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ARCHITECTURE'S DESIRE

READING THE LATE AVANT-GARDE

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DESIRE

I write here about architecture's status as a domain of cultural representation. I am not primarily concerned with architecture as the art of building per se; nor do I consider it as a profession. Rather, I examine architecture as a way of negotiating the real, by which I mean intervening in the realm of symbols and signifying processes at the limit of the social order itself—that is, architecture as a specific kind of socially symbolic production whose primary task is the construction of concepts and subject positions rather than the making of things. It is thus an architectural impulse or attitude that I seek to characterize, and a certain kind of attention is needed to detect it: specialized theoretical techniques and methods must be brought to bear on this subject. Nevertheless, I hope to suggest too that the architectural impulse is part of daily social life and its wide-ranging practices. Architecture comprises a set of operations that organize formal representations of the real (although I will have to complicate that formulation), and hence, rather than merely being invested with an ideology by its creators or users, it is ideological in its own right—an imaginary “solution” to a real social situation and contradiction (as Louis Althusser’s take on Jacques Lacan puts it); that is what is meant by its “autonomy.”¹ Understood in this way, architecture’s effects—the range of conceptual and practical possibilities it both enables and limits—as well as the irreducible affects it presents are a precious index of the historical and social situation itself. I am concerned here with the effects and affects as well as the facts of architecture.

If ontology is the theory of objects and their relations—a structure within which being itself may be given some organization—then, I believe, art (generally) and architecture (especially) can and do operate ontologically. Architecture is fundamentally an inquiry into what is, what might be, and how the latter can happen. Architecture is one way of attaining the verb “to be.” But my problem is not philosophical; rather, it is historical—that is, I want to investigate a moment in history when certain ways of practicing architecture still had philosophical aspirations. The expanded decade of the 1970s (which I will take to include roughly the years between 1966 and 1983) saw a search for the most basic units of architecture and their combinatory logics. Aldo Rossi’s singular typological fragments; Peter Eisenman’s frames, planes, and grids; John Hejduk’s wall and its nomadic adventures; and Bernard Tschumi’s cinegrammatic segments, which frame and trigger the architectural impulse itself—all were understood as fundamental architectural entities and events that could not be reduced or translated into other modes of experience or knowledge. This self-consciousness also aimed for an awareness of architecture’s position in society and history itself (philosophical thinking always turns historical when pushed to its limits); thus ideological-representational engagements of architecture with the expanding consumer society of the 1970s were probed, and various strategies of distortion, resistance, and reappropriation were devised. The very nature of subject-object constructions and relations and of the subject’s relation to its other was opened to a scrutiny as intense as any philosophical inquiry. And architecture reached a limit condition in which its objects were no longer construed as mere elements and assemblages of building, however complicated or sophisticated, but rather as a representational system—a way of perceiving and constructing identities and differences.²

Such ontological ambitions were recognized even at the time; they are implicit in the widespread and recurrent analogies between architecture and the ultimate system of self-consciousness that is language. Indeed, another way of characterizing the period in question would be to call it "Architecture in the Age of Discourse," a designation that has the advantage of aligning architecture with other disciplines that similarly turned to language in their own respective self-examinations. As Jacques Derrida put it, "This moment was that in which language invaded the universal problematic; that in which, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse—provided we can agree on this word—that is to say, when everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences."³

Judgments about the meaning and value of the discursive turn, however, were not all positive. "The return to language is a proof of failure," Manfredo Tafuri declares, and though his position is more ambivalent than this assertion would indicate, he never wavers from his argument that, by the 1970s, what remains of modernity is only a spectral sense of our existence, in which we wrestle with the barely perceptible and unsolid echoes of an architectural past that cannot be recovered and a future that will not arrive. The advanced architecture of the 1970s must therefore remain a "salvage operation" in which "the elements of the modern architectural tradition are all at once reduced to enigmatic fragments—to mute signals of a language whose code has been lost—shoved away haphazardly in the desert of history."⁴

Tafuri's analysis finds architecture in a double bind. To the extent that architecture can function in a capitalist society, it inevitably reproduces the structure of that society in its own immanent logics and forms. When architecture resists, capitalism withdraws it from service—takes it off-line—so that demonstra-

tions by architects of the critical distance of their practice from degraded life become redundant and trivialized in advance. This transmutation of the cold, all-encompassing blueprint of a mode of production into the pure formalization of aesthetic technique is architecture's destiny, its "plan." And having identified that, Tafuri asserts the intolerable but inescapable conditions of possibility for contemporary architecture: to collapse into the very system that condemns architecture to pure means-end instrumentality, or to retreat into hypnotic solitude, recognizing that there is no longer a need for architecture at all. Thus "'the disenchanted avant-garde,' completely absorbed in exploring from the comfort of its charming *boudoirs* the profundities of the philosophy of the unexpected, writes down, over and over again, its own reactions under the influence of drugs prudently administered."⁵

The "over-and-over-again" indictment of the postwar avant-garde—the empty, numbing repetition of forms left over from the presumed-authentic historical avant-garde—became something of a leftist critical trope after Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (German, 1974; English, 1984). Bürger's derogatory term *neo-avant-garde* therefore suggests itself as an appropriate appellation for the work I am interested in here. Certainly the repetition of the formal elements and operations of Le Corbusier, de Stijl, and constructivism is the most immediately apparent characteristic of the experiments of Eisenman, Hejduk, and Tschumi, if not Rossi, whom one might nevertheless think of as a neo-Enlightenment-avant-gardiste. Bürger's categorization seems inescapable: "The neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions. This is true independently of the consciousness artists have of their activity, a consciousness that may perfectly well be avant-gardiste. . . . Neo-avant-gardiste art is autonomous art in the full sense of the term, which means that it negates the avant-gardiste intention of returning art to the praxis of life."⁶

The *neo*-ness of this work is made all the more compelling in the specific medium of architecture by the fact that not only Tafuri but also the more conservative Colin Rowe came to all but the same conclusion earlier and independently of Bürger. According to Rowe, if the historical avant-garde shared common ideological roots with Marxism, it also shared a Marxist philosophical ambition to interfuse form and word—variously articulated as expression and content, system and concept, practice and theory, building and politics, or (in Bürger’s terms) art and life. That the fusion ultimately failed may be attributed to a shift in the terms in which the experience of modernity itself had to be conceived in postwar architecture—a shift from modernity fully developed as the essential desired goal of architecture to modernity as architecture’s limiting condition. In his introduction to *Five Architects*, Rowe asserts what seems to be the only possible choice for the advanced architecture of the time: adhere to the forms, the “*physique*-flesh” of the avant-garde, and relegate the “*morale*-word” to incantation. For if the latter has been reduced to “a constellation of escapist myths,” the *physique* still “possess[es] an eloquence and a flexibility which continues now to be as overwhelming as it was then.” The measure of architecture lies no longer in the efficacy with which it prefigures a new and better world but rather in its achievement within the contingent conditions of the modern, of meeting the demands of the flesh, as it were, of elevating form as its own language without reference to external sentiments, rationales, or indeed social visions: “The great merit of what follows lies in the fact that its authors are not enormously self-deluded as to the immediate possibility of any violent or sudden architectural or social mutation.” The plastic and spatial inventions of cubism and constructivism, of Giuseppe Terragni, Adolf Loos, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier, remain the standard specific to the ideologically indifferent medium of architecture itself. The architects of the postwar avant-garde are “belligerently second hand,”

Scamozzi to modernism's Palladio, a series of simulacra. Yet it is only through the acceptance of that standard and the repetition of just those simulacra that architects' aspirations can be intelligible.⁷

This is the story, then, on which Tafuri and Rowe agree: In a first moment, the revolutionary avant-gardes of the early twentieth century surgically probe the modern city itself—the sociopsychological metropolis of Georg Simmel, Georg Lukács, and Walter Benjamin—in order to identify the patterns of its essential characteristics, which can then be converted into artistic form; in Tafuri's words:

*To use that experience as the foundation for visual codes and codes of action borrowed from already established characteristics of the capitalist metropolis—rapidity of change and organization, simultaneity of communications, accelerated rhythms of use, eclecticism—to reduce the structure of artistic experience to the status of pure object (an obvious metaphor for the object-commodity), to involve the public, as a unified whole, in a declaredly interclass and therefore antibourgeois ideology: such are the tasks taken on, as a whole, by the avant-gardes of the twentieth century.*⁸

In a second moment, a dimension of achieved autonomy of form allows architecture to stand against the very social order with which it is complicit, yet the same complicity racks architecture into an agonistic position—combative, striving to produce effects that are of the system yet against it. But the language of forms thus discovered—simple geometrical volumes, serialized points and lines, diagonal vectors, planes in vertical layers and horizontal stacks, frames and grids—takes on an absolute autonomy with the result that, in a final moment, the architectural neo-avant-

garde can peel the language off from the real, repeating the same already reified forms but transforming them into a self-enclosed, totally structured system of signs. The repetition of the neo-avant-garde is that "of someone who is aware that he is committing a desperate action whose only justification lies in itself. The words of their vocabulary, gathered from the lunar wasteland remaining after the sudden conflagration of their grand illusions, lie precariously on that slanting surface that separates the world of reality from the solipsism that completely encloses the domain of language."⁹ In this view, in the architecture of the age of discourse we witness the "freeing of architectural discourse from all contact with the real."¹⁰

The lack of a social need for architecture; architecture's total loss of the real: there is plenty of evidence in the works and writings of the architects in question to support Tafuri's conclusion. But a brief excursus will suggest a more dialectical position than either Tafuri or Rowe allows. Rossi and Eisenman, for example, are explicitly and especially sensitive to the effects of reification, but their work is not just a victim of its effects; they critically inscribe these effects. In Rossi's typological thinking, the relentless fragmentation, atomization, and depletion of the architectural elements seem to follow precisely the process that Lukács called reification (*Verdinglichung*). And yet typology (very like the realism recommended by Lukács), involves the power to think generally, to take up the fragments and organize them into groups and to recognize processes, tendencies, and qualities where reification yields only lifeless quantities. What is more, for Lukács the form of experience that most concretely represents the force of reification is crisis—that point where, as in Tafuri's analysis, the mnemonic function of architecture is just about to fail, where the memory banks have become so compartmentalized and arid that they will hold nothing other than the most bleached-out material. At this stage, the cognitive vocation of architecture is to reflect or

to cause reflection on the processes behind such crisis: crisis is modulated into critique.

We can begin to restore the social and historical meaning of type making—and indeed of the larger project under consideration that typology helps inaugurate—by positing it as an abstraction from a specific historical moment, a crisis, even a moment of trauma. For the very conditions on which the typology project depends—namely, the continuing tradition of the European city as documented in Rossi's *L'architettura della città* (1966)—had, by the time of this theorization, already disappeared as a contemporaneous object of experience, giving way to the city of information, advertisement, and consumption. By 1971 Denise Scott Brown (just to give one example) had proposed that the communication across space of the social values of groups had superseded the more conventional sorts of need for architecture. "Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Levittown, the swinging singles on the Westheimer Strip, golf resorts, boating communities, Co-op City, the residential backgrounds to soap operas, TV commercials and mass mag ads, billboards, and Route 66 are sources for a changing architectural sensibility," writes Scott Brown. "In fact, space is not the most important constituent of suburban form. Communication across space is more important, and it requires a symbolic and a time element in its descriptive systems."¹¹

We need not rehearse the ways in which mass media changed the very nature of the experience of public space during this time, except to recall that advertising media joined with the extensive development of buildings on the outskirts of the city and the new distribution of services to suburban commercial zones, making it more difficult to control the quality of urban space through traditional tectonic and typological means. Message reception challenged the tactile experience of objects, and voice, as it were, became *tenant lieu* of the full body; information now structured space and prepared it for experience. Scott Brown, Robert Venturi,

and others seized on the new perceptual conventions adequate for comprehension within this new system. The perception of architectural surfaces began to overtake the experience of urban space in the traditional sense. Image consumption began to replace object production, and the sheer heterogeneity of images exploded any single, stable typology of the city. Public meaning was now to be found in the signs and perceptual habits forged in a pluralist, consumerist, suburban culture. Consequently a split was felt to have opened up between the European tectonic-typological tradition and the everyday world of the American popular environment, a split that was fundamental to theoretical debates of the 1970s.

The point, however, is that none of this was missed by Rossi. For while Rossi's typological obsessions seem to be a way of constantly confirming the determinate presence of the traditional European city—refracting its historical logic of form through a neo-Enlightenment lens in contingent, contradictory, and quasi-surreal ways—their peculiar mnemonic function also makes it possible to see in them a new beauty in precisely that which is vanishing. The originality of Rossi's work may well be its capacity to convey, alternately with melancholy or unblinking disenchantment, that the traditional European city—which in some sense means architecture itself—is forever lost, and that the architectural avant-garde has reached an end. Tafuri insisted as much in a direct response to what Massimo Scolari, speaking of Rossi and the *Tendenza*, considered a refounding of the discipline: "The thread of Ariadne with which Rossi weaves his typological research does not lead to the 'reestablishment of the discipline,' but rather to its dissolution, thereby confirming *in extremis* the tragic recognition of Georg Simmel and György Lukács: 'a form that preserves and is open to life, does not occur.' In his search for the Being of architecture, Rossi discovers that only the 'limit' of Being there is expressible."¹²

While the work of Rossi and the *Tendenza* and that of Scott Brown and Venturi make up two more or less divergent problematics, the fact that they are similar even in their differences was recognized in the theoretical literature of the mid to late 1970s. Mario Gandelsonas's dialectical negation of the differences between the "neorationalism" of Rossi and the "neorealism" of Scott Brown and Venturi with his category of "neofunctionalism" is only the first example of a widespread theoretical attempt to resolve the contradictory aspirations of an architectural representation of the sociocultural moment together with an architectural autonomy in the face of the same.¹³ What has not been noticed is the fact that Peter Eisenman's "postfunctionalism," formulated in his 1976 editorial response to Gandelsonas and developed in the decade after in his "cities of artificial excavation," is a simultaneous absorption and displacement of the same two problematics (neorationalism and neorealism)—a double negation or neutralization of Gandelsonas's neofunctionalism. But the counterdialectic that Eisenman twists out of this scheme is the position that the autonomy project must be extended because the heterogeneity of the consumerist, mediatic city has now collapsed under its own weight, producing not difference but sameness. For Eisenman, architecture does not so much aspire to autonomy, as with Rossi, as it is *forced* into it by the very system it seeks to represent. The price of autonomy is a reduction in and a specialization of form, which becomes cut off from other social concerns even as, in its very isolation and aridness, it becomes perfectly adequate for, representative of, and homologous with the society that sponsors it. What Venturi and Scott Brown present as the discovery of happily possible, practical futures, Eisenman recognizes as nothing more than a misprojection of our own baleful historical moment and subjective situation.

The interpretations of Tafuri and Rowe encode the premise that the postwar "disenchanted" avant-garde symbolizes the torsions,

contradictions, and closures of a certain historical and social moment. This view does not sufficiently recognize, however, the more dialectical fact that this architecture—in its very objectivity and autonomy—has already internalized that with which the critics intend to confront it: that is, architecture has already incorporated the annulment of its own necessity (both its functional and representational vocations) and consequently *recoded* the object as the symbolic realization of just that situation. This architecture is a reflection on the foundations and limits of architecture itself. I shall therefore adopt a different terminology and refer to the architecture and the ethos of this group as the *late avant-garde*, with all the connotations this contradictory locution entails: of intransigence and survival beyond what should have ended; of a moment in a larger trajectory beyond which one cannot go; of technique accumulated to the point of bleak rumination; of productive negativity. In the late phase, the architectural symbolic begins to close in on itself, to regard itself as a vast accumulation of signifiers rather than as the never-concluded, positive production of meaning. The late avant-garde's introjection of loss and absence means not that the architectural object is empty, lacking, freed of contact with the real—as Tafuri and Rowe have it—but rather that the object renders its pathological content directly; it is the very form in which a certain lack assumes existence, the form necessary to imagine a radical lack in the real itself.

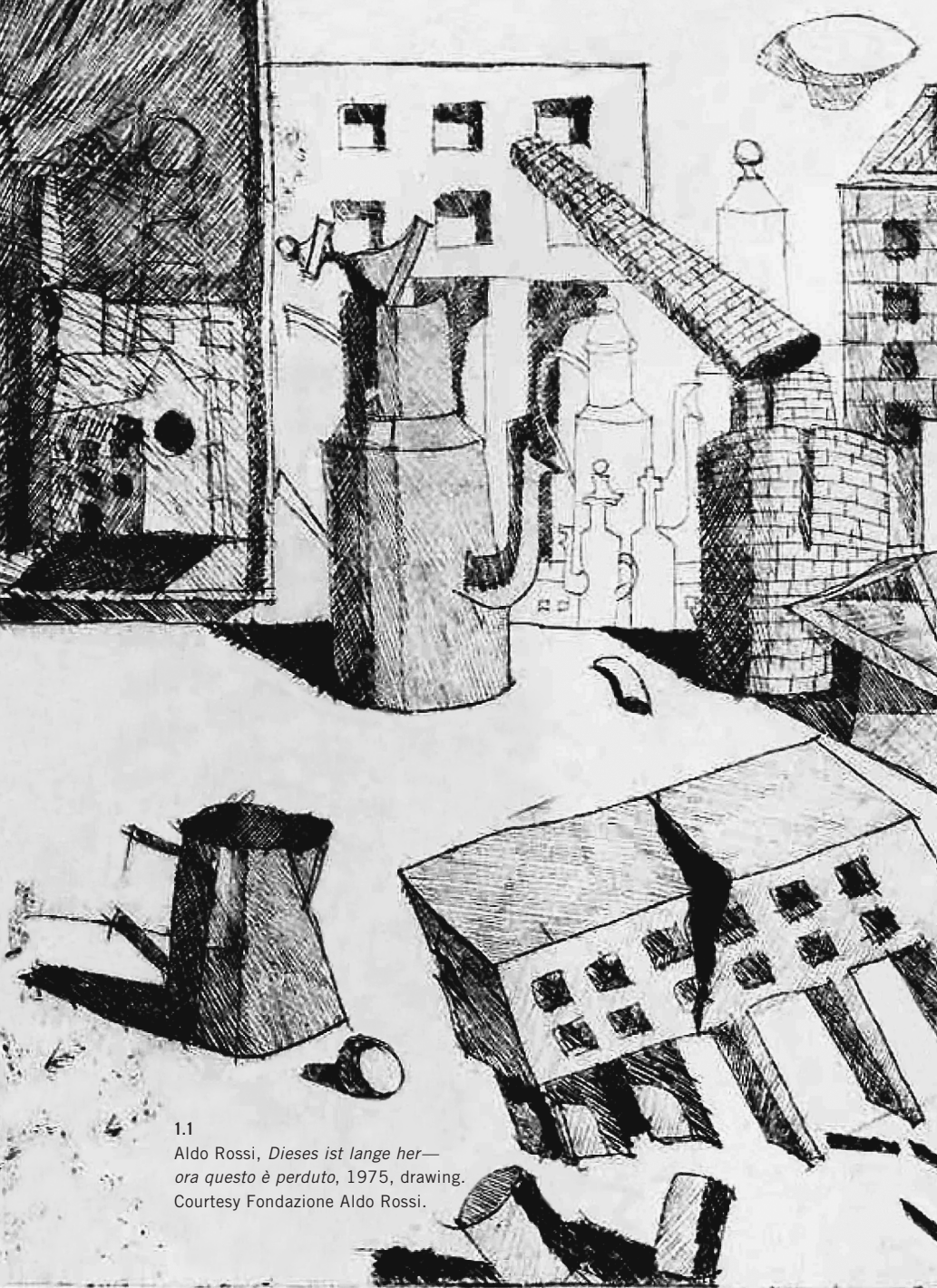
The term *late avant-garde* has the advantage of association with Fredric Jameson's *late modern*, by which he intends an extreme reflexivity within the modern itself rather than a replay of modernism—that is, a condition in which the ideology (understood as a positive and necessary framework for practice) of modernism has been theorized and identified in terms of artistic autonomy, "a return to art about art, and art about the creation of art." Unlike the fully commercialized postmodernism, the late architectural avant-garde keeps its namesake's commitment to

rigorous formal analysis, making the material of architecture stand against consumerism. But unlike the historical avant-garde, it self-consciously closes in on its own limits rather than opens outward; its original site is one of the trauma of having arrived too late. After all, when everything has been accounted for, how do you account for what remains? The late avant-garde "can never take place in any first time, but is always second when it first happens."¹⁴ The term also recalls Theodor Adorno's concept of "late style" and Edward Said's elaboration of it. Said sees lateness as an unresolved contradiction involving "a nonharmonious, nonserene tension, and above all, a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness going *against*." It is made possible at certain moments in modern history "when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it. His late works constitute a form of exile."¹⁵

Against the received view of Tafuri and Rowe, the examination of the late avant-garde undertaken in the following chapters shows a different relation between architecture and the real, of architecture's representation of the real. It will become evident that the received view of Tafuri and Rowe is not so much incorrect as it is not correct enough. For the real is not so easily dealt with as the received view implies—it is not just *there* before some material symbolic practice makes it manifest. Architecture's imperative is to grasp something absent, to trace or demarcate a condition that is there only latently. In short, my thesis is that having long since been deprived of its immediate use value, architecture in the 1970s found itself challenged as a mode of cultural representation by more commercially lubricated media. Feeling the force of changed historical conditions and a developed consumer society, the most advanced architecture of the 1970s retracted the frame of identity between the architectural object and the sociomaterial ground (on this, so far, all are in accord). This retraction is a

form of pragmatic negation that follows the historical avant-garde's strategies of resistance—a variant demanded by a new situation, but one that produces an impasse, since resistance seems no longer to bring change (and this is where Tafuri leaves it). At this point, however, the most advanced architecture forces a transduction upward, as it were, to a higher plane of abstraction—a transition from the outward-directed negativity of the historical avant-garde (which produced an architectural object that, through certain demystifying operations, strived to resist or disrupt the very situation that brought it into being) to a second-order negativity, an architecture reflecting on Architecture (whose object consequently becomes internally split, as we will see). The architectural object as such is disenfranchised (though not necessarily destroyed), annulled as an immediate thing and reconceived as a mediating material and process. The object-in-itself becomes an object-different-from-itself, a signifier directed toward the very disciplinary codes and conventions that authorize all architectural objects—it becomes Symbolic in Lacan's sense. The object becomes a medium for a Real that it does not simply reproduce, but necessarily both reveals and conceals, manifests and represses.

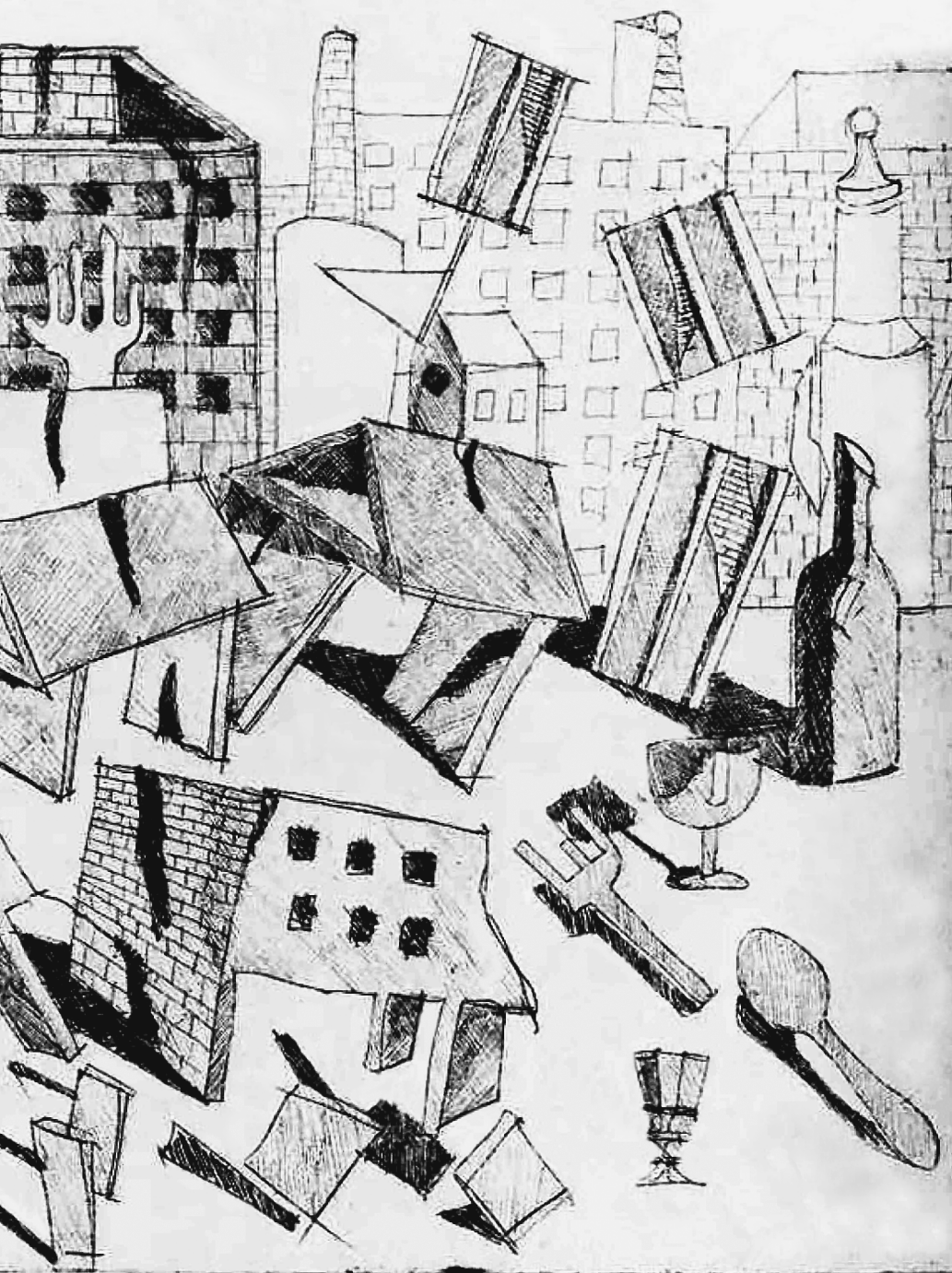
A certain pattern emerges. What in the received view appears as the conditions of impossibility for an architectural system—a historical and social situation in which there is no need for architecture as a cultural representation or, rather, in which its representational domain has no access to any reality beyond it—in fact establishes the conditions for new and different architectural functions. For as soon as architecture's need is articulated as *symbolic*—as soon as the architectural object is presented anew, repeated as *symbolized*—an inquiry is launched into architecture's possibilities rather than its actualities: Where does architecture come from, and what authorizes its existence as architecture—beyond the particular constitutions already in place? This is the query of the late avant-garde. To which in response they



1.1

Aldo Rossi, *Dieses ist lange her — ora questo è perduto*, 1975, drawing.
Courtesy Fondazione Aldo Rossi.

Dieses ist lange her / ora questo è perduto



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offer *not architecture itself but evidence that it exists*, as Adorno might say.¹⁶ But the pattern of the response is Lacanian. An empirical need reorganized in a medium of the Symbolic is what Lacan distinguishes as a demand, which directs its signifiers to an Other (originally the Mother, or language itself, but here something exterior to architecture, something beyond its grasp, which I characterize in the chapters that follow) that is experienced as intervening in (granting, denying, limiting) the satisfaction of the need. When need is reorganized as demand, the immediate, actual object of need is sublated (Lacan uses the Hegelian nomenclature of *Aufhebung*) only to reappear in mediated form—as the avatar of a dimension transcendent to the immediate object (the dimension of the Mother’s love, in the original instance; a horizon at the limit of architecture in the present instance, architecture’s essential but absent structure) and the process-object through which that dimension finds expression.¹⁷

We are in the matrix of desire (we have been all along). In the Lacanian system, desire is “the force of cohesion which holds the elements of pure singularity together in a coherent set,” where “the elements of pure singularity” are understood as nothing less than the most basic signifying units of the unconscious.¹⁸ Which is to say that desire is the machine that runs the entire psychic system. Desire is the constant production, connection, and reconnection of signifiers, of architectural quanta, of the pulsating flows of pure interpretation; this is why Lacan so insistently identifies desire and metonymy. What I suggest here and in the chapters that follow is that architectural desire is materialized in the objects of the late avant-garde—the symbolic desire constituted by architecture’s “big Other,” its laws and language, its original oneness; desire as the architectural unconscious; desire as the pursuit of architecture’s original object forever lost (the Tabernacle in the desert, the Vitruvian tree house, the primitive hut).¹⁹ Hence the obsessive search in this work for architecture’s fundamental codes and principles, all the time knowing full well

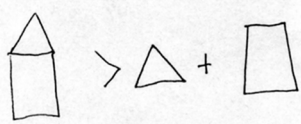
there can be none, that outside the architectural Symbolic is the radical nothingness of the architectural Real. Hence too the tumbling into the abyss as desire seeks its object: for desire desires *itself* in its object. It determines itself by negating its object, then becomes the object abolished through its own self-appropriation. Lacan's formula is, "Desire is the desire for desire, the desire of the Other."²⁰ And we can feel the full significance of the advent of desire at this particular moment in architecture's history by recognizing that architectural desire arises as a kind of absolute alterity exactly when the possibility of architecture's nonexistence is glimpsed on the horizon. In other words, the question of how architecture exceeds itself is the other side of imagining architecture's end. Thus the late avant-garde is the form architecture assumes when it is threatened with its own dissolution.

The marks of desire are various. They include the reduced, single volumes and fragments that populate Rossi's ghost-lit cityscapes and Hejduk's carnivalesque villages, and the even more minimal el-cubes of Eisenman and cinegrams of Tschumi—all bits and pieces from the architectural Symbolic understood as *analogues* of the social text (which by the 1970s had seen its possibilities similarly reduced and minimized). And the *repetitions* of these same forms are desire looking for its object and constantly missing the mark ("this is not *that*"), an insatiable quest best understood, as we will see, on the model of an architectural death drive. These architects address the matter explicitly: Eisenman, whose "end of the end" seeks to abolish history to fulfill itself; Rossi, with his allegorical drawing of striving *Dieses ist lange her / Ora questo è perduto* (this is long gone: architecture survives because the time of its fulfillment has passed);²¹ Hejduk, with his wall event, "which . . . might also be considered the moment of death";²² and Tschumi, whose Manhattan Transcripts are an entire screenplay of death and desire. Through desire, architecture is rendered eccentric to itself. And there are moments when an architectural experience produces that conception of eccentricity—moments of becoming,

affects, *encounters* that are nonrepresentational modes of thought; moments when a sensation just barely precedes its concept and we glimpse very basic, primitive architectural ideas, axioms for future architectures. Encounter and event are particularly operative in the work of Hejduk and Tschumi (Tschumi coined the term *event-space* in architecture), but all of these architects find ways to dislocate architectural experience, opening it up to the

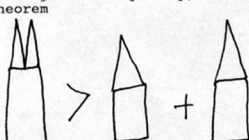
3 Masterpieces of late-twentieth-century design theory.

1. Rossi's Inequality, aka the Architectural Memory Theorem



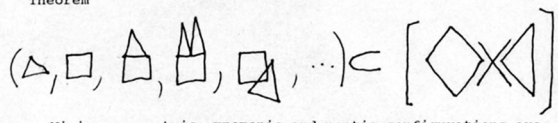
The minimum meaningful architectural configuration is greater than and irreducible to its geometric constituents.

2. Hejduk's Inequality, aka the Architectural Poetry Theorem



The minimum poetic architectural configuration is greater than and irreducible to architectural memories.

3. Eisenman's Hypothesis aka the Architectural Calculus Theorem



Minimum geometric, mnemonic and poetic configurations are special cases of a generalized calculus of form.

1.2

Jeffrey Kipnis, *3 Masterpieces of Late-Twentieth-Century Design Theory*, 1990.

fact that all perception is partial and ideological. Their work has been called “critical” in recognition of this characteristic. Yet I believe that the concept of desire more adequately signals their corollary attempt to escape the ideological closures of the situation through the portals of the libidinal and the collective; “critical” implies perhaps a too cerebral asceticism of specialized elites, though that too is correct as far as it goes. Moreover, I am insisting that the work under investigation here does more than extend the compulsory critical negativity of the historical avant-garde. In a theoretical sense, an architecture that, by internalizing critical negativity, posits itself as eccentric to itself is even more radical.

The complete absorption of structuralist tenets into architecture had by the 1970s made it possible to think architectural form as the effect of relations of difference among elements that themselves had no substantive meaning—Ferdinand de Saussure’s “difference without positive terms.” The late avant-garde, on the other hand, is the exact inversion of that formulation: it presents a singular architecture different from itself—an architecture that, in order to install itself as architecture, must already be marked, traced, transgressed, and divided from itself by memories of a past (Rossi and Hejduk are explicit about this) and anticipations of a future continuing identity (as Eisenman and Tschumi differently insist). I will follow Derrida in using the term *spacing* to refer to this tearing of the singularity from itself, this internalized differing. Therefore, the metonymy of architecture’s desire is: *analogy, repetition, encounter, spacing*. Each component will be developed in the readings of architecture that follow.

But for now, we are finally in a position to situate the representational range of late avant-garde architecture from the spatial Imaginary to the codes and laws of the Symbolic in the larger nonrepresentational field of the Real. And it should be made clear now that my understanding of the Real follows the readings of Lacan by scholars like Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek and is

best summarized by Jameson's famous pronouncement that the Real "is simply History itself."²³ It is interesting in the present context to remind ourselves that it was Jameson's confrontation with the negative thought of Tafuri that virtually forced the production of Jameson's correlate to the Real-as-History, which is the imaginary projection he calls cognitive mapping. The imperative to think totality is one on which Tafuri and Jameson agree (and dealing with the Real must always involve a totalizing propensity). Yet for Jameson, architecture still has the important social function of articulating material forces that would otherwise remain ungraspable and linking the local, phenomenological, and subject-centered experiences of space to the developing subject-producing structures of capitalism itself. And right where Tafuri sees the fading away of class ("there can never be an aesthetics, art or architecture of class"),²⁴ Jameson finds the residue of what used to be called class consciousness—a mapping of one's social place—but of a paradoxical kind, premised on the representation of the "properly unrepresentable" global structure in each of the local, experiential moments that are themselves the effects of that structure. Cognitive mapping is fundamentally a development of Althusser's radical rewriting of ideology as "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," itself, of course, a reading of Lacan's Imaginary-Symbolic-Real triad. Cognitive mapping is, on one side, a kind of collective "mirror stage" in which the affective immediacies of identity are in dialectical play with the alienating closures and misrecognitions that are the byproducts of any representation at all. But at the same time, the map is also a trace-trait of the social Symbolic, a "social symbolic *act*" with potential to break out from its ideological prison. Beyond that, at the limit of the Symbolic order, is the Real—"History itself"—which supports the social even as it remains obdurately unavailable and unsymbolizable. "Conceived in this sense," Jameson writes,

History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its "ruses" turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention. But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force. This is indeed the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular theoretical justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them."²⁵

Jameson's History—"absent cause," "unrepresentable" and "unsymbolizable," the "untranscendable horizon," "Necessity"—is always in place but only as an undifferentiated and ultimately intractable outside (Lacan defines the Real as "that which resists symbolization absolutely"): the vanishing point of the Symbolic and Imaginary alike, the end of the line toward which their plays of presence and absence, signifiers and images incline. The late architectural avant-garde is, in the end (at the end), a reckoning with this Real.

Jameson's "History is what hurts" passage was published in 1981. It is interesting to ponder whether it is analytical or symptomatic of its time. In any case, History is what hurt architecture at precisely this same moment, as the practico-inert began to turn back on and against the accumulate practices of architecture. And the sense one has when scanning the fractured landscape of the late avant-garde, of a failure that is alternately inevitable and deliberate, and a finality that is dreaded but enjoyed—these are explainable only as effects of History's contradictions.²⁶ The architecture of the late avant-garde performs the impossibility of architecture's full realization; it stages an architectural project that for historical reasons must be undertaken but ultimately is brought to failure by a dynamic integral to the project itself. Such are the workings of architecture's desire.²⁷