with new contents at any moment… Their red frames stand not as signs of some romantic ruined cottage, but as open structures for the nomadic ‘banlieue’. Their formal structures are as ‘empty’, in a
traditional, formalist sense, as their implied content with respect to function; or rather procedures for their subdivision and assemblage prescribe
no fixed contents. A transparent cube of space is internally crossed and cut by points, which turn into lines, and by planes, which turn into surfaces,
which in turn define volumes… Here forms… lack both the rules and the content of modernism’s utopian design. Unlike the series of house types
invented by the moderns, limited in form and number by a controlling, empirical determination, there are no limits to Tschumi’s series or to their
permutations. Nor does the series refer to any ‘origin’… They start where they start and finish equally arbitrarily.

In this sense,… they must be understood to refer, if not to the reality principle of function, then to the pleasure principle of their architect. And
here Tschumi breaks radically with tradition. For an architect’s pleasure has little or no place in contemporary theory. The traditional objects of
such pleasure have been dispersed with the demise of the anthropomorphic analogy… Against this, Tschumi has defined his own version: “My pleasure,” he writes, “has never surfaced in looking at buildings,… but rather in dismantling them”… This would certainly be to divert pleasure to apparently perverse ends. And yet Tschumi’s pleasure principle is consistent… Tschumi allies himself firmly with a present condition characterized by
fragmentation and dissociation… Indeed,… his architectural projects… provide an interesting conceptual and visual commentary on the emergence of
post-structuralist models of analysis over the last decade. Thus, his pleasure in ‘dismantling’ would be… a pleasure not of the ‘work’ but of the
‘text’. Against the traditional idea of a work, defined as a concrete, finite object, closed within its aesthetic limits, single, authored, institutionalized,
and ready for explication, interpretation, and consumption, Roland Barthes [had posed] the conditions of the text, seen as a methodological field… Whereas the pleasure of the work… would remain circumscribed by its nature as an object of consumption, the pleasure of the text would be a full enjoyment of writing as well as reading…

An architectural ‘work’… is closed, a suitable object for nostalgia or consumption but nothing more. It does not enter into play. In Barthe’s terms
it is something already distant from us… This said, however, the conditions of ‘textuality’… would be… difficult to determine;… derived not by the
simple manipulation of the internal codes of traditional or modern architecture, but rather by their confrontation with concepts drawn from outside
architecture, from literature and philosophy, film and music. In this often violent encounter, the limits of the discipline would be tested, its margins
disclosed, and its most fundamental premises subjected to radical criticism… Play of this kind would celebrate dissonance over harmony, difference
over identity.

It is significant, with respect to the Barthesian notion of text, that Tschumi proposes, as the instrument of his play, a work on ‘notation’… (marks used
to denote certain operations… that are central to dismantling and… reassembly). In the development of the notational language itself, Tschumi has had recourse to a number of already partially-defined codes. First and most obvious is the filmic… Banded diagrams are transformed into a form of static ‘animation’… as if emulating the late 19th-century flicker books… Supplemeting this,… Tschumi relies on 2 additional languages drawn from ‘modernist’ architecture itself… The first… (are expressions of movements and forces… (based on Russian suprematists’, constructivists’, and German expressionists’) means for ‘writing’ the dynamics of form in space). A second ‘language’ is provided by… dynamic plans and sections and the axonometric, twisted, broken, and shattered… At once withdrawing from and entering into the conventions of architectural representation, these suggest a realm that is neither architecture nor film. Following Rosalind Krauss’ characterization of Barthes’ ‘texts’ as ‘paraliterary’, reflecting their ambiguous status somewhere between criticism and literature, we might call this realm ‘para-architectural’,… not seeking the aestheticization of disorder, [but rather truly] a faulty and disorderly architecture.

Confined to the domain of theory,… Tschumi’s para-architectural ‘transcripts’ would no doubt seem entirely benign. But in the realization of La Villette, when the drawn superpositions and fragmentary exploded diagrams are translated into buildings and spaces, Tschumi’s new pleasure principle may indeed pose problems for architecture,… as follies demand no functions, arcades are confused by routes that meander with no goals, and empty spaces pose riddles that ought to be solved by contents. The tension emerges at the point between the drawn and the built. While, in a traditional practice, drawing notations… refer to something else (in the realm of building), in Tschumi… notations become directly built notations… (the work on notation is, quite literally, constructed). And here the confrontation with well-worn criteria becomes sharpened. For “to build the diagram” has always marked the failure of the architect. His project would only be successful if he managed to invent a realm where such rules simply do not apply (managed not only to theorize the para-architectural but to establish it in the city,… codes of notation have to imply both an architectural language and its subversion). Thus the folly built at La Villette… adopts the ‘red’ color so evocative of political as well as architectural revolution, and spiral, diagonal, and stepped elements… reminiscent… of constructivist style… However, with no hidden political agenda, no revolutionary aesthetic or social aim, and no historicist nostalgia, the allusion to constructivism becomes a mad shot in the dark… On another level, the folly is precisely calculated for its own purposes: an object fully expressed without a function to express. Empty or full of one activity or another, it is full of all of architectural meaning; or rather, para-architectural significance.

Here the body is not, as in modernist utopia, to be made whole through healthy activity… rather it has finally recognized itself as a text, not as a work, whose finitude is ever in question and whose powers are in doubtful play, always to be tested by the infiltration of other discourses, other texts. [As opposed to modernist] ‘machines for living in’,…. Tschumi’s machine-like structures… have been exploded so that all questions of maintenance, repair, or even working are suspended. With no need… to respond to real bodies, they are complete in themselves.

Further,… Tschumi has not, as many critics have asserted, abandoned the characteristics of traditional parks, but rather put them into motion… Such re-encoding has had a respectable history in the development of the modern public park itself. In the blissful but short life of the park,… all the motifs of the aristocratic landscapes of the previous epoch were pressed into service by the new public gardeners… By the mid-20th-century, a park had become so removed from nature that the promise of verdure throughout the city had no chance of being mistaken for anything but a carefully orchestrated cover for parking lots. Tschumi’s park retains at least 2 formal aspects of these historical precedents:… the axis and the parcours (the straight line and the undulating line, the one characteristic of classicism and the other of romanticism). Neither of Tschumi’s lines attempts to refer to its patron except in form… Thus the axis… pretends to control no territory but its own. Similarly, the undulating parcours… stands for no narrative… It simply serves as an alternative to the axis, another way in or out. In this sense, Tschumi has bound the park to the city, acknowledging its fundamentally urban character and fabricating it out of bits that might also be found elsewhere.

Shifting Ground
A poststructuralist sensibility has for some time felt uncomfortable with the positive versions of architectural origins… In much the same way as linguists have long discarded the search for linguistic origins, architects have by and large rejected a theoretical foundation that relied on the empirical, accidental, or purely imaginary origin… And if beginnings have been rendered suspect,… endings have become equally difficult to resolve.

This would seem especially pertinent to a reading of the projects and texts of Peter Eisenman…. It is tempting, now that the series [of his houses] seems finished, to regard the projects entitled ‘House I’ through the ‘Fin d’Ou T Hou S’ as… a self-conscious, logical sequence with a beginning and an end. This is, after all, what appear to be implied by the numbering, by the chronology, and by the internal transformations from one scheme to another… But another look might reveal a very different pattern, entirely opposed to any neat trajectory of beginning, development, and end.

That works were composed in chronological order, as artists from Breton to Duchamp have noted, is no guarantee of their logical relationship in such a chronology… Between the various interpretations one is placed as between minimal differences, such as that between black and black, or, in this case, white and white, gray and gray… When the Fin d’Ou T Hou S is juxtaposed… with… House I (the ‘beginning’ of the line), one is faced with a difference that nevertheless poses as the same. In a recent essay entitled ‘The End of the Line’, the critic Neil Hertz identified a series of problematic moments in literature or art that resist interpretation by virtue of their deliberate obfuscation between differences of a similar kind… Hertz… terms this condition “an end-of-the-line mode”. This condition, in literature, occurs when, at the end of the line, a figurative turn is introduced that occludes it antecedents and renders them resistant to interpretation because framed by the minimal difference that is now seen to operate between beginning and ending. Such tension may be, Hertz argues, emblematic of the similar tensions that separate and join viewer and painter, standing outside the frame, from their identifiable surrogates inside the frame… Hertz also insists on the violence of what happens ‘after’ the end of the line, a violence especially aggressive as it seeks to realign a subject’s stability at the expense of another subject.

The nature of an architectural semiology that presupposed and contained the seeds of its own death was first explored by Hegel in the context of a general theory of art’s own inevitable death. His final judgment on art’s inadequacy to the highest needs of contemporary religion and philosophy… was embedded in the notion of a grand progression… from architecture to the beginning to poetry at the end, a progression that finally led to the abandonment of art altogether as a proper vehicle to express the highest truths… The section on architecture in the aesthetic ends abruptly with the architecture of the Middle Ages… After this, architecture seems to find no place in the descent of art through sculpture, painting, music, and poetry. Tied irredeemably to the ‘Symbolic’ or ‘Independent’ form, it must pay the price for all the inadequacies of its primitive manner… For Hegel, art consists in an act that prefigures its dissolution… The very act of impressing meaning on meaningless material, the fact that, however embedded in form, this meaning will remain always external to the material, gives a particular instability to the artistic process…
In a celebrated modification of Alberti’s comparison of a painting to a view through the window, Emile Zola… typified the ‘screens’ that seemed to him to correspond to the differences between classical, romantic, and realist vision… Thus the classical screen was something like a “fine sheet of chalk… of a milky whiteness”, its images appearing in sharp, black lines; the romantic screen, by contrast, “let all the colors through,” together with “tangle spots of light and shade,” like a prism… The realist screen, finally, had all the pretensions to being a “simple windowpane, very thin and clear… so perfectly transparent that the images come through and reproduce themselves afterward in all their reality.” But even this pristine glass, Zola noted, possessed a thickness that served like any other screen to refract its objects and transform them, however slightly… Zola’s image of a dusty screen… anticipates another dust-laden glass, that in which Duchamp “raised dust”… and which might be taken as the 4th in Zola’s implied sequence: a modernist screen. In The Large Glass,… the viewer is caught in a matrix of conceptual ambivalence, anxiety, and indecision… The work stands as a technical artifact, playing with all the optical structures of engineering projection, collapsed, so to speak, into the thin membrane between the 2 pieces of glass…

[This final screen seems to appear in Eisenman’s ‘Romeo and Juliet’ project, but] there… the spectator does not make the picture; indeed, there seems to be little need for a spectator… The Large Glass would stand in for Freid’s wax pad, with its “permanent trace of what was written… legible in suitable lights,” while the Romeo and Juliet project would manifest the erasure of even the slightest impression of a once-full presence (the Mystic Writing Pad,… a mechanism devoted to the production of the trace and its potential erasure)... If the analogy of a mirror calls up the fullness of classical theatricality, a space dedicated to framing the actions of human subjects, [perhaps here we see] the reversed mirror-theater described by Philippe Sollers in ‘Nombres’, a 3-sided scene with its prosenium formed by [an opaque 2-way mirror, turned with its back to the observer]… where the unrevealed interior drama… is silently mimed in a shadowy landscape… At the end of this line, violence no doubt awaits, for the irrepressible subject finds such opacity against the grain…

A curious feature of the Romeo and Juliet project is the absence of identifiable buildings… The play of forms… does not seem to harbor a clear and dialectical logic… A system of form seems to be at work that does not rely on immediate referents… Rather, the image is one of a formal process developed out of the whole cloth of what might be termed, provisionally, the landscape… The forms are produced in a seemingly implacable autogeneration of grids, surfaces, and… scaling that refers to the random and fractal geometries of Mandelbrot)… In this post-historic geology, the only constant is the systematic nature of the ‘random’, a quality well known in the mathematics of topology and topography but less so in architecture… The sole recourse of any trespassing subject would be to begin at the beginning, naming arbitrarily according to a random experience of a landscape yet to be mapped or explored. Here the etymology of ‘random’, from the old French ‘randon’, gives a clue as to the mode by which the territory might be incorporated into the known: a ‘randonnée’ would be a long and extended promenade, with unexpected twists and turns, or, in terms of the hunt,… the anguished and impetuous movement of a trapped beast just before the kill.

Perhaps the correct description of this mapped form would be ‘buried transparency’, a term that would not so much refer to a preconceived architecture ensconced underground but to a kind of architecture embedded in ground zero… For Hegel, hollowed-out caves… seemed to anticipate a later architecture above the ground, the prototypes of the classical: “in excavating there is no question of positive building but rather the removal of a negative”… For Eisenman to return architecture to the ground, therefore, would seem on one level to return it to an origin; but, as Hegel noted, this would be an origin already revealed as problematic in that the cave, as such, cannot be freely symbolical, but already presupposes the house or the temple. At the same time, to bring a once-buried architecture above ground would imply replacing the ‘original’ excavation by its negative, removed but not filled in… However, where in the House E! Even Odd and the Fin d’Ou T Hou S, the ground line signifies in an almost traditional sense a division between earth and sky, such a ground line no longer exists in the recent projects, as it has been entirely subsumed into an ambiguity of top and bottom… The buried architecture of Eisenman’s later works attempts to leap a divide, which Hegel might have called a ‘pit’, and to constitute a sign without need for a signified; to configure without figure…

In this process the characteristics of traditional monumentality have inevitably been jettisoned; Eisenman has searched for a ‘counter-‘ or ‘a-’ monumentality that might seem a more appropriate expression of what Lewis Mumford described as “an age that has deflated its values and lost sight of its purposes”, and can no longer “produce convincing monuments”… [In the design of] the Wexner Center at Ohio State University,… jurors concluded in favor of the solution by Eisenman that was “all process rather than product”… The built realization of a scheme founded on indeterminacy and process raises the question of monumentality once again and in a more paradoxical way. A project established according to the premises of the impermanent has become permanent; a form developed out of a criticism to monumentality has, so to speak, instantly monumentalized… George Bataille attempted to account for the very power of monuments, tracing their effect to the very architectonic structure of power in society.… For Bataille,… monuments took their place quite naturally in the ordered development of society, by virtue of the fact that their origin (the imposition of mathematical order on stone) was accomplished by evolution itself, by the passage from the “simian form to the human form”… Here Bataille gives a new twist to the anthropomorphic dependence of architecture on the body. Architecture is now seen as an organic part of the biological development, the “morphological process”, in which man is forlornly stranded as a mere intermediate stage between monkeys and great buildings… Writing in 1929, Bataille was intervening in a continuing debate that had pitted ‘new monumentality’ against the ‘pseudo-monumentality’ of eclectic historicism… In this debate, Bataille deliberately confused the terms ascribing to all monumentality the architectural will to power and finding the only remedy in the complete rejection of architecture… This takes on a new cast in the context of a quarter-century of attempts to revive a perceived ‘lost monumentality’. This revival… has once more raised the question of the architectural monument as dissipated power, but in a strangely attenuated form… Both postmodern and late modern… attempt to achieve monumentality and thereby domination… In the case of the Ohio State University Wexner Center for the Visual Arts,… at first glance, the building seems to aspire to and achieve a monumentality of impeccable proportions… Yet, immediately, this image of certain stability, of monumental power, is undermined in aumber of increasingly unsettling ways. First, the ‘entrance’ through the reconstructed armory tower is revealed on closer inspection not to be an entrance at all; its huge arch is blocked and sunken, as if some ancient fortification had been closed off as unsafe. Further, the brick mass… is peeled back in layers, as if sliced by a surgical scalpel, to reveal a sequence of shifting surfaces that effectively break any illusion of security… Secondly, the grids that form the body of the building itself, calibrated on 3 measures (12, 24, and 48 feet),… work against any resolution… of support and enclosure… the ‘monument’ here gradually dissolves into a series of discrete fragments… that uncomfortably touch, intersect, or break into each other… [As opposed to] Russian constructivism,… here the grids do not… symbolize any structural potential… Rather they stand for another, less stable origin, one that lies in the geometrization of territory… (the grid of the city of Columbus, and that of the campus itself,… and an echo of the Greenville fault line cutting through Ohio)…

In her seminal essay ‘Grids’ (1979),… Rosalind Krauss has remarked on this dualistic nature of the grid, at once centrifugal and centripetal in implication. The grid, she argues, makes the work of art a fragment by virtue of its extensions in all directions to infinity… At the same time, as a definer of the outer limits of the aesthetic object, the grid appears as… “a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself”. In Eisenman’s case
this dualistic condition... has been thwarted. First, the conceptual field of the infinite grid has been a priori disrupted by the intrusion of more than one grid (the calm and pristine state of the 'universal' has been transformed into an abyssal conflict among a potentially infinite number of grids, all struggling for primacy)... Secondly, nothing in the conflicted play of these fragments... indicates that the boundaries of the object logically and centripetally work their way toward a meaningful center...

Here we are returned to Bataille's initial desire to counter architecture with the monstrous, form with the formless... In his note on the word 'formless', Bataille advanced the philosophical explanation of his position on architecture... "In order for academic men to be content, the universe ought to have form. Philosophy in its entirety has no other aim: it is concerned with giving a frock coat to what is, in itself. The frock coat of mathematics"... No longer content to dress up a frock coat in a frock coat,... architecture might then become once more, in Bataille's formulation, "the expression of the very being of society"...

Homes for Cyborgs

If, for the first machine age, the preferred metaphor for the house was industrial, a "machine for living in", the second machine age would perhaps privilege the medical: the house as at once prothesis and prophylactic. In the Corbusian 'home of man' technology took the form of more or less benign 'object-types' and perfectly controlled environments... The line between nature and machine, between organic and inorganic, seemed crystal clear... Now, the boundaries between organic and inorganic, blurred by cybernetic and bio-technologies, seem less sharp; the body, itself invaded and reshaped by technology, invades and permeates the space outside, even as this space takes on dimensions that themselves confuse the inner and the outer...

In the terms introduced by Donna Haraway, cyborg culture, a product of late capitalist technology, is at once an all-embracing and controlling reality and a utopia full of promise... The implications of this metamorphosis for architecture are more radical than even Reyner Banham would have envisaged... Neither the Dymaxion dome nor the spacesuit reflects the infinite permeability assumed by the contemporary skin, the interchangeability of body part and technical replacement, or the spatio-mental reconstruction implied by the cyberspace. This complex and impure system of existence, indeed, offers neither the luminous promise of technological utopia nor the dark hell of its opposite... In such a context, architectural exploration... might best be limited to the precise dimensions of a controlled experiment. In a world of infinitely disseminated power,... the stylistic metaphor is as suspect as the functional solution. In their place, the minute and exactly calibrated interrelations of body and machine are subjected to a dispassionate scrutiny... These calculations take as their starting point the clearly distinguished systems identified by modernist technique: the system of the object, of the body, of the optical, and finally of the home. Each of these is carefully unwrapped, disassembled, and confronted, as it were, defenseless, to the next...

For surrealists in general, semiorganic and dream objects were arrayed to counter the implacable rationalism of purely technological modernism... Surrealism's antipathy to modernism, reflected in the well-known quarrels between André Breton and Le Corbusier, was, on the surface, based on suspicion of abstraction... Surrealists posed a volatile and elusive sensibility of mental-physical life against what was seen as the sterile and overrationalized technological realism: the life of the interior psyche against the externalizing ratio... For Le Corbusier, looking always, as Beatriz Colomina has observed, toward a universally transparent exteriority, the attempt to reenvison the objects of daily life metaphorically was misguided, leading to a dangerous imbalance in the human "technico-cerebral-emotional equation" (the creation of a 'sentiment-object', rather than an object of use)... Against this,... the surrealists called for an architecture more responsive to psychological needs... Against the horizontal extensions and the dissolution of barriers between public and private (implied by the Domino model), Tristan Tzara posed the maternal and sheltering images of 'uterine' constructions which, from the cave to the grotto and the tent, comprised the fundamental forms of human habitation... Entered through "cavities of vaginal form", these conical or half-spherical houses were dark, tactile, and soft... In Tzara's muddling of popular psychology and primitivism,... we can identify a double nostalgia. On the one hand, the return to archetypal forms marks an identification with the origins of civilization and an explicit critique of its technological results... On the other, the notion of womb as origin displays a familiarity with Freudian explanations of desire and the repressed or displaced routes of homesickness... ('whenever a man dreams of a place and says to himself while he is still dreaming: 'This place is familiar to me; I've been here before', we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body)... Tzara's nostalgia hardly evoked the comforting images of hearth and home. For these warm and all-enclosing interiors... were, as Freud pointed out, at the same time the very centers of the uncanny (at once the refuge of inevitably unfulfilled desire and the potential crypt of living burial)...

This blurring of lines between the mental and physical, the organic and the inorganic, was, for the surrealists, one of the characteristic pleasures of Art Nouveau. Dalí's celebrated eulogy to Gaudí's 'edible' architecture had stressed its images of metamorphosis, of all historical styles merging into each other, of the intersection of the biological and the constructional, building and psychoanalysis, architecture and hysteria, in order to produce the ultimate object of desire... Walter Benjamin... later made the conceptual link between the technical visions of modernism and the apparent anti-technical stance of art nouveau... Benjamin argued that, since the Jugendstil considered itself no longer 'menaced' by technique, it could identify itself with technique. Thus he noted the correspondence between the curving lines of art nouveau and their modern counterparts, electric wires, which in turn paralleled the nerved of the modern city dweller... "The reactionary attempt that seeks to detach the forms imposed by technique from their functional context and to make natural constants out of them... is found sometime after art nouveau, in a similar form, in futurism." The structure that united the two, in Benjamin's terms, was fetishism. For it was fetishism that, in its multiple displacements, "suppresses the barriers that separate the organic from the inorganic world that is at home in the world of the inert as in the world of the flesh"... Surrealism and purism, indeed, fetishized precisely the same types of objects: what for surrealists were vehicles of oneiric desire and for Le Corbusier were the physical extensions of the body... In the dependency of surrealist fantasy on the real objects of the machine world, 'type objects' and 'sentiment objects' met in their common aim to overcome technique,... in favor of a technological imaginary that would transform technology into the human and vice versa... (cyborg)... Dark Space

Space, in the contemporary discourse, as in lived experience, has taken on an almost palpable existence. Its contours, boundaries, and geographies are called upon to stand in for all the contested realms of identity... In every case 'light space' is invaded by the figure of 'dark space', on the level of the body in the form of epidemic and uncontrollable disease, and on the level of the city in the person of the homeless...

In the elaboration of the complex history of modern space following the initiatives of Foucault, historians and theorists have largely concentrated their attention on the overtly political role of 'transparent' space (that paradigm of total control championed by Jeremy Bentham and recuperated under the guise of 'hygienic space' by modernists led by Le Corbusier in the 20th century). Transparency, it was thought, would eradicate the domain of myth, suspicion, tyranny, and above all the irrational... [However] the moment that saw the creation of the first considered politics of spaces
Late-18th-century architects were entirely aware of this double vision. Etienne-Louis Boulée... exploited all the visual and sensational powers of... "absolute light" to characterize his projects for metropolitan cathedrals and halls of justice, but was equally obsessed with absolute darkness as the most powerful instrument to induce that state of fundamental terror claimed as the instigator of the sublime. His design for a Palace of Justice... the Enlightenment's own phenomenology of light and dark, clear and obscure, his insistence on the operation of power through 'transparency', the panoptic principle, resists exploration to the extent to which the pairing of transparency and obscurity is essential for power to operate. For it is in the intimate associations of the two... that the sublime... retains its hold...

"Space is indissolubly perceived and represented... [In represented space,] the living creature is no longer the origin of the coordinates, but one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege and literally no longer knows where to place itself... One then enters into the psychology of psychasthenia... (the disturbance between personality and space)."

Following the psychological studies of Pierre Janet, Caillois compared such a disturbance to that experienced by certain schizophrenics when, in response to the question "where are you?", they invariably responded: "I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself..." The spatial condition of the devoured subject Caillois assimilated to the experience described by Eugene Minkowski, of 'dark space', a space that is lived under the conditions of depersonalization and assumed absorption... In Minkowski and Caillois, darkness is not the simple absence of light:

"There is something positive about it. While light space is eliminated by the materiality of objects, darkness is 'filled'; it touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him: hence the ego is permeable for darkness while it is not so for light."

Posturbanism

In the traditional city, antique, medieval, or Renaissance, urban memory was easy enough to define; it was that image of the city that enabled the citizen to identify with its past and present as a political, cultural, and social entity (neither the 'reality' of the city nor a purely imaginary 'utopia', but rather a complex mental map of significance;... thence the privileged place of monuments as markers in the city fabric)... This 'memory map'... was allied to aids to memory constructed by rhetoricians and philosophers from the time of Cicero. The orator Quintillian was quite precise in his description of how to remember: because, as he says, "when we return to a place after a considerable absence, we do not merely recognize the place itself, but remember things that we did there..." He outlines a system of reminders,... where a sequence of places... is established in the mind, and the signs of what is to be remembered are 'installed' within these places... All that is necessary to recall the thing itself is to 'remember' place-and-contents... Yates describes the way in which more and more elaborate versions of these memory places were fabricated throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, leading to those strange half-real, half-imaginary loci named 'memory theaters', or even, as in the case of Campanella, 'utopias'...

This relationship becomes important at the moment when architects became aware of the possibility of transferring to the realm of reality that which they had imagined in their memory... urbanism might be defined as the instrumental theory and practice of constructing the city as memorial of itself. The history of urbanism from the late Renaissance to the Second World War illustrates this definition clearly... Of course, with modernism, a slightly different twist was given to the idea of the memory map, even as to the monuments that signified it. For the modernists made no secret of their desire to forget as well as to remember; to forget the old city...

While the models proposed for the modern 'urbs' departed very little in form and spirit from those of earlier centuries,... modernism did introduce a profoundly destabilizing concept into the general idea of memory. Forgetting, after all, is a more complex activity than simply not remembering... the abyss of remembering erases as much as it traces. The traces of erasure form a kind of negative path,... always a present as well as an anticipation of a future... Sartre thematized this in his celebrated image of the Parisian café... Sartre arrives at a café a quarter of an hour late for a 4:15 appointment with Pierre. Pierre is not in fact there, and Sartre realizes this... The café, as Sartre enters it, is immediately organized with respect to his search for Pierre on entering as such a ground: "This organization of the café as the ground is an original nihilation. Each element of the setting (a person, a table, a chair) attempts to isolate itself,... only to fall back once more into the undifferentiation of the ground... The original nihilation of all the figures which appear and are swallowed up in the total neutrality of a ground is the necessary condition for the appearance of the principal figure, which is here the person of Pierre." But while all would be... fulfilled as ground with the solid appearance of Pierre,... Pierre is, in fact, not there. His absence is everywhere in the café, a café that remains a ground in the face of his absence, presenting... a 'perpetual disappearance'.

"Pierre raising himself as nothingness on the ground of the nihilation of the café"... (a double negation: 1. the expectation of seeing Pierre, and the subsequent adjustment of the café as ground; 2. the absence of Pierre)...

This description of the double nihilation... seems to me to operate... as a parable of the dislocation of memory in the modern city. That the models of urbanism proposed by architects of the modern movement seemed to ignore such a process, indicates the extent to which they were the prisoners of the classical belief that judgment precipitates being and not the other way around... The modern architects entered the old city... in the expectation of finding modernism there... The city, first niliated, remained in a constant state of nihilation in the face of a modernity that, as we now know, was never really there, save as an absent presence... Founded thus on a double nihilation, it was no accident that modernism... was instantly seen as the 'not-modern' (the modern 'not there')... The angry discomfort felt at this double absence (the letdown felt by Sartre because Pierre, who was always punctual, was not in fact there) is involved in the impossible nostalgia of postmodern attempts to retrieve fullness of being by retrospective memory... But the invention of a supposed presence to stand in for the haunting absence can hardly result in more than a 3rd negation... rather than such an attempt,... I would suggest... the process of entering a very different café... This café... looks about the same, perhaps a little more time-worn, chairs falling apart, waiters long past their prime, a café definitely in decline and with the air of having seen better years. But of course we enter it without expectation, crossing the threshold with no sense that we are going to find anything there. Certainly if Pierre was expected, we have long given up hope that he would ever arrive... (perhaps he was no more than a fiction of our imagination). Our lack of expectation is countered by the café... We enter this room simply to relax and not be noticed, to become ourselves ground in the ground... This sensibility... we might term 'post-urbanism'... In the post-urban sensibility, the margins have entirely invaded the center and disseminated its focus... This condition...
is given heightened significance by the loss of the original ordering device mustered for every traditional city: that of the body itself... Humanists and urbanists would argue that the end or urbanism also signifies the end of liberal humanism, of social conscience, and a belief in the public realm. But it is at least arguable that in the face of the rigorous exclusions operated by urbanism at its most idealistic, and the economic supports it demanded at its most realistic, a post-urbanist world would perhaps offer more inclusivity if less grand hope...

**Psychometropolis**

The idea of a 'modern' architecture... held 2 dominant themes in precariously balanced. The one... (cultural revolution; Le Corbusier) stressed the need to remake the language of art, to explore the conventions... The other... (materialist utopia; Karl Marx) called for a political and economic transformation... Both were permeated with historicist notions of progress, inevitable development, and the Zeitgeist, ideas that served, for a brief period, to hold the 2 tendencies in tandem without apparent contradiction... So strong was the assumed interdependence of formal and social change that, for many decades, the mere promise of a new language has been seen as politically threatening, while successive attempts to postulate political utopias have all questioned the existing language of forms... In one sense, of course, this is true: no one is immune to the techniques of modernism cleverly deployed... But in another sense, the simple utilization of technique, no matter how well calculated, does not in fact lead inevitably to cultural or political estrangement... For technique in and of itself... is more than academic and very quickly becomes kitsch. Equally, the isolation of programmatic concerns... tends toward the establishment of a kind of social positivism that... divorces art from social change... Certainly the last decade has demonstrated the distinct separation of these 2 concerns, formal and programmatic...

The work of the Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA)... has always resisted this great divide between program and form, social text and artistic technique... OMA has tried to weld text and image in a reciprocal dance that... mirrors the lusts, atavisms, hopes, and horrors of the modern metropolis... This project has obvious links to well-known modernist techniques, surrealist and metaphysical, but differs... by virtue of a persistent irony... (the techniques are, in a real sense, deployed against themselves)... The 'Floating Pool' and its indefatigable swimmers (1977), backing stroke by stroke toward... a center of dreams realized but changed in the realization,... a 'Welfare Palace Hotel' (1976) is indeed a place for the people of William Burroughs, but one they would perhaps abhor out of scorn... The Hotel Sphinx (1975-1976), dedicated to the delivery of cosmetic bliss... All these are projects composed under the sign of the need to escape and its impossibility... This, one might think, would make excellent, dryly humorous reading, but would not necessarily provide the foundations of any kind of building (it would seem that the very choice of such techniques arms the critically self-conscious writer against the fate of the avant-garde architect)... But build OMA will, and... a number of serious projects have emerged... Not the stuff of irony, surely. Yet in a subtle and intriguing way, OMA has succeeded in maintaining its dominant figure... This time it is sustained not simply by the nature of the drawing and the narrative; nor are we presented with elaborate scenarios of actions side by side with their illustration... The irony... is in a real sense embodied in the formal structure of the works themselves. In these projects... there is a determination to absorb the didactic 'form' of modern programatics... into the form of the building. In this process, the ultimate absurdity of the juxtapositions predicated by zoning is exploited as a 'formal' device...

In the projects, references to... the late modern movement are clear, but... style, in the art-historical sense, is rendered inoperative as an analytical device. The projects might look like... or this modern precedent; however, they are not repetitions or even extensions of the modernism of the 20s and 30s... Should the complicated set of negotiations and counter-negotiations be interpreted as... a loss of faith in modernism, while employing the husks of modernist forms?... Modernism continues to operate, not as kitsch but as work... There is a possibility of what one might call a 'restricted modernism'. Conscious of its loss of positive ground yet intimately aware of its own procedures, it is bound to speak, even though the results are not only unpredictable but also impossible to endow with any unitary purpose. In this context OMA refuses the positive inquiry into semantics... (the attempt to develop 'true' language)... Nor does it intend to anthropologize its productions with a false mask of humanism, for it affirms the complete independence of image and society...

**Oneism**

The form of the city, Baudelaire noted,... changes more quickly than the heart of a mortal... Le Corbusier's impatience at the obstinate survival of old Paris... is only one extreme example... More recently, even debates over the fate of the 'historical' city... have themselves founndered over the unwillingness of cities to be turned into historical museums of themselves... A contemporary philosopher of urban architecture is faced... not so much with the absolute dialectic of ancient and modern,... as with the more subtle and difficult task of calculating the limits of intervention according to the 'resistance' of the city to change...

In the development of such a sensibility to the limits of urban change, the projects of Wiel Arets stand as evocative experiments... Here the city, as existing, stands as the object and generator of so many possible futures... The architectural project, while crystallizing one or more of these futures, is then presented... as material to be submitted to the life and consuming power of the context. Apparently totalizing 'types' are thereby inevitably fragmented by the counterforce of the site... Their vocabulary belongs resolutely to a century of technological change, echoing while not imitating the already historicized language of the first avant-garde; but their strategy is countermordern... (a contemporary 'urban imaginary' fabricated out of the dialectic between memory... [post-Bergsonian] and situation [phenomenological])... The metropolis as architectural container for individual and collective memory ("a void which is only filled with thoughts," in Aret's words... a catalytic rather than an instrumental role... This substitution is... more than a literal recombination and recalculation of modern architectural types... Despite the almost anatomical attention to the delineation and program of each separate architectural event with its corresponding metaphorical referent, the resulting composition remains open to multiple interpretations... This procedure... is a deliberate merging of the 'locus solus' invented by the architect and the 'locus suspectus', or haunted site, of the city, a recognition that architecture and lived experience share the same sources... The traditional opposition between an ideal project and its real application is overcome by the essential complicity of the architect's project and the collective memory from which it derives...

**Vagabond Architecture**

In a recent publication of a journey taken to the cities of Riga and Vladivostock, John Hejduk once more... has mustered up a tribe of architectural animals, a traveling carnival of objects gradually assembled over the last decade... Perhaps on one level we might interpret this... traveling architecture as an example of... Hejduk's difficulty in joining, in agreeing... We might also see in these movable objects a generalized critique of conventional monumentality... (such a countermonumentality has... a long tradition of supporters in modernism... the modern city dweller living in houses like tents [the Maison Domino]; houses like cars [the Maison Citrohan]; or houses like airplanes [the Maison Voisin])...

But Hejduk's strange-looking characters on wheels defy rationalist classification... Indeed, his designs stand aggressively against both past and present... Emulating those vagrants, vagabonds, and strangers who were so distinctly disquieting to 19th-century social order, the work invades its
Hejduk’s players also roam the city not so much like tourists but more in the manner of... ‘lettristes’ and ‘situationnistes’, as they stumbled into the practice of the ‘dérive’. As described by Debord, the theory of the ‘dérive’ included directions on the place of chance and the random in the planned, the type and duration of movement through the streets... Such a walk, mingling wandering and wayward activity, merging meanings drawn from memory and chance as well as from random associations with encountered objects and people, was an elaborate technique collaged from surrealism, sociopsychology,... and more ‘scientific’ ways of measuring the use of urban space... Against the Corbusian schemes of modern urban renewal, the situationists posed a new mental mapping of the city,... conforming to more enduring mentalities... These ‘maps’ provided a guide to the new ‘science’ of psychogeography (‘the study of the precise effects of the geographical milieu... on the affective behavior of individuals’)...
The qualities of estrangement that result are, on one level, similar to the uncanny effects of all mirroring… Freud tells the amusing but disturbing story of sitting alone in his train compartment, when a jolt of the train caused the door of his washing cabinet to swing open; “an elderly gentleman in a dressing gown and traveling cap came in”. Jumping up angrily to protest this unwonted intrusion, Greus at once realized to his dismay “that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking glass of the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance.”

“Repetition, like repression, is originary, and serves to fill an originary lack as well as to veil it; the double does not double a presence but rather supplements it.”
[Sarah Kofman; ‘The Childhood of Art’; 1988]

[Reflections can be uncanny because] the proximity, noted by Freud, of the familiar and the strange causes “a profound modification of the object, which from the familiar is transformed into the strange, and as strange something that provokes disquiet because of its absolute proximity”… The mirror stage involves a complex superimposition of the reflected image of the subject conflated with the projected image of the subject’s desire…

In Koolhaas’ library… mirroring [is refused. Representation is made ambiguous, while reflection is blurred. This is the ‘greater’ psychasthenic mirror, different from the direct reflections of Modernism and the simultaneous reflections of the Post-Modern]… Here, the subject is no longer content to interrogate its face in the mirror, but… desires to stage its self in its social relations… The plane of the mirror becomes the space of a theater… In light of Rem Koolhaas’ preoccupation, outlined in ‘Delirious New York’, with the ‘paranoid critical method’ of Salvador Dali,… we might be tempted to apply such a designation to the façade of Koolhaas’ library project. The paranoiac space of the library would then be that which is staged through the anxiety instigated at its surface…