

*P o s t m o d e r n  
P e r s p e c t i v e s :*

*A n e x p l o r a t i o n i n t o  
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*b y  
D o n n a M a r i e  
C h o m i c h u k*

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This thesis is submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the  
University of Manitoba  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Department of Landscape Architecture  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba



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POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVES:  
AN EXPLORATION INTO CONTEMPORARY  
CRITICISMS AND PRACTICES

BY

DONNA MARIE CHOMICHIK

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree of

MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

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*A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s*

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*A b s t r a c t*

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This study attempts, primarily, to understand some of the multiple and often contradictory concerns and critiques of postmodernism. These concepts of postmodernism are understood first, through a model of modernity as defined through a historic overview. This study then examines postmodern concerns arising from this model, as informed by both post-structural and architectural criticisms and models.

This study also examines strategies from various fields which have arisen to deal with these concerns on both theoretical and practical levels. What is of concern here is the interface of these issues and strategies - between landscape architecture and other fields, and how the general field of architecture has attempted to come to terms with some of the questions and dilemmas brought to light by the crisis of 'modernism' and poststructuralist critiques. These strategies are used as a basis for reconsidering the profession of landscape architecture and its relationship to other fields.

Finally, this study includes an application of these ideas to the design of the urban landscape, in this case, the community of St. Norbert.

*C o n t e n t s*

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*"The postmodern is seemingly not so much a concept as a problematic: 'a complex of heterogeneous but interrelated questions which will not be silenced by any spuriously unitary answer.'"*

Linda Hutcheon after Victor Burgin, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, pg. 15.

*" But what exactly is the Postmodern? Is it possible to find a single definition to such a paradoxical and irritating word? I feel that it is indeed possible. But we must first stop thinking of it as a label designating homogeneous and convergent thing. Its usefulness lies, rather, in its having allowed us temporarily to put together and compare different things arising from a common dissatisfaction with that group of equally heterogeneous things called modernity. To put it another way, the Postmodern is a refusal, a rupture, a renouncement, much more than a simple change of direction."*

Paolo Portoghesi, *Postmodern: The Architecture of Post-Industrial Society* pg. 7.

*"In opposition (but not only in opposition), a resistant postmodernism is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition, not an instrumental pastiche of pop-or pseudo-historical forms, with a critique of origins, not a return to them. In short, it seeks to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations."*

Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic*, pg. xii

*P o s t m o d e r n i s m - a  
F r a m e w o r k*

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Particularly during the 20th century, a growing number of theorists, practitioners and writers have questioned the assumptions underlying modern western culture. In recent years this questioning has coalesced into a conviction that the way in which we view the world, the 'modern' view, has deeply rooted problems. Out of this conviction has arisen a concern to bring to attention and criticize this problematic modern world view. This critical perspective vis-a-vis the modern paradigm has become known as a 'postmodern' stance, that is a challenge to our traditional mode of thinking, a reaction against the modern.

While postmodernism is of our time, instances of a postmodern critique can be found early in this century in "the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics; the Freudian critique of self-presence; the Heideggerean critique of onto-theology."<sup>1</sup> Since the 1950's issues such as the energy crisis, environmental destruction, rapid technological transformation, and the emergence of an information age have also prompted a questioning of the directions and motives of western culture. Most recently, postmodern interrogations into the Cartesian subject, of modernity's binary model

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<sup>1</sup>. Dawne McCance, "Ethics in Postmodern Perspective," Studies in Religion, 16(4): 1.

which leads to domination and authority, and of the modern scientific ontology or approach to comprehending reality, have challenged the assumptions of western culture at a foundational level.

This questioning of assumptions at a fundamental level constitutes, as art critic Craig Owens describes, "a crisis of the cultural authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions"<sup>2</sup>, a critical juncture in which Western culture can no longer sustain its sense of mastery or ability to legitimize and 'compel consensus.' French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard terms this changed state of Western culture 'the postmodern condition,' an "incredulity toward metanarratives."<sup>3</sup> He suggests in his report, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, that for contemporary Western society, modern knowledge has been legitimized through scientific theories or through the 'grand narratives,' universal ideals such as progress, the optimization of efficiency, the liberation of humanity, and the unity of philosophical systems. Postmodern knowledge, Lyotard argues, is characterized by a crisis of these meta-narratives,<sup>4</sup> a questioning of their authority or legitimizing function. This crisis of narratives is not only societal, but has political implications, suggests Marxist critic Frederic Jameson, as it points to a "problem of the

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2. Craig Owens, "On the Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983) p. 57.

3. Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984) p. xxiv.

4. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

legitimation of the whole social order" of late capitalism, or consumer and postindustrial society.<sup>5</sup>

For postmodernists, this crisis of legitimation has meant an active critique and exploration of modernity's foundations. Certain 'postmodernists' argue that the modern paradigm has culminated in the twentieth century and has become so pervasive that it has affected, as quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg describes, "the fundamentals of our existence, which on their part certainly have their effects in all areas of human experience."<sup>6</sup> For modern systems structure the dominant features of Western culture, such as the institutions of the museum and the university, our discourses and systems of meaning, the creation of our artifacts, and our notions of the individual and culture.

A postmodern impulse is to 'de-naturalize' or deconstruct those systems, to show them as cultural constructions rather than as natural or a given. Though not limited to the arts, this critical interrogation of modern systems is perhaps most evident in the aesthetic fields. Linda Hutcheon suggests in *The Poetics of Postmodernism* that postmodernism as an activity, "can be discerned in most art forms and many currents of thought today."<sup>7</sup> Various fields such as painting, photography, architecture,

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5. Frederic Jameson, "Foreword" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984) p. vii.

6. Werner Heisenberg, "The Representation of Nature in Contemporary Physics," *The Discontinuous Universe*, eds. S. Sears and G. Lord (New York: Basic Books, 1972) pp. 122-123.

7. Linda Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, (New York: Routledge, 1988) p.4

music, literature, and aesthetic theory challenge modern systems of representation and communication, for they "all share a view of discourse as problematic and of ordering systems as suspect (and as humanly constructed)."<sup>8</sup> These challenges take on any number of forms: deconstructivist activity in literary criticism, the deconstruction of architectural structures and conventions, visual representation's challenge of realism and the politics of representation, and feminist critiques of patriarchal underpinnings to these systems.

These critiques focus our attention not only to representation, but to the production of meaning and systems or structures of thought behind them. Contemporary representation is seen by some postmodernists as both the product and producer of the modern paradigm. Not only is postmodernism's criticism of modernity evidenced in literary and visual arts as manifestations of modern thought, but also in architecture as the built expression or representation of modern thought and transformer of our environments. Postmodern issues have been brought to light by the questioning of architectural meaning, ordering systems, and notions of architectural form, the city and of nature.

Though dissatisfied with the norms of the pastoral and picturesque, and currently exploring alternatives for landscape design which express and address contemporary situations, practitioners of landscape architecture have for the most part remained disinterested in

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<sup>8</sup>. Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) p. 24.

postmodernist debates and critiques of modernity (except on rare occasions as a stylistic source). Prevailing attitudes within the profession of landscape architecture hold that the issues and concerns of postmodernism theory are outside those of the profession and its practice. However, this attitude of exteriority to current debates and assumed division knowledge into autonomous fields are foci of postmodernism's critique: of modernity's segregation of knowledge and professions into specialized fields, and particularly of modernity's tendency to relegate certain groups to the periphery of mainstream concerns. A consequence of this interrogation has been the dissolution or transgression of boundaries, "between genres, between disciplines or discourses, between high and mass culture, and most problematically, perhaps, between practice and theory."<sup>9</sup>

In this light, postmodernists contend that the foundational problems of modernity cross disciplinary lines. This line of thought suggests that postmodernism, as a critical inquiry of the foundational models of modernity has implications for landscape architecture, for it (as all fields) does not exist in theoretical and operational isolation from the cultural systems of the West, but overtly and covertly perpetuates its assumptions.

This study attempts, primarily, to understand some of the multiple and often contradictory concerns and critiques of postmodernism as informed by both post-structural and architectural criticisms and models. What informs these models is not so much a stylistic approach as a critical

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<sup>9</sup>. Ibid., p. 18.

attitude from which to provide an expanded framework for reconsidering the directions of the landscape architecture and its practice.

Traditionally, landscape architecture has been a practice which has not developed a self-conscious body of theoretical knowledge.<sup>10</sup> The situation in landscape architecture is not one in which the profession does not follow theory or a set of possibilities, but that we have often been unaware of what those points of view or frameworks are. As with other field, we have 'naturalized' the assumptions of the profession. In other words, landscape architects have not been particularly articulate in expressing our theories or analyzing our views.<sup>11</sup>

Peter Jacobs suggests that an alternative approach to inscribing landscape theory involves

de  
in {form} ing landscape<sup>12</sup>  
re

In many ways, this perspective is similar to what informs the explorations of this thesis.

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10. Steven Krog has referred to this issue numerous times in articles in Landscape Architecture. See for instance, "The Language of Modern" *Landscape Architecture* 75, Mar./April 1985, p.56. Additionally, many of the more recent books on landscape has been written by architects, such as *The Poetics of Gardens* by Moore et al., and *Green Architecture and the Agrarian Garden* by Barbara Stauffacher-Solomon.

11. This issue is a concern of Peter Jacobs, presented in his paper, "Truth and Beauty," at the *Landscape and the Avant-Garde: Can They be Reconciled?* conference, University of Minnesota; Minneapolis, Minnesota. April, 1989.

12. Ibid.

As a cultural activity or phenomenon, postmodernism is non-linear; it has no distinct beginning or end. Nor is it a singular movement identified by styles, formal interventions, or methodologies, for many aspects of postmodernism are contradictory and paradoxical. To complicate the matter further, Frederic Jameson has pointed out that there are as many forms of postmodernism as there were modernisms, indeed, that "no one single postmodernist can give us postmodernism since it is a system involving a whole range of things."<sup>13</sup> While this situation presents multiple points from which to set out on a discussion of postmodernism, this study first establishes the historical concept of 'modernity' I am working with here. I have chosen (out of numerous possible modernisms) to deal with the concept of modernism as a cultural construct determined, in part, from a scientific and dualistic mode of thinking developed during the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution and elaborated by later eras. Though there are numerous other valid definitions for modernity (and consequently postmodernity), as a starting point for this inquiry, this interpretation has allowed enough scope to encompass some of primary issues and manifestations of modernity and yet set enough borders from which to begin addressing them.

This study examines postmodern concerns arising from the problematics of modern Western thinking, particularly as they relate to hierarchical binary thought and the construction of meaning, the subject and nature. Numerous postmodern strategies, most notably deconstruction,

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13. Anders Stephanson, "Interview with Frederic Jameson," *Flash Art* 131. (December 1986/January 1987): 72.

have arisen which deal with these concerns on both theoretical and practical levels. What is of concern here is the interface of these issues - between landscape architecture and other fields, and how the field of architecture has attempted to come to terms with some of the questions and dilemmas brought to light by the crisis of 'modernism' and poststructuralist critiques.

Additionally, I wish to briefly touch upon and situate within this larger context, some of the numerous crossings of postmodern and landscape architectural viewpoints, for postmodernism suggests far more than a stylistic interval for landscape design, but a possibility for a practice informed/transformed by theory or a politic. The case study, or practical application, is my translation of some of these ideas into form.

u n d e r s t a n d i n g  
 m o d e r n i t y : a s a  
 c u l t u r a l c o n s t r u c t

"...the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn't grow on trees."

Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 14

Postmodern criticism is indebted to continental theory, particularly French structuralist and post-structuralist theories. Structuralism suggests that meaning is produced by the patterns or inter-relations between units, not inherent in individual units themselves. Post-structuralism argues that the meanings produced by these relations are not extrinsic to society, but are culturally produced. These theories, American critic Hal Foster writes, "have lead us to reflect upon culture as a corpus of codes or myths (Barthes), as a set of imaginary resolutions to real contradictions (Claude Levi-Strauss)."<sup>15</sup> Both have lead postmodernists to reconsider modernity not as a natural outgrowth of human progress but as a system of relations and as a cultural construct, a structure based upon Western assumptions about reality or world view.

The modern assumption of truth as coincident with reality, rather than as constructions or systems, traditionally has not been questioned. For

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14. Hutcheon, *Politics* p. 2.

15. Hal Foster, "Introduction," *The Anti-Aesthetic*, p. x

postmodernists, this acceptance is seen as deeply problematic as they maintain that we create reality; that is, our 'truth' is relativistic, nothing more than a cultural system based upon a historical and prescribed set of assumptions. These assumptions are deeply engrained in Western culture, as French feminist writer Hélène Cixous describes:

There is no such thing as 'destiny', 'nature', or essence, but living structures, caught up, sometimes frozen within historicocultural limits which intermingle with the historical scene to such a degree that it has long been impossible and is still difficult to think or even to imagine something else. <sup>16</sup>

Central to these assumptions, Cixous contends, is a system governed by the order of logocentrism, a "network of millennial cultural determinations of a complexity that is practically unanalyzable."<sup>17</sup> For logocentrism, which posits reason or presence as the centre of our systems of knowledge, is one of our longest standing structures, it "subjects thought - all the concepts, the codes, the values, to a two-tiered system,"<sup>18</sup> a binary system which subjects pairs such as rational/subjective, subject/object, culture/nature and active/passive as hierarchical relationships. This "conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition,"<sup>19</sup> as the French philosopher/literary critic Jacques Derrida writes, constitutes a 'violent hierarchy' of domination and repression which governs society, culture, and symbolic systems such as art, language and architecture. This binary framework as a foundation of

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16. Hélène Cixous. "Sorties," in *New French Feminisms* ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken, 1981) p.96.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 91

19. Jacques Derrida, "Positions," *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) p. 41.

modernity has become so ingrained in Western culture that it has become restrictive and allows no other perspectives to infringe on it. It limits our possibilities and marginalizes other points of view.

In other words, post-structuralists argue that Western society has constructed and organized a deeply entrenched 'logocentric' system which has now become problematic. Yet, maintains Cixous, this is a time when the system's foundation is weakening. If this system would crumble,

then all the stories would have to be told differently;... another thinking as yet not thinkable will transform the functioning of all society. Well, we are living through this very period when the conceptual foundation of a millennial culture is in process of being undermined by millions of a species of mole as yet not recognized."<sup>20</sup>

Postmodernists deconstruct, or interrogate this 'logocentric' bias at a foundational level. They do not posit another model in its place, for this system is so pervasive that we are only beginning to know what forms it could take. Paul Ricoeur expresses a similar sentiment,

No one can say what will become of our civilization when it has really met different civilizations by means other than the shock of conquest and domination. But we have to admit that this encounter has not yet taken place at the level of an authentic dialogue. That is why we are in a kind of lull or interregnum in which we can no longer practice the dogmatism of a single truth and in which we are not yet capable of conquering the skepticism into which we have stepped.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>. Cixous, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup>. Paul Ricoeur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures," (1961) History and Truth, trans Chas. A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965) p. 283, cited by Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism," in The Anti-Aesthetic, p.22.

Many postmodernists concur; alternatives to modernity's closure are 'as yet not thinkable.' From the criticisms of feminists, natives, and other minority groups stems a realization that Western culture is not as homogeneous nor as monolithic a culture as we may have once believed, that is, 'we can no longer practice the dogmatism of a single truth.'

As a means of opening intervals for dialogue not dogma, particularly with previously marginalized groups and ideas, postmodernists are rethinking and questioning the problematics of modernity and its quest for singular thinking based upon the modern binary perspective of the world. Particularly, this has meant an interrogation of binary thinking, symbolic systems, the Cartesian view of the person as 'subject' (as rational, autonomous, and centered) and the objectification or classification of phenomenon. Postmodernists and others argue that the foundations of this perspective have at least in part, "been determined mainly by modern science and technology,"<sup>22</sup> arising in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the ideals of Enlightenment humanism. The scientific method introduced by Galileo, Newton and Descartes, revolutionized not only modern science, but modern society, modern man, and society's conceptions of nature. As a means of illustrating these aspects of modernity and the problematic nature of its assumptions, I would like to situate at this juncture an examination of modernity <sup>23</sup> within a historical context.

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22. Heisenberg, p. 122

23. The modernity I use in this context is a very simplified description of a wide range of events and concepts which occur not only in science.

## t h e m e d i e v a l c o s m o s



he Western world began to take on features that we now term modern and progressive,<sup>24</sup> during the 16th and 17th century transformations from a medieval cosmos to the modern or Cartesian paradigm. Medieval teleology was a meaningful, but also a closed and static world view. Morris Berman, in the *Reenchantment of the World*, describes the medieval world as "ultimately changeless, but being riddled with purpose, is an exceptionally meaningful one."<sup>25</sup> To the medieval man, the cosmos was steeped with spirit and meaning, taking the form of a concentric universe of which God surrounded the outermost boundaries followed by the planets, and earth and man at the center (Figure 1 ). Both the earth and nature were considered divine creations, imbued with spirit and meaning, a benevolent nurturing mother.

As inherently meaningful, this organic cosmos was also viewed as a static world. Man and nature were believed to follow essentially cyclical and unchanging patterns of growth and decline. Man saw himself as the focus of this world, and yet a part of a larger whole in which the

<sup>24</sup>. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980) p. xix.

<sup>25</sup>. Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988) p.38.

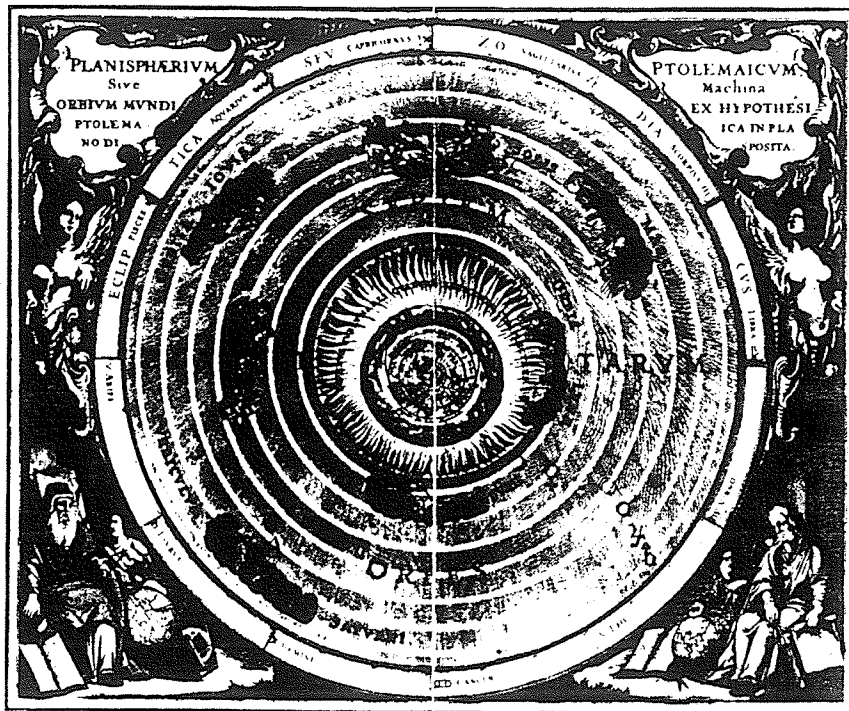


Figure 1: The Earth Centred, or Ptolemaic Universe, from Andreas Cellarius, *Harmonia Macrocosmica*, (Amsterdam, 1661) Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*.

interdependence of parts was emphasized. Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature*, has described the medieval view of feudal society as one which "stressed the whole before the parts, while emphasizing the inherent value of each particular part. The unity of the one was of higher value than the objectives of the many. The connection between the parts was integrated through a universal harmony pervading the whole."<sup>26</sup> Medieval man's place in the medieval world was therefore seen as predetermined and unchanging within a hierarchical feudal structure, and within a larger hierarchy of nature, man and God.

<sup>26</sup>. Merchant, p. 71.

## t h e c a r t e s i a n p a r a d i g m

*"Our present lives are dominated by the goddess Reason, who is our greatest and most tragic illusion. By the aid of reason, so we assure ourselves, we have 'conquered nature.'"*

Carl Jung, cited by James Wines in *De-architecture*, pg. 125.

Although the paradigm changes of the 16th and 17th centuries, from the medieval organic or cosmic world view to a predominantly mechanical and rationalist paradigm, occurred in many areas, I have chosen the scientific transformations of this period to exemplify and illustrate the transformation of these views. Copernicus' theory that the earth revolved around the sun,<sup>27</sup> radically altered the earth-centered medieval cosmos to a heliocentric or sun-centered system; this theory and other pivotal developments in astronomy and physics mark the beginning of a shift from a medieval cosmology to a mechanical philosophy of the modern world view.

Under the scope of modern scientific enquiry, the universe came to be mathematically described, made up of particles of matter. While nature had once been seen as a nurturing and benevolent mother, in the early stages of the Scientific Revolution nature came to be seen as wild, disorderly and chaotic, needing to be subdued and controlled by man through the imposition of order. Science and its technology was seen as the

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<sup>27</sup>. Published in On the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres in 1543.



Figure 2: Engraving from Levinus Hulsius's *Theory and Practice of the use of the Geometric Quadrant Etc.*, 1594. From Mary Miss: *Projects*.

key method of achieving this order out of chaos. Francis Bacon, Galileo Galilei, and Rene Descartes were key figures in the development of the scientific method and changed view of nature. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) envisioned a mechanical model of the universe, one which followed predictable laws of motion. This mechanical universe could be understood through knowledge gained from scientific experimentation. Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) added the notion of 'objectivity' to Bacon's notion of experimentation, as he advocated the removal of the scientific observer from the phenomena he observed; that is the scientific observer should regard phenomenon 'objectively' in order to know 'truth'.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup>. Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine, The Pentagon of Power*, vol. 2. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970) pp. 55-58.

Like his predecessors Galileo and Bacon, French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650) saw the universe as a mechanical system which must be observed objectively in order to understand it with certainty. For Descartes, mathematics was viewed as the only true means of absolute knowledge, therefore, physical systems were to be quantitatively described through mathematics as scientific laws. Furthermore, assuming a mechanistic view of nature, that matter was only the sum of its parts, nothing more nothing less, Descartes advocated an atomistic method of analysis as a means of understanding physical systems. According to this approach, knowledge of physical systems could be gained by dividing up into smaller and smaller units, the parts which could then be studied outside the complication of environmental context. Descartes believed this reductionist or atomistic approach would be a means of enabling man to eventually understand the world in its entirety. This mechanical philosophy, or analytic and reductionist approach, became the prescribed and normative scientific method. The universe was to be described in quantifiable terms of ideal geometry, structure and stability. Not only was this objective and quantified view a scientific viewpoint, but contemporary thinkers suggest that this mechanical philosophy about nature and the world still permeates all our thinking today.<sup>29</sup>

As both Merchant and Berman have observed, this mechanical view was associated with a framework of values based on power, rational

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<sup>29</sup>. See also Berman's The Reenchantment of the World, Fritjof Capra's The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture, (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), and Lewis Mumford's The Pentagon of Power on this argument.

control, and domination. Francis Bacon advocated the use scientific knowledge in order "to endeavor to establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe," and in this way "the human race [could] recover that right over nature which belongs to it by divine bequest."<sup>30</sup> Descartes also expressed these goals in a similar manner, as he believed his scientific method would enable man to become "the lords and possessors of nature." From within this framework, the machine functioned as a symbol of the power of technology to order human life and nature.

The modern scientific method as we know it today was solidified by Sir Issac Newton (1642 - 1727) through his inclusion of hypothesis and experiment to the methods of Bacon and Descartes. This view of science was believed to be the 'touchstone of reality', the means of accessing absolute truth. Newtonian science was used to validate the mechanical view of the universe. This belief in knowledge based on hypothesis, experimentation, and objective observation became the basis for modern science and a notion scarcely conceivable by the medieval man. The universe was no longer considered contemplatively, but to be understood through a mechanical model of mathematics and universal laws.

As modern man began to see himself as the objective observer of nature through scientific enquiry, he increasingly saw himself as remote

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<sup>30</sup>. Francis Bacon, "Plan of the Work," p.32 and "Novum Organum," pp.114,115, Works, vol. 4, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, Douglas Devon Heath, 14 vols. (London: Longmans Green, 1870) cited by Merchant, p. 172.

and distant from that which he observed. Nature became seen as independent of God and of man, composed of dead, spiritless particles of matter, rather than alive and full of meaning. As Merchant has written, "the removal of animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos constituted the death of nature,"<sup>31</sup> for in the scientific eye, nature lost all sense of inherent meaning. More specifically, "mechanism eliminated from the description of nature concepts of spatial hierarchy, value, purpose, harmony, quality, and form central to the older organic description of nature, leaving material and efficient causes - matter and force."<sup>32</sup> Descriptions of nature later evolved into even more scientific and objective terms, Werner Heisenberg tells us, as "the meaning of the word 'nature' as an object of scientific research slowly changed; it became a collective concept for all those areas of experience into which man can penetrate through science and technology."<sup>33</sup> Merchant has argued that it was the replacement of the organic view with the mechanistic view which sanctioned the manipulation and domination of nature for the purposes of man.

By the advent of the nineteenth century, Heisenberg continues, "nature appears as a lawful process in space and time, in whose description it was possible to ignore as far as axioms were concerned, even if not in practice, both man and his interference in nature."<sup>34</sup> Many critics have argued that our contemporary views of man as separate from the

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31. Merchant, p. 193.

32. Ibid., p. 277.

33. Heisenberg, p. 124.

34. Ibid., p. 125.

environment stem from these scientific foundations, for today, we have in general, become as detached from our environments as the rational, objective scientist who, in the 16th and 17th centuries separates himself from 17th century nature.

All forms of knowledge become modeled upon similar positivistic, practical, technological, and divisive values. In the area of architecture Alberto Perez-Gomez has shown that architectural theory adopted the premises of Cartesian-Newtonian science and technological framework to become based upon positivist theories.<sup>35</sup> Architecture became defined and practiced as a rational, prescriptive, and self-referential system which assumed its meaning from functional and mathematical premises. "Mathematical logic has been substituted for metaphor as a model of thought,"<sup>36</sup> as mechanism eliminated all notions of meaning from the geometry and mathematics of architectural language. For Perez-Gomez, this constituted a "functionalization of architectural theory," a reduction of architecture based upon 'logos' without 'mythos,' an approach which informs modern architecture<sup>37</sup> and its present crisis.

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35. On the scientizing of architectural theory from the 16th to 19th centuries, see Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983)

36. Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983) p. 6.

37. While 'modern' architecture has frequently been identified with the 'International Style,' I am using the term here as a set of ideas operating within architectural thinking based upon postivist science, technology, progress, and the Cartesian subject.

t h e c a r t e s i a n s u b j e c t  
a n d c a r t e s i a n d u a l i s m

As previously mentioned, central to the modern paradigm of rationality and domination is a hierarchical and dualistic view of the world. Though perhaps first advocated in the emerging fields of modern science, this view was not just a scientific concept or system, but also a philosophical and societal one, as it put forth a radically different means of describing and defining human experience. As a philosophical treatise, Descartes' *Discourse on Method* represents the emergence of a modern epistemology based upon a new personality or 'subject' radically different from the medieval man, for the Cartesian subject was defined as a purely rational being whose rationality was considered the ground of truth. Descartes first principle of philosophy, *Cogito, ergo sum*, "I think therefore I am," equated thinking with being, and put forth the notion of man identified purely as mind. The act of thinking, Descartes argued, was proof of his existence in this world. For Descartes, reason distinguished and separated man from that which he observed and from the world in which he lived. This Cartesian binary model is used as a means of justifying and advocating not only a separation, but a hierarchical separation of 'subject' and object of the world.

The subject became an internalized private individual circumscribed by new divisions between the mind as the locus of rationality and the 'natural' body. The Cartesian 'subject' was viewed as comprising two entirely distinct and independent entities; mind and body. The

Cartesian or bourgeois subject comprised an elevated soul over a private body, a hierarchical relationship in which the soul's preeminence was dependant upon 'the banishment of the body.' The mind was seen as completely independent of both the body and the outside world, while the body was viewed as merely a vehicle for the superior mind. This division, Barker suggests, censored the participant body from modern discourse in order for it to reemerge as an object of control.

The Cartesian subject declares himself capable of objective, scientific reason, which empowers him with a privileged position, with authority to designate truth, and with mastery over 'others.' Descartes' definition of man creates a hierarchical separation between objective thought and the world, an approach which was not merely a method or categorization, but an ontology or way of defining the world and human experience based upon the primacy of reason. What is now termed the Cartesian dualism categorized fields knowledge; science and technology were seen as giving rational, objective knowledge, as distinct from 'subjective' ethical and philosophical considerations; thought was divided into rational and subjective spheres. As this new mechanical universe was seen as only properly explained by mathematical and rational knowledge, all non-rational, non-Cartesian approaches to knowledge came to be seen as invalid. Philosophy and ethics, therefore, soon enough emulated the 'rational approach,' as did architecture, for example, with Alberti's proposal to separate architectural theory (logos) and practice.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>. Ibid., p. 9.

Cartesian thinkers felt it necessary to reject all traditional, contemplative and subjective knowledge and start fresh from rational, objective thinking, for rational, objective knowledge was defined as inherently superior to emotional or subjective thought.

This rational and oppositional science categorized not only the spheres of knowledge, but influenced the 17th century man to transform his world according to binary categories and separations. A new set of boundaries and hierarchies was drawn in the lives of Cartesian subjects. Francis Barker's *The Tremulous Private Body* charts the emergence of binary thinking as a dominant organizational structure for modern relations between the subject, himself, and society. The increasing mechanistic and divisive approach formed, as Barker describes, "a new set of relations between state and citizen, body and soul, language and meaning."<sup>39</sup>

Barker argues that the binary relations of bourgeois society were essentially power relations in which domination and resistance become the inner substance of social life.<sup>40</sup> This domination was achieved not by outside intervention or violence but by an ideology which assumes the subject as a private, internalized locus of judgement and truth, a 'centered' subject whose foundation was the presence of reason. As the sole possessor of rationality, Descartes believed that reason would grant unlimited capabilities to acquire knowledge and "unlock the secrets of the universe."

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<sup>39</sup>. Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays in Subjection*, (London and New York: Methuen, 1984) p. 10.

<sup>40</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

This reasoned knowledge could be used to render man, in Descartes' words, 'the lords and possessors of nature,' in order to increase 'the material power of man.'

Barker suggests that the essence or site of this power and control lies as much in the line of division and segregation created by the binary model "as in the substantive contents of what lies to either side of it."<sup>41</sup> This line of division or separation is crucial to the modern paradigm and its contemporary crisis. Postmodernists argue that this binary perspective has become a closed restrictive system that continues to order all aspects of modern existence. As Hélène Cixous in *Sorties* has said, it is "always the same metaphor: we follow it, it transports us, in all its forms, wherever a discourse is organized."<sup>42</sup> This position denies the validity of 'other' minority perspectives, as the 'other' is relegated to a marginal realm of consideration. It has become the dominant form of representing difference and organizing knowledge in Western society. In reaction to this closure, they suggest a questioning of the subject/object dichotomy as a means of exploring and opening of this modern system. As Craig Owens writes: "the critique of binarism is...an intellectual imperative, since the hierarchical opposition of marked and unmarked terms...is the dominant form both of representing difference and justifying its subordination in our society."<sup>43</sup>

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41. Ibid., p.48

42. Cixous, p. 90.

43. Owens, p. 62.

## t e c h n o l o g y   a s   o n t o l o g y

In the realm of contemporary science, Werner Heisenberg has argued that scientific assumptions, particularly the dualistic view of the world and its terms of technology and progress, are concealed to such an extent that society often only sees their consequences; consequences which we see as out of our control, but are actually structures which we have created. Says Heisenberg:

... individual technical process is bound to the common goal [of enlarging the material power of man] in such an indirect way that one can hardly view it as part of a conscious plan for the accomplishment of this goal. Technology almost ceases to appear at such times as the product of conscious human effort for the spreading of material power. Instead it appears as a biological process on a large scale, in which the structures that are part of the human organism are transferred in ever larger measure to mans environment. Such a biological process would be outside mans control, for man can indeed do what he wills, but he cannot will what he wills.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, technology has become the central ontology, or theory of reality for Western society. It has permeated all aspects of our culture, including architecture, as Enlightenment ideals of limitless technological growth and social, moral, and material progress of mankind through technology were ultimately taken up as a driving force for 'modern' 20th century architecture. The modernist view of architecture holds that architecture is a culmination of a line of evolutionary development of the art of building. In attempting to utilize new constructional methods, address the ravages of World War I on the city, and capture the sentiments

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<sup>44</sup>. Heisenberg, p. 129.

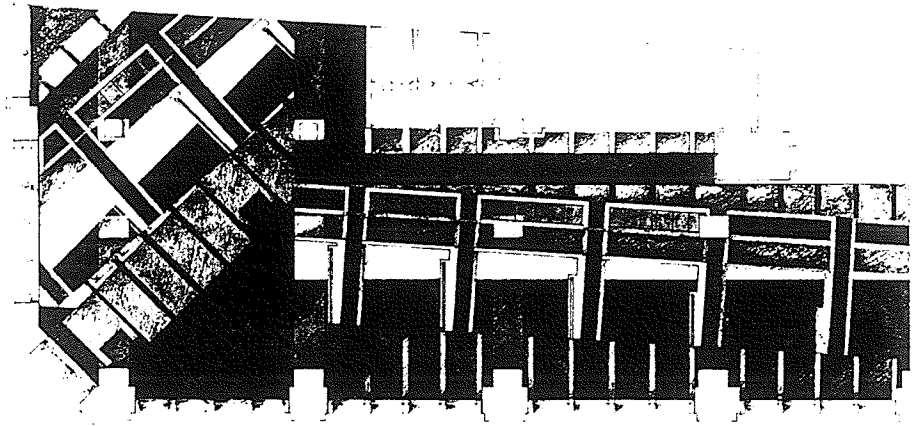
of its time, modern architects optimistically and utopically took up technological and economic values as primary values for buildings. For proponents for the 'modern movement,' believed architecture and technology could bring about social progress, a utopian vision of social betterment through technological forms and functional architecture.

Many postmodern critics have argued that this modern vision has failed. Its primary emphasis on functional, technological, and universal approaches often negated other equally as important factors, such as symbolic, historical, cultural, and regional differences. Instead, it has contributed to sterile, homogeneous, and 'meaningless' buildings and cities. Paradoxically, the modernism has been immensely successful, as it has become the dominant ideology for building in the Western world, transforming our environments into technological visions.

**POSTMODERN CRITIQUES**

*P o s t m o d e r n C r i t i q u e s*

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Peter Eisenman, *Tom's Loft*, New York, 1988.

*Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy.*

Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.

*What we need is to determine otherwise, according to a differential system, the effects of ideality, of signification, of meaning and of reference.*

Jacques Derrida , "Positions"

*s i g n i f i c a t i o n   a n d   t h e  
m e t a p h y s i c s   o f   p r e s e n c e*

Postmodernism is not identified by specific forms or styles, but by cultural investigations and critical attitudes which constitute a diverse and often contradictory movement. One means of discussing, or examining it is through its relation to representation and to a set 'logical operations' (binary and hierarchical) fundamental to the concept of modernity. A central area in which this has meant a renewed interest has been the "investigation of the social and ideological production of meaning"<sup>1</sup> and signification. The impetus for a large segment of postmodern activity has been a desire to change the conceptual framework that determines our artifacts, and in this way, a changed notion of the artifact.

Underlying this problematizing of signification is the post-structuralist position that language, as a system of signs, determines culture. "From this perspective," Linda Hutcheon writes, "what we call 'culture' is seen as the *effect* of representation, not their source."<sup>2</sup> This understanding of signification has compelled a questioning of representational systems, and a critical examination of "the way meaning is manifest today."<sup>3</sup>

Postmodern criticism of logocentric thinking points to a problem of a Western preoccupation with ultimate, unitary truths, or the 'metaphysics

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1. Hutcheon, *Politics*, p.7.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Peter Eisenman, "Blue Line Text," *Contemporary Architecture*, (AD Profile 74, Vol. 58 7/8-1988): 9.

of presence.' They argue that logocentric thinking assumes a correlation between signification and reality, a view of the sign as accessible to truth and meaning. This claim to some singular form of truth or realism effects a closure of signification. Some postmodernists argue that language, visual representations and architectural forms are not one-to-one correspondences between signified and signifier, between meaning and its representation. Rather, representation is seen as a metaphorical or figural system of signification which can only approximate reality. This bias also operates hierarchically, as it suppresses those concepts with less claim to rational grounds of truth. This preoccupation governs the order and authority of oppositional pairs. In literary terms, those terms thought to be near to some ultimate or transcendental truth value suppress those terms with less claim to ultimate meaning. For example, Derrida has shown this model operating within the pair speech/writing, speech claims authority as the authentic and natural form of communication which assures that the intentions of the speaker are understood. Writing, because it is committed to paper, loses that authenticity and is subject to interpretation or misinterpretations by others.

This pretext is typical of modern representations (architectural or otherwise) which characteristically attempt to signify or account for some sort of totality, universality, or reality. In architectural terms, as Peter Eisenman describes, "the apparent truth of architecture is in its claims for univocality of the representation of the architectural object, that is, the object which has an immediate aesthetics and a function that it represents in its presence. The idea of presence and the representation of presence

represses all other interpretations, represses textuality."<sup>4</sup> For example, traditional notions of the built environment assume that architecture conveys some fundamental essence of shelter and landscape some replica of nature. According to postmodernists, these concepts of 'architecture as reality' suppress an understanding of architecture as an idea or metaphysic.

In aesthetic fields this logocentric bias has also meant an assumed correspondence between modern representations and some essence or reality, whether in painting, sculpture, or photography. Because modern aesthetic works claim to mirror reality, they are seen as "truthful" or as a depiction of reality. Frederic Jameson describes the modern theory of representation as "an essentially realistic epistemology, which...projects a mirror theory of knowledge and art, whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself."<sup>5</sup> This view of representation is accepted Western culture to such an extent that it is seen as a natural means of communication and representation. American art critic Craig Owens writes that:

According to Heidegger, the transition to modernity was not accomplished by the replacement of a medieval by a modern world picture, 'but rather the fact the the world becomes a picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age.' For modern man, everything that exists does so only through representation. To claim this is also to claim that the world exists only in and through a *subject* who believes that he is producing the world in producing its representation.<sup>6</sup>

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4. Eisenman, "The Authenticity of Difference: Architecture and the Crisis of Reality," Buildings and Reality: Architecture in the Age of Information, (Centre, Vol. 4, 1988): 73.

5. Frederic Jameson, "Foreword," The Postmodern Condition p. viii .

6. Owens, p. 66

Postmodernists conclude that the modern signifying subject (whether author, architect, or artist) believes that he is re-presenting reality, not creating or constructing it.

This view of art can be described as "mimesis", or representation which claims the authority of accurately reproducing an original. Jonathan Culler, characterizes mimesis "as that which involves hierarchical oppositions between objects and representation and between original and imitation."<sup>7</sup> This hierarchy involves a view of the model or origin of a representation as somehow superior to its resemblance or copy. This system has become problematic for Western thinking, as modern representation has difficulty in separating the representation from its objects. Postmodernists argue that rather than accepting representation as coinciding with reality, a distinction must be made between the representation and its referent.

This critique of modernity's realistic epistemology based upon an either/or dichotomy expresses itself not only in the aesthetic realms, but in all fields. Physicist Werner Heisenberg suggests that these new points of departure for contemporary art may stem from changes in our foundational understanding of our relation toward nature brought about by quantum physics, for atomic science can no longer describe nature from an objective point of view of what is or as what exists, but only about its interpretations and "our relation to nature within it..

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7. Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982) p. 185.

When we speak of a picture of nature provided by contemporary exact science, we do not mean any longer a picture of nature, but rather a picture of our relation to nature. The old compartmentalization of the world into an objective process ... that is, the Cartesian differentiation of *res cognitans* and *res extensia* - is no longer suitable as the starting point for the understanding of modern science.<sup>8</sup>

While in quantum physics, this changed view of nature also demands that the "*relationships of the frames of reference* be included in the object studied,"<sup>9</sup> it has also meant an evaluation of the object and its relations in all fields. An interdisciplinary reevaluation or 'epistemological slide,' as Roland Barthes puts it, has meant a transformation from the modernist 'work' to the postmodernist 'text'. As Hal Foster defines these terms, the 'work' suggests "an aesthetic, symbolic whole sealed by an origin (i.e., the author) and an end (i.e., a represented reality or transcendent meaning); and 'text' to suggest an a-aesthetic, 'multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.'"<sup>10</sup>

While this involves a changed understanding of signification and its transmittal, from the static, closed meanings of realism to, in the text, a relativism, and multiplicity of processes, it also is a condition of "the relativism of the relations of writer, reader and observer"<sup>11</sup> and a challenge to the notion authorship, authority, and originality.

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8. Heisenberg, p. 134.

9. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," *Image/Music/Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) p. 156.

10. Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985) p. 129.

11. Barthes, *Ibid.*

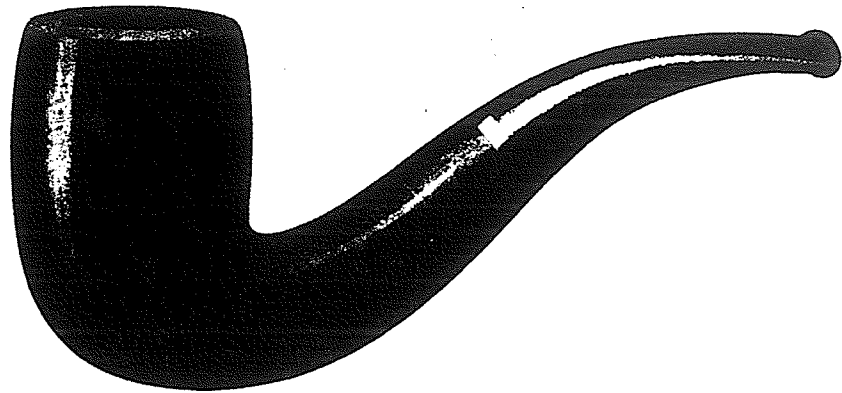
The transition from work to text has been identified by Barthes in terms of the relationship is signification and authorship, I will concentrate in this thesis upon three aspects which I believe are relevant in architectural terms. This includes both signification and authorship, but also points to a somewhat different view of the artifact in relationship to other culturally produced objects. This involves the dissolution of genres or disciplinary boundaries, but also, I believe, for an architectural 'text' , this might also involve the acknowledgement that the architectural object is never outside it's relations to the rest of the built fabric, it does not exists in cultural isolation, either from ideology and politics or it's immediate environment. As a 'text' a building or landscape can be read as cultural artifacts whose meaning is created through various interpretations, not as a given.<sup>12</sup>

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12. Andrea Kahn, "Shifting Geographies," Design Book Review 17, (Winter 1989): 48

*Postmodernism involves an assault on meaning or, more precisely, a rejection of well-defined signified that guarantees the authenticity of the work of art.*

Bernard Tschumi, *Parc de la Villette, Paris.*

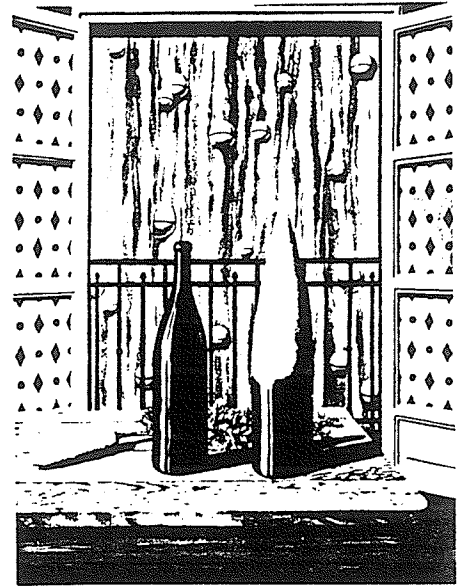
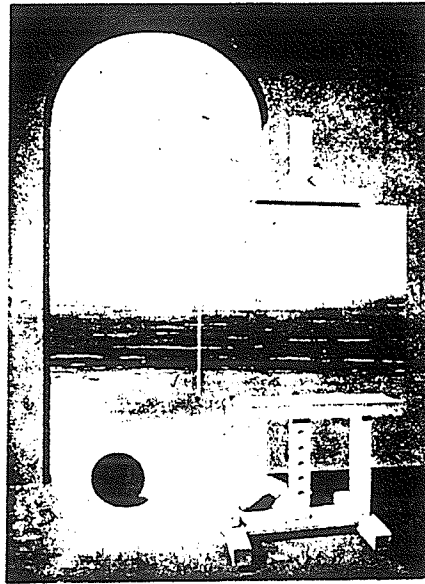


*Ceci n'est pas une pipe.*

Figure 3: "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," (1926), by Rene Magritte. From *This is Not a Pipe*

Certain postmodernists conclude that mimesis and presence are not the only means of conceiving representation and have explored numerous avenues for undermining binary thinking and the closure of signification. One non-hierarchical means of conceiving representation is described by French historian/theorist/critic Michel Foucault as *similtude*, which in the following passage he contrasts which *resemblance*, or modern representation's desire to convey reality.

Resemblance presumes a primary reference that prescribes and classes. The similar develops in series that have neither beginning nor end, that can be followed in one direction as easily as in another, that obey no hierarchy, but propagate themselves from small differences among small differences. Resemblance serves representation, which rules over it; similtude serves repetition, which ranges across it. Resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similtude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation to the similar. <sup>13</sup>



Figures 4&5: "La Condition humaine," (1935) by Rene Magritte and "L'Explication," (1952) by Rene Magritte. From *This is Not a Pipe*

Traditionally, resemblance assumes a hierarchical relationship to the representation, whereas similtude upsets those hierarchies. Foucault cites the works of Belgian surrealist painter Rene Magritte to illustrate the disruptive operations of similtude on both language and mimetic images. Magritte contends that representation does not resemble reality, only thought resembles reality "by being what it sees, hears, or knows; it

13. Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe* ed. James Harkness (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983) p.44.

becomes what the world offers it." <sup>14</sup> The assumption that representation conveys a model or essence is disrupted by Magritte's works as they disturb our assumed one-to-one identification between images and some original. The images in *La Condition Humaine*, (1935) (Figure 4), and *L'Explication* (1952) (Figure 5), do not resemble anything which we would assume to be a model or an original, they undermine representation's assertion of reality. In addition to disturbing mirror images of reality, Magritte's works frequently traverse the traditional boundaries of image and text. *This is not a Pipe* (1926) (Figure 3 ) has been described by some as "a visual critique of language,"<sup>15</sup> as it plays images and text to dissolve the implicit structures which assume a correlation between text and image.

#### D e c o n s t r u c t i o n

*...deconstruction says something about the impossibility of there being a universal translation. This also means that the construction of architecture will always remain labyrinthine. The issue is not to give up one point of view for the sake of another, which would be the only one and absolute, but to see a diversity of possible points of view.*

Jacques Derrida, *Architettura ove il desiderio puo abitare.*

While Magritte's work may be considered as an early precursor to postmodernist challenges, a central and more contemporary postmodernist strategy for dealing with modernity's oppositional and authoritarian stance has been the practice of deconstruction. One of deconstruction's foremost strategists has been French philosopher/literary critic Jacques Derrida.

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14. Rene Magritte, "Letter to Michel Foucault," *This is Not a Pipe*, p. 57

15. James Harkness, "Introduction," *This is Not a Pipe*.

As a strategy, deconstruction aims to dissolve the violence and closure of oppositions upon which logocentric reason depends. Derrida deconstructs the binary system from within, through a strategy and process of 'double writing' or 'double gesture.'<sup>16</sup> Derrida's 'double writing,' is situated "against the authority of meaning, as the *transcendental signified* or as *telos*,"<sup>17</sup> to show the inherent contradictions in their imaginary resolutions to truth or reality. The first stage of this strategy traces and interrogates the institutionalization and operation of hierarchical pairings, such as speech/writing and philosophy/criticism to reveal its hierarchical order and show how they are "manifest at every level of the text."<sup>18</sup> For most postmodernists, this is a necessary exposure of a "violent hierarchy" which underlies all fields of knowledge, as it restricts the possibilities of thinking outside of a 'logocentric' bias. As Derrida explains:

For some time, something like a de-constructive procedure has been establishing itself, an attempt to free oneself from the oppositions imposed by the history of philosophy, such as 'physis/techne, God/man, philosophy/architecture. Deconstruction therefore analyses and questions conceptual pairs which are currently accepted as self-evident and natural, as if they hadn't been institutionalized at some precise point, as if they had no history. Because of being taken for granted, they restrict thinking.<sup>19</sup>

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16. 'Writing' for Derrida, explains Christopher Norris, "is the 'free play' or element of undecideability within every system of communication that includes signs, symbols and language. Writing is the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it for ever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge." In Deconstruction: Theory and Practice, (London and New York: Methuen & Co.) p. 29.

17. Derrida, p. 49.

18. Christopher Norris, "Deconstruction, Post-Modernism and the Visual Arts," What is Deconstruction? (London: Academy Editions, 1988) p. 9.

19. Jacques Derrida, "Architettura ove il desiderio puo abitare," Domus 24, (April, 1986): 2.

These hierarchical orders are 'overturned,' revealing 'conflictual and subordinating structures,' operating within these systems in which one of two terms subverts the other or 'has the upper hand' This is also to show that the subordinated term can operate in its opposite place. However, to 'overturn' is not simply the reversal of the order of pairs, which would reintroduce another binary order and leave the "the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition"<sup>20</sup> intact.

Rather than moving immediately beyond oppositions, Derrida's stage of overturning intervenes in the oppositions, to make a space of 'interval' within. Derrida describes the second stage as the suspension or intervention of the possibility of opposition which refuses the unitary authority of signification which claims truth and meaning. Instead, language is opened to a 'free play' or figural aspect of meaning, interrupting the grounds of 'logocentric authority.'

Refusing the imaginary reconciliations of Hegelian dialectics, which assume a resolution to binary tensions and conflicts, Derrida opens signifiers to 'undecidability.' The text is opened to a 'free play' of meaning by the use of 'marks' - terms irreducible to singular meanings and either/or categories. Marks subvert one-to-one relationships between the signified and the signifier to fracture closed or singular meanings. For Derrida, 'marks' or word/concepts such as '*differance*', '*pharmakon*', and '*supplement*' "play neither the role of a 'concept' nor simply of a 'word'".<sup>21</sup> There are no claims to a singular meanings with such terms, multiple

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20. Derrida, "Positions," p.41.

21. Ibid., p. 40.

meanings are inherent in these terms, a multiplicity that is both "conflictual and productive." For example, '*differance*,' - distinguished by the presence of the letter 'a'- signifies both the French terms 'to differ' and 'to defer'. As philosopher and leading writer on Derrida Christopher Norris explains it, '*differance*' signifies "in brief - the fact that meaning can never be accounted for in terms of punctual 'self-presence'; that language is not only (as Saussure argued) a *differential* structure of contrasts and relationships 'without positive terms'; but also that meaning is endlessly *deferred* along the chain of linguistic substitutions and displacements that occur whenever we seek to define what a given term signifies in context."<sup>22</sup> Such use of multiple meanings associated with the rubric of a singular sign denies the logocentric, unitary meanings. This challenge of the system - of working within it, which refusing to practice that which it criticizes, is central to the strategy of deconstruction.

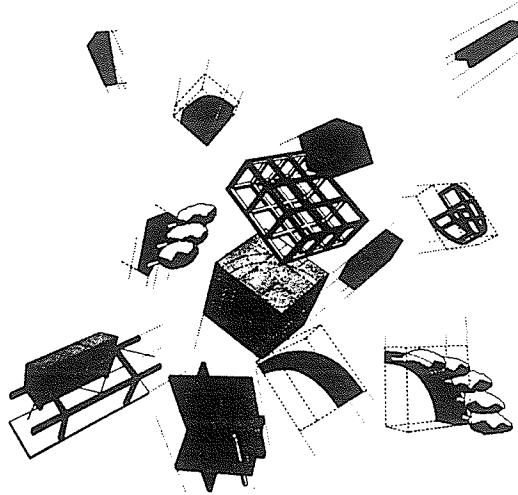
"Deconstructions would be feeble if they were negative," Derrida suggests, "if they did not construct, and above all if they did not first measure themselves against institutions in the solidarity, *at the place of their greatest resistance*:"<sup>23</sup> The points of 'greatest resistance' and their various manifestations may differ somewhat from field to field, such as in architecture, where the issues have come to rest not only upon signification, but also the universal ideals which it attempts to ultimately convey. These also rest upon issues of functionalism, or utilitarianism, autonomy, and oppositions within the field of architecture.

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22. Norris, p. 12.

23. Derrida, "Point de Folie-Maintenant Architecture," AA Files 12 (Summer, 1986): 65.

*A r c h i t e c t u r a l*  
*D e c o n s t r u c t i o n*



*Bernard Tschumi*

This same kind of challenge to architectural signification has been undertaken by a number of architects. Logocentric thinking has come under similar scrutiny by architect Bernard Tschumi, who argues that this bias assumes a 'transparency of form to meaning', that is, meaning is assumed to be inherent in architectural structure and form, and directs its signifying capacity.<sup>24</sup> This claim to transparency directs architectural practice toward unified, coherent, hierarchical forms and autonomous systems. As a binary ideology, Tschumi adds, this bias also traditionally posits a cause and effect relationship between programme and architecture, but also structures the same relationship between pairs such as function and form, economics and structure, programme and form. That is, within the modern

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24. Tschumi, p. 38-39.

system, programme and/or function have been primary determinants of architectural and landscape forms.

This 'metaphysics of presence' may be particularly problematic for the field of architecture, for as Peter Eisenman has remarked, "architecture in the public consciousness, is the structure of reality, presence and objecthood;"<sup>25</sup> it constitutes "the objectification of the metaphysics of presence"<sup>26</sup> From this perspective, architecture, both as idea and as form may be the most difficult, and/or paradoxical system to deconstruct or dislocate for those designers desiring to do so.

Perhaps one of the most notable and closely related architectural works to Derrida's strategy of deconstruction, is Bernard Tschumi's *Parc de la Villette* in Paris, the first place competition entry for a thirty-five hectare 'park for the 21st century.' (Figure6) Through this project, Tschumi demonstrates how a deconstruction of architectural assumptions and categories can be undertaken. Tschumi deconstructs or displaces the modern system as it is manifest in architecture through its own oppositions and structures. Similar in intention to the deconstructive strategies of Derrida, Tschumi intends to reverse "classical opposition and a general displacement of the system." In the case of La Villette, one of the 'points of greatest resistance' is the ideology implied by its extensive and comprehensive programme (Figure7 ) which assumes that its forms (hence its signifying capacity) will be derived from its functional requirements and organizing

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25. Eisenman, "Blue Line Text," p. 7.

26. Eisenman, "Authenticity of Difference," p. 50.

systems which synthesize or totalize these considerations into autonomous, hierarchical, and unified works.

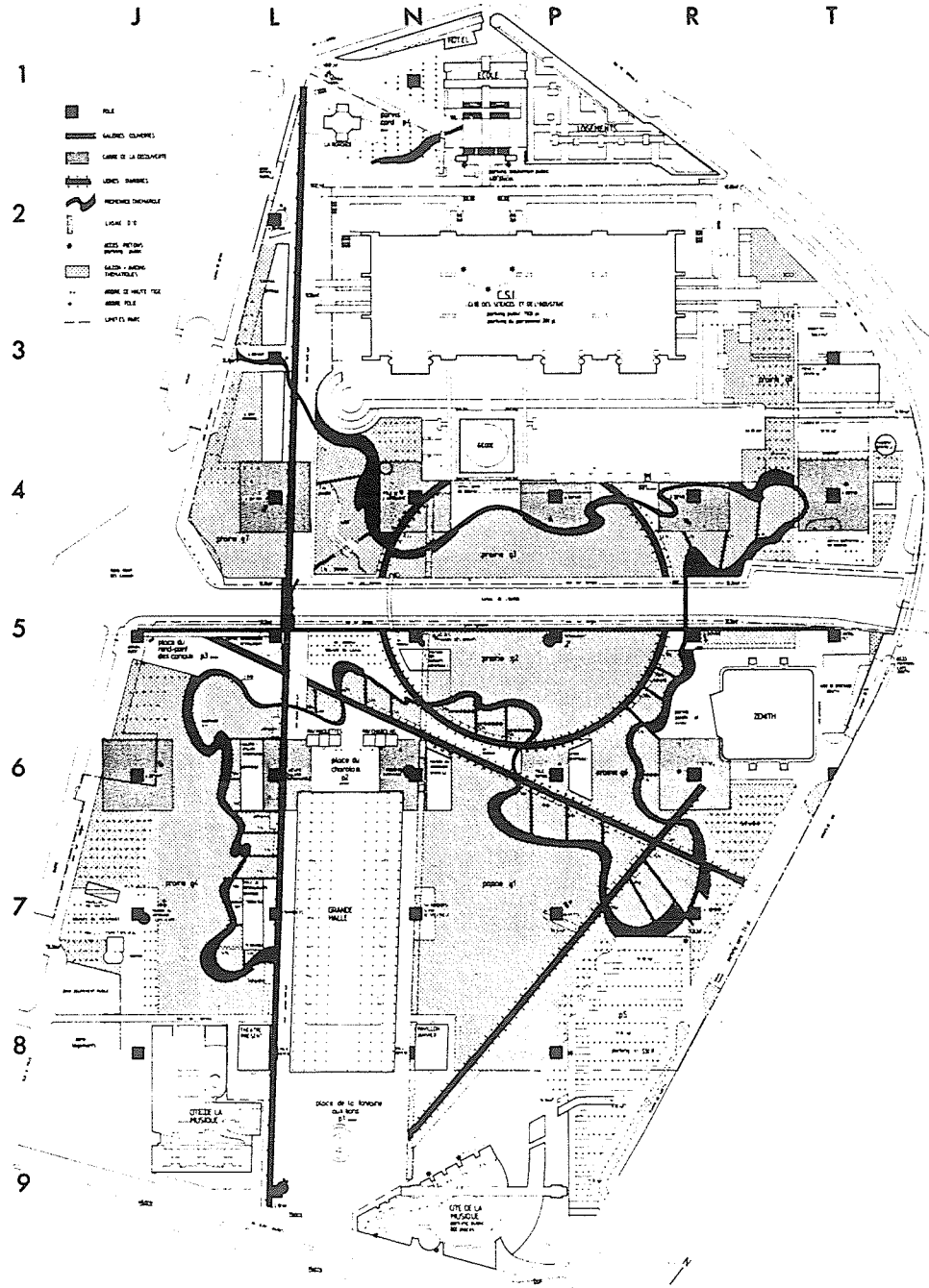


Figure 6: Plan of *La Villette*, Paris, by Bernard Tschumi. From *Cinnegramme Folie*

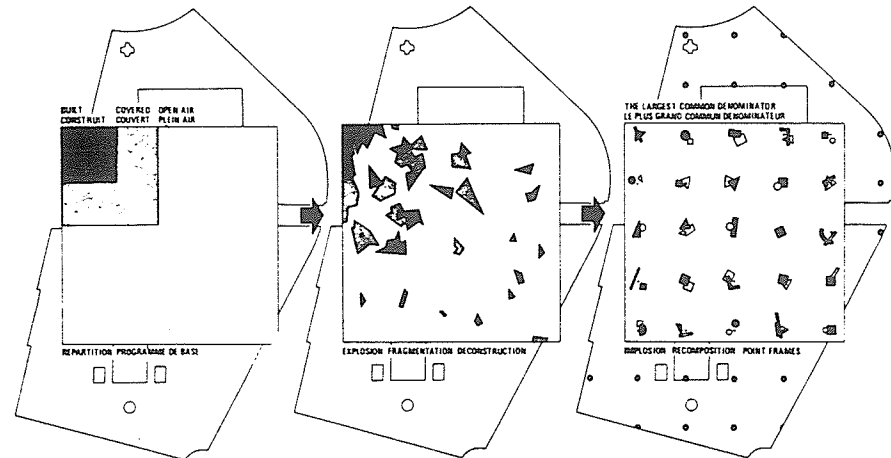


Figure 7: Exploding of Programmatic Requirements throughout the site.  
From *Cinnegramme Folie*

For Tschumi, "there is no 'absolute' truth to the architectural project," for whatever 'meaning' architectural form may have "is a function of interpretation: it is not resident in the object; or in the object's materials."<sup>27</sup> According to Tschumi, La Villette 'aims at an architecture that *means nothing*, an architecture of the signifier rather than the signified.' This is, an architecture concerned with form, object, and material rather than 'presence.' In *La Villette*, Tschumi defers the idea of fixed meaning and presence through the use of 'empty forms,' - the *folies* (the French term for madness), intended to inscribe not some functional or programmatic signification, but a multiplicity of meanings derived from the individual interpretation of each observer.

Not only is the notion of meaning inherent in structure and form challenged, but so are the meanings we traditionally associate with

27. Tschumi, p. 39.

architectural terms. The notion of 'park' put forth by La Villette, defies traditional categorizations and typologies. As Tschumi writes,

... today the term 'park' (like 'architecture,' 'science,' or 'literature') has lost its universal meaning; it no longer refers to a fixed absolute, nor an ideal. Not the *hortus conclusus* and not the replica of Nature, La Villette is a term in constant production, in continuous change; its meaning is never fixed but is always deferred, differed, rendered irresolute by the multiplicity of meanings it inscribes.<sup>28</sup>

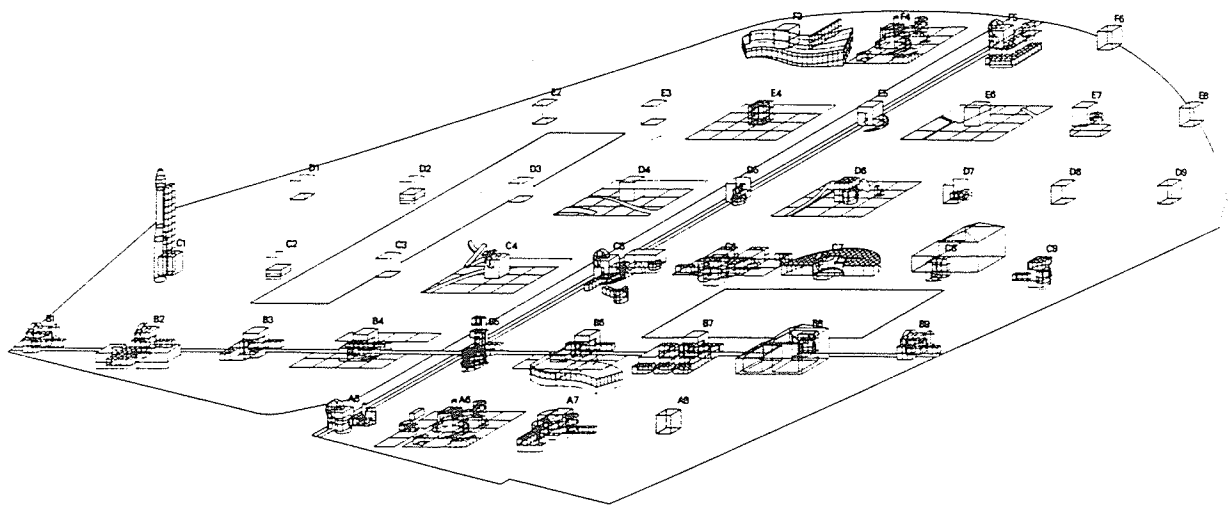


Figure 8: *La Villette*: Distribution of folies throughout the site. From *Cinnegramme Folie*

The folies or 'system of points,' impresses itself as a grid of cubes over the site. (Figure 8) With these folies, the primacy is not given over to their programmatic functional uses, they are accommodated but are signified by architectural form, as their intent is not to signify anything. Some of Tschumi's folies have no programmatic function at all, but act as a

28. Ibid.

sentinel, or empty form. As a system of points, the folies are envisioned as anchors for the park, a means of maintaining a partial coherence for the site. Yet these folies deviate from norms and coherence, as these forms are decomposed into fragments in which the cage, or norm is still discernable, or extended out past the limits of the cube, according to the requirements of the programme.

While the signifying capacity of architectural form is important to architectural deconstruction, so to is the autonomy of architectural order and unity. To disrupt these architectural assumptions and oppositions, Tschumi utilizes the strategies of superimposition and disjunction. These strategies imply "constant, mechanical operations that systematically produce dissociation (differance) in space and time"<sup>29</sup>; "an approach "incompatible with a static, autonomous, structural view of architecture."<sup>30</sup> The superimposition of autonomous ordering systems, also refutes the architectural presence of order and composition for La Villette "aims at disrupting the smooth coherence and reassuring stability of composition, promoting instability and programmatic 'madness.'"<sup>31</sup> The ordering concept of superimposition rejects the idea of synthesis and coherence, as the three different and autonomous ordering systems - points, lines and surfaces, (Figure 9 ), negate any totalizing or hierarchical tendencies, they become mutually disruptive and maintain their differences. As Tschumi writes, this multiple imposition and resulting contiguity "refuses the ascendancy of any privileged system or organizing element."<sup>32</sup>

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29. Ibid., p. 35.

30. Ibid.

31. Tschumi, Cinnegramme Folie: Le Parc de la Villette (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. vi.

32. Ibid.

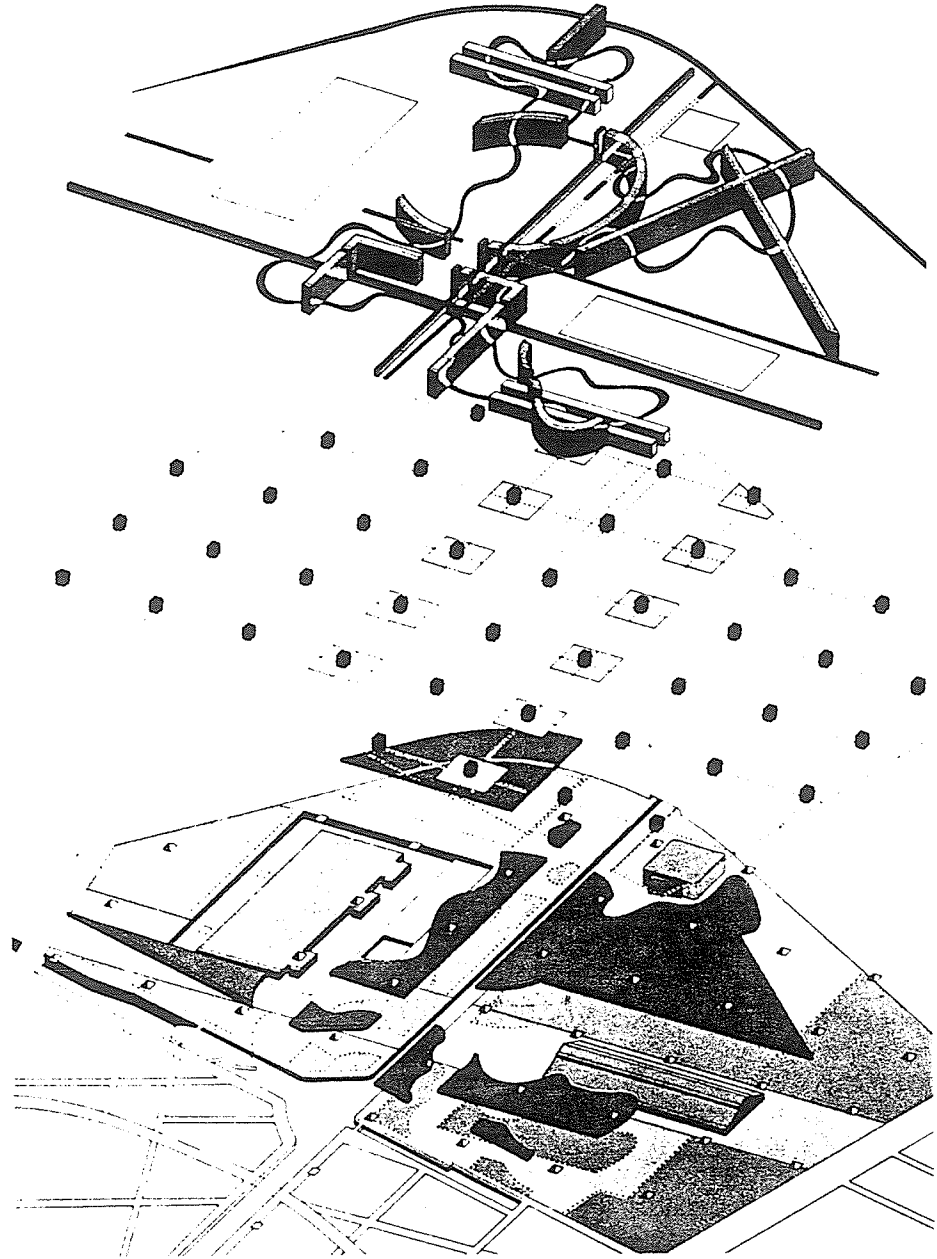


Figure 9: *La Villette*, Superimposition of lines, points and surfaces. From *Cinnegramme Folie*.

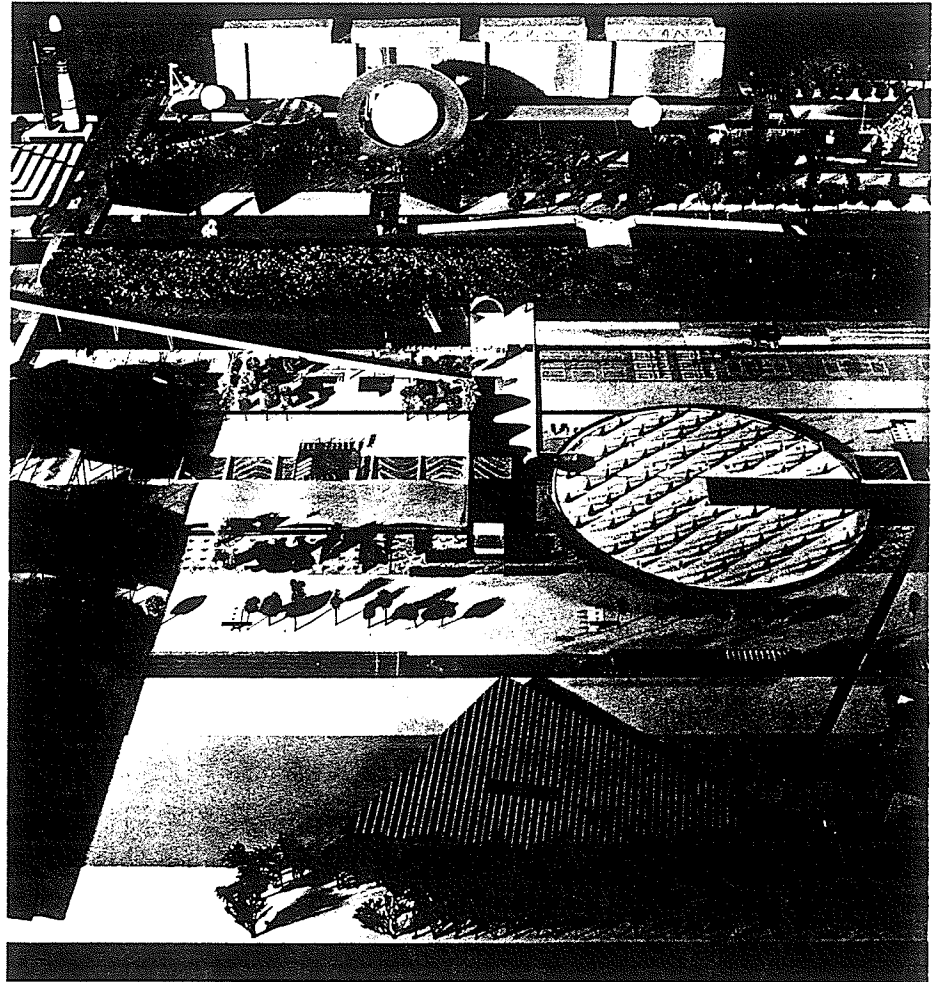


Figure 10: Model. *Parc de la Villette* Entry, 1983-84, by OMA. From *What is Deconstruction?*

Tschumi has not been the only architect who has recently attempted to disrupt autonomous organizational systems, as OMA's (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) entry for *Parc de la Villette* in 1983-84, (Figure 10) also 'deconstructed' the programme into functional strips, which one would experience as a juxtaposition of varying uses as one traversed the strips, rather than neat, coherent unification of functions. Elia Zenghelis' *Parc Citroën-Cévennes* (1985) competition entry superimposed various types of connectors for the park and surrounding areas (Figure 11).

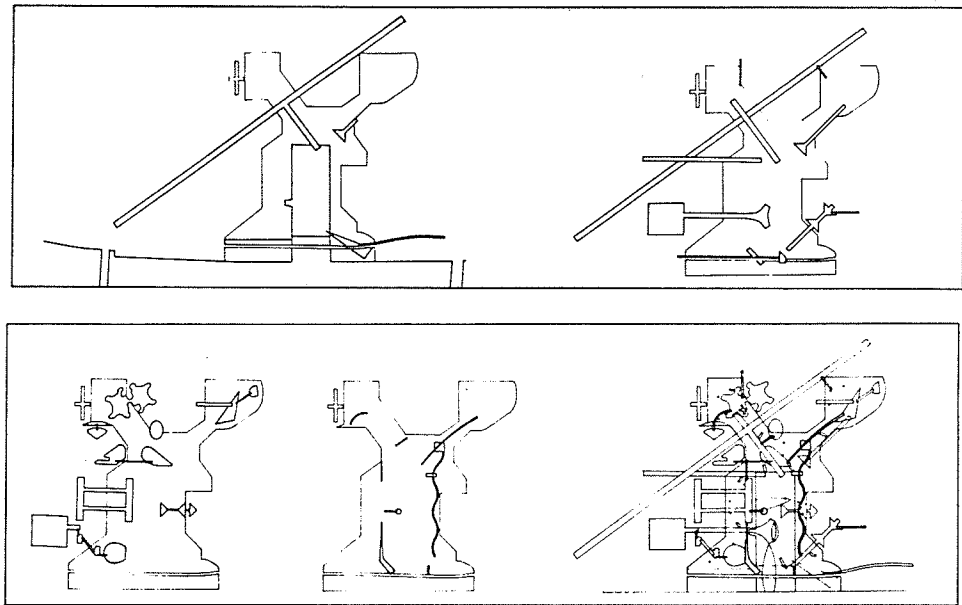


Figure 11: *Parc Citrôen-Cévennes*, Paris: diagrams showing layering of connections: metropolitan, quartier, neighbourhood, internal, synthesis. From *Contemporary Architecture*. AD Profile 74 1988.

While one of the central intentions of deconstruction is to dismantle authoritarian oppositional systems and examine and questions the assumptions inherent in these systems, numerous disagreements have arisen between postmodernists as to the degree to which cultural structures should be dismantled. Some postmodernists have criticized deconstruction as a negative dismantling of systems, in which the dismantling leaves nothing behind. This type of negativity does not necessarily free us from modernity, as Jurgen Habermas argues, for "nothing remains from desublimated meanings, a destructured form; an emancipatory effects does not follow."<sup>33</sup> Charles Jencks expresses a similar sentiment, as he sees these works as essentially nihilistic because their deconstruction dismantles meaning, leaving 'nothingness' or no meaning at all. For Jencks the works of

33. Jurgen Habermas, cited by Hal Foster in "Postmodernism: A Preface," The Anti-Aesthetic p. x.

deconstruction constitute a positive nihilism, as those practitioners appear to derive pleasure from their discovery of emptiness beneath the deconstruction.

As I understand it, the intent of deconstruction is not only necessarily to dismantle or discover the point of absence, but also to engage in a constructive process. Both Derrida and Tschumi have countered that deconstruction is a positively displacing, deconstruction, undertaken in order to reconstruct non-authoritative and non-oppositional terms, to disrupt the restrictiveness of modernity's closed system. For example, Derrida writes that with the folies of *La Villette*, they "affirm,...maintain, renew and reinscribe architecture. They revive, perhaps, an energy which was infinitely anaesthetised."<sup>34</sup>

Does *La Villette* create a space/interval for something new? As a challenge to the modernist framework, this approach has perhaps been one of the most lucid and disruptive to date, opening some of the central issues involved with the problematics of modernism. Deconstructive works such as *La Villette* have sparked an intense interest in renewing architectural debate and criticism, an area long unquestioned or neglected. In this way, these works have created new directions for architecture. Whether this will be sustained or short-lived in the field of architecture remains to be seen.

I also agree to some extent with Jencks comments on the nihilistic sensibility and empty man syndrome of deconstruction. One of my initial

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34. Derrida, "Point de Folie," p. 65.

readings interpreted Tschumi's folies as dynamic architectural compositions, empty of any meaning or interpretation. A perhaps more informed reading views these forms through, and as reflective of, the theories of deconstruction. Tschumi's folies inevitably convey some meaning, even if it is that of a teleology of nihilism, one that is nihilistically deconstructive, or that of the meanings associated with deconstructive theory.

One of the problems or criticisms of Tschumi's work has been its limited accessibility. Do we not always attempt to create some sort of framework or provisional explanations? These sort of issues lead to questions of communication. Does communication not require some common grounds or means for conveying intent? These common grounds need not necessarily be seen as universal, on the other hand, perhaps neither are they infinite. The works of SITE, on the other hand, attempt to gain accessibility at a number of levels in their work.

Addressing the issues of architectural functionalism and meaning from a somewhat different viewpoint, SITE (originally an acronym for Sculpture in the Environment) has also attempted to build alternatives to modernist abstraction and fixity of architectural meaning. SITE takes a position against early 20th century modernism which envisioned a "universal formal language that would transcend all class distinctions and accommodate all social change."<sup>35</sup> SITE claims that modernism's universal language has become so abstract as to be uncommunicable to the public.

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35. James Wines, De-architecture, (New York: Rizzoli, 1987) p. 29.

Whereas Tschumi and other poststructuralists are primarily concerned with dissolving architectural meaning, the alternative that SITE proposes is that of a provisional meaning and a mutable architecture, one in which its "language is more psychological than formal, more cosmic than rational, more informational than obscure, more provisional than stable, more indeterminate than resolved, more narrative than abstract."<sup>36</sup> This view of architecture is described by James Wines of SITE as "narrative architecture," architecture which deals foremost with its narrative content in order to communicate to the public. Architecture, Wines maintains, is the "perfect vehicle for conveying messages about society's values and motivations" because it is an intrinsic part of people's lives. The 'narrative experiences' created by the works of SITE "are the product of using and inverting conventional architectural typologies"<sup>37</sup> such as the relationship of architecture with context, culture, or nature. Works such as *Best Indeterminate Facade Showroom*, (Houston, 1975) (Figure 12), challenges the notion of what constitutes a finished building, what is the stage of completion. *Best Forest Building* (Richmond, Virginia, 1980) (Figure 13) plays a reversal of dominance of building over nature. Nature appears as if it is reclaiming the building. Exploring another binary theme, their *Perpetual Savings and Loan Association Bank* (1980) (Figure 14) plays with the pair of inside/outside. These approaches integrate architectural messages directly into architectural form, not as a decoration, but as driving force behind it's form and development.

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36. Ibid., p. 165.

37. Ibid.

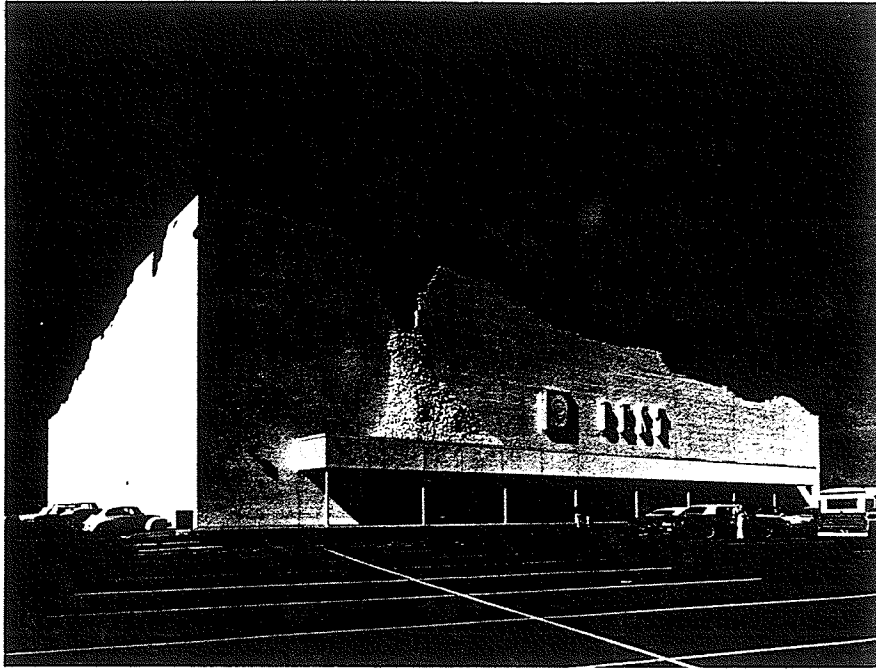


Figure 12: *Best Indeterminate Facade Showroom* (1975) by SITE. From *SITE*.



Figure 13: *Best Forest Building*, (1980) by SITE. From *SITE*.

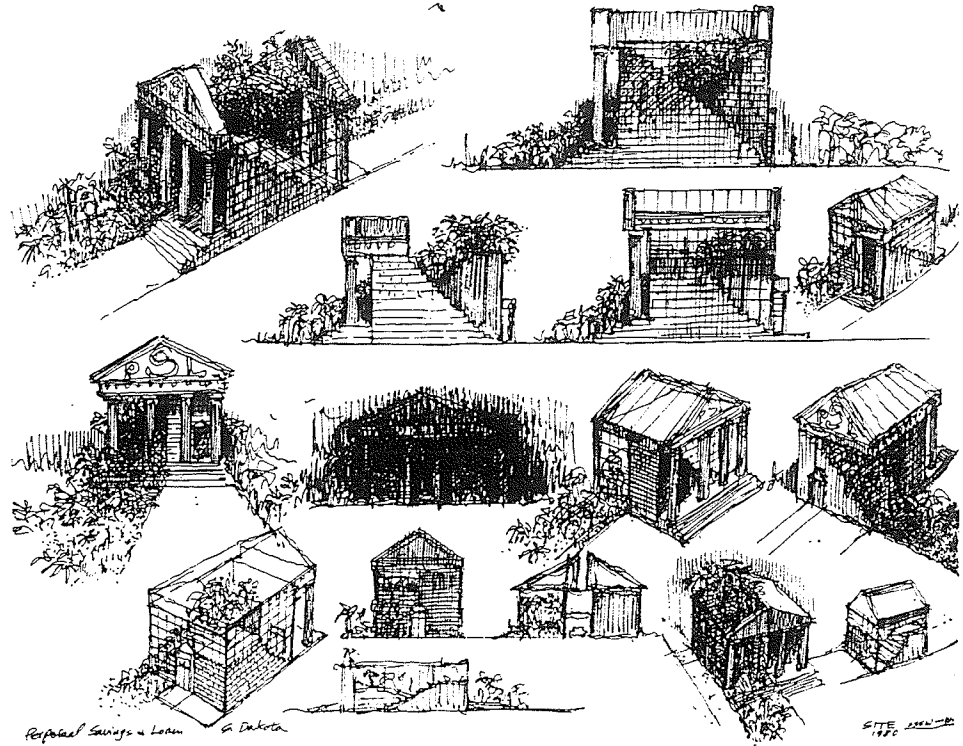


Figure 14: Studies for *Perpetual Savings and Loan Association Bank* (1980) by SITE. From SITE.

This narrative architecture invites a flexible interpretation on the part of the viewer, rather than claiming an authoritarian position on meaning of their work. For example, the *Laurie Mallet House* (1985) has imagined memories from the history of the residence and of the personal history of the owner 'ghosted' throughout the home. Each visitor to the home projects their personal interpretations of the forms. As the owner has commented, each visitor finds some different message in the house. This non-authoritarian and non-unitary stance involves involves the notion of a dialogue. The *Frankfurt Museum* competition entry also involved the "notion of multi-level associations" about the relationship of American and German culture and architecture, and of the relationships of the site to

context. SITEs concern with narrative is how it can be achieved on relevant terms in a diverse, disordered and pluralistic society.<sup>38</sup>

George Hargreaves, in taking a stance somewhat similar to SITE in terms of a narrative approach, also maintains that landscape can tell a narrative about its context or contemporary condition. He also maintains that these projections of intent or meaning through landscape architectural form should come before those of programmatic requirements. The functional and programmatic requirements are still addressed, but no longer to they remain the primary determinant of form. Works such as *Plaza - Tower One* and *Villa Zapu* narrate aspects of the surrounding landscape. The swaths of plantings at *Villa Zapu* echo the vineyards of the surrounding hillsides.

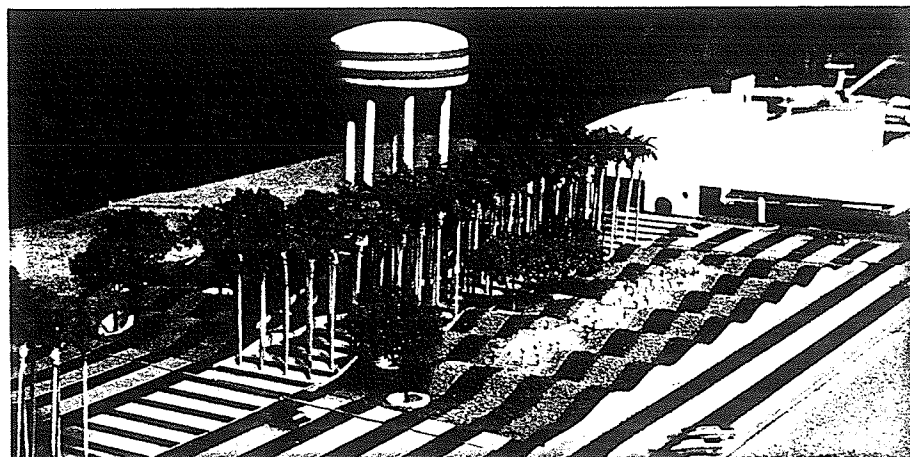


Figure 15: *Swimming Hall of Fame*, by Martha Schwartz. From *Progressive Architecture*, July, 1989.

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38. Ibid.

No longer is the primacy of programmatic requirements central to contemporary landscape architectural practices such as George Hargreaves and The Office of Peter Walker and Martha Schwartz. These practitioners have brought to the forefront issues of functionalism in landscape and the invisibility of landscapes. The same issues of abstraction and programme as determinators of architectural form are also found in landscape architecture, only the context and medium is somewhat changed. Modern landscapes have also followed the idiom 'form follows function,' but only with a different universal vocabulary, that of the picturesque. The accompanying issue that arises in landscape however, is that has traditionally been relegated to the condition of the 'other', that is, of passivity, and invisibility. It has become the invisible context, that which we hardly even notice. Additionally, traditional notions of landscape have been governed by a vision of landscape or park as a replica of 'nature.'

Addressing these issues of visibility, functionalism, and the replication of nature makes for a somewhat different approach by some landscape practitioners, such as Peter Walker and Martha Schwartz. They argue that the landscape must make itself visible, must assert its own presence, for too often it has only answered to functional and programmatic requirements. Her *Splice Garden* at the Whitehead Institute in Cambridge, Mass.(Figure 16) points out that landscapes or gardens are not exclusively a realm of plant material, but a range of things which need not necessarily incorporate plants or replicate some notion of nature. While juxtaposing two contrasting landscape typologies of Japanese Zen Garden, and French garden, her use of materials is entirely unconventional:

astroturf hedges and green gravel to foreground its artificiality. "There are all sorts of signs that indicate that it is a garden," Schwartz comments, "for one, it is incessantly green."<sup>39</sup> Through its artificiality, it extends the limits or boundaries of what constitutes garden.

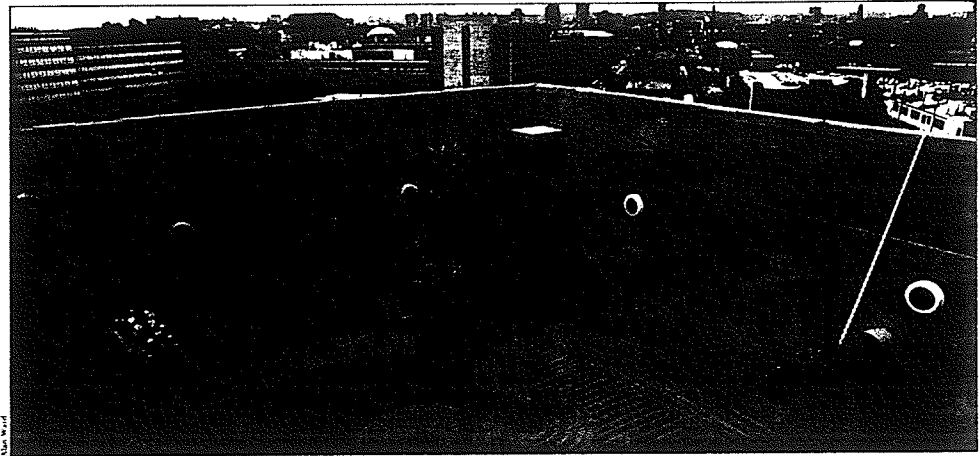


Figure 16: *Splice Garden*, by Martha Schwartz. From *Progressive Architecture*, July, 1989.

These different understandings of architecture and landscape in terms or narrative force a questioning of architectural signification and its foundation. This parallels the post-structuralist questioning of our systems of representation. As Christopher Norris describes: "There is no longer the sense of a primal authority attaching to the literary work and requiring that criticism keep its respectful distance. The autonomy of the text is actively invaded by a new and insubordinate style of commentary with puts in question all the traditional attributes of literary meaning."<sup>40</sup> Though this passage refers to literary theory, Norris's comment equally applies and explains postmodern endeavors in all areas.

39. In "New American Landscape," *Progressive Architecture*, (July, 1989): 62.

40. Norris, p. 24.

*T h e P o l i t i c s o f  
P o s t m o d e r n i s m*

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*Postmodern thought is no longer binary thought. Hierarchical oppositions is the dominant form of representing difference and justifying its subordination in our society. What we must learn, then is how to conceive difference without opposition.*

Craig Owens, *Feminists and Postmodernism*

While modernity's realistic epistemology and the transmittal of meaning has been problematized by postmodernists, so to have the political implications of the artifact been interrogated. Some postmodern photographers have been particularly concerned with this issue, for photography has traditionally been a field that perhaps lays the strongest claims as an objective, realistic mode of representation, as it assumes a transparency of medium. However, postmodern photographers argue that photographs do not project mirror images of reality; as photographic representation is never an objective point of view. Rather, all representation is political - it is always determined by the viewpoint of the 'subject' producing the image and the cultural perspective of the viewer. According to the postmodernist view, "we are never outside representation - or rather, never outside its politics"<sup>1</sup>, which are inherent in our participation and perception of the world.

Similarly, Linda Hutcheon has argued that postmodernism is 'inescapeably political,' as representation is always informed by an

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1. Foster, p.xv.

ideological orientation, that is, the ideologies - whether stated or unstated of our social relations and their apparatuses. Postmodernism questions the modernist notion that art gives access to perfect, unmediated access to timeless, apolitical disinterested meanings and values. This stance implies that no longer can representation maintain the pretense of neutrality or disinterest, but might move towards acknowledging its ideology or framework. It becomes necessary to look at both the content and structure of representation; content unavoidably influences a works structure, and structure is never without bias.

*a u t h o r / a u t h o r i t y , o r t h e  
' d e c e n t e r i n g ' o f t h e s u b j e c t*

Underlying the modern, or humanist 'work,' whether in architecture, literature, or another discipline, is "a belief in the unified, centered and self-generative subject, whose own autonomy is reflected in the formal autonomy of the work."<sup>2</sup> As previously examined, this autonomous subject claims himself as the grounds of truth and the work as a reflection of that certainty. While we have already seen how this is reflected in traditional architectural conventions which value organizational strategies based upon notions of composition, hierarchy, and order to achieve coherence and unity, the assumption of an autonomous subject is also reflected in the notion of author or architect as originary and authoritarian. The subject assumes to speak with 'authority' about the

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2. Bernard Tschumi, "Parc Villette," p. 33.

meaning of the object. This hierarchy distances the signifier from the representation, the subject from the object. It has similarly imposed a distance between artist and viewer, author and reader, and architect and user.

In literary fields, postmodernists have refuted the idea of the 'author' as a solitary figure who creates a novel derived solely from his own genius. The author's novel and words are expected to reveal to us some ultimate and universal truth about the world. A similar relationship can be seen with the artist and painting or the photographer and the photograph. In this same image, modern architects were heroically cast; his architectural ideas and buildings were also seen to be derived solely from his own creativity. His buildings were to be unitary creations, as objects which conveyed universal ideals of truth and beauty.

Postmodernism attempts to undermine this type of claim to authority. The vision of "authorship" is slowly breaking apart, and in some cases this issue has been the source of pointed critiques. While the exploration of the 'subject' has perhaps been most extensive in the fields of visual and literary representation and in psychoanalysis, their critiques inevitably have bearing upon architecture and the notion of the architect as the originary subject. For example, the architectural convention of architect as an autonomous designer, as determiner and bearer of architectural ideals is challenged SITE's *Highrise of Homes*. (Figure 17). In this proposal, the design control comes from the residents who personally choose the style of the homes they will live in. In a scenario such as this, the architect provides not a finished design, but a kit of parts and

framework in which the residents determine its final form. This concept challenges "that last stronghold of design autonomy (and the root of academic formalism)," as James Wines of SITE phrases it, "- the self-righteous conceit of the architect as master builder, as the ultimate form giver, as the arbiter of design control."<sup>3</sup> Such an approach also avoids the sometimes homogenizing tendencies of a single designer in favor of a number styles, or points of view on architectural form.

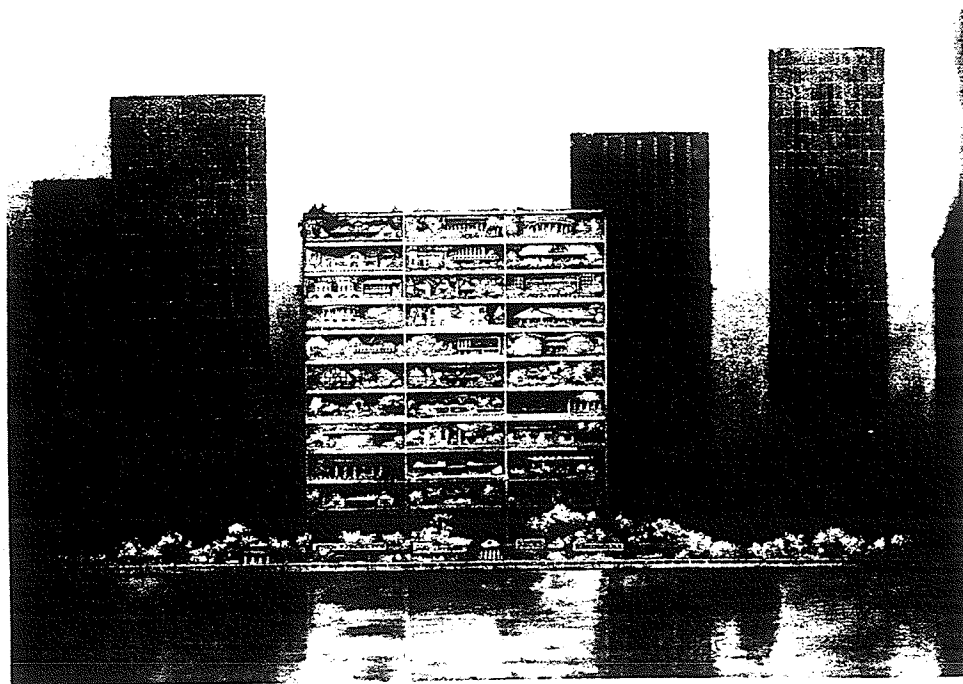


Figure 17: SITE's *Highrise of Homes*. proposal. From *SITE*.

Against the modernist autonomy of architect, and autonomous, unified, and often homogeneous architectural compositions, Tschumi has conceived his cinnegramme or promenade of gardens at La Villette as a montage, a composition of autonomous segments of fragments, frames and

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3. Wines, p. 161.

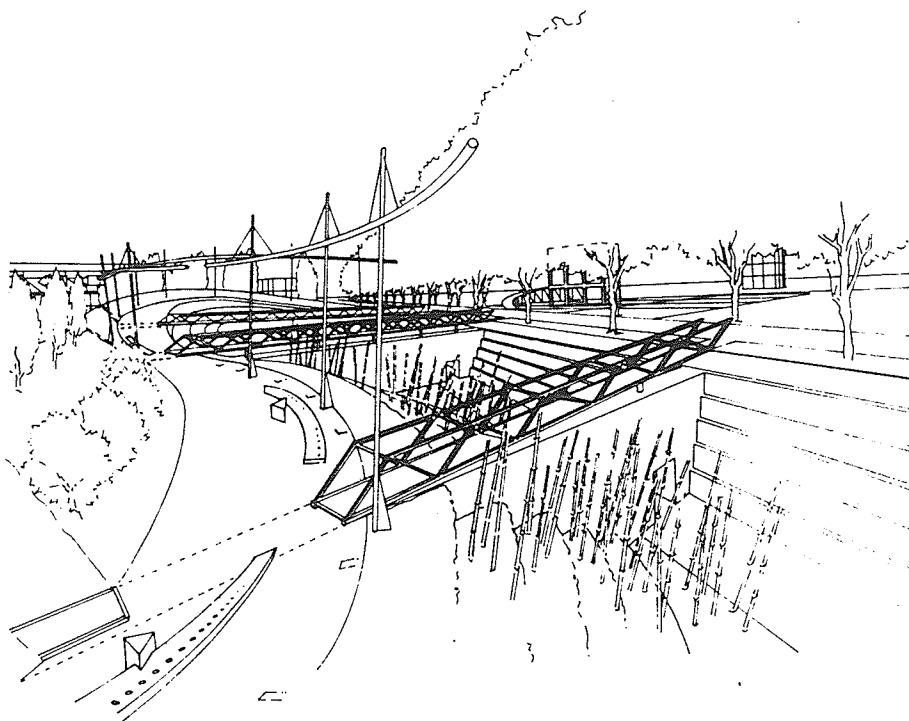


Figure 18: Cinematic Promenade, *Parc de la Villette*. From *Cinnegramme Folie*.

sequences (Figure 18). Each fragment is the intervention of different designer along a random curve, intended to create the effect of heterogeneity, juxtaposition, and confrontation. This system provides a structure which depends upon differences and confrontation, one which has no intention of coherence. With such a concept, as Tschumi writes, the "divergence from continuity would become the condition of other designer's interventions." In this way, the autonomy of the humanist architect, as creator and designer of form in its totality is deferred.

It may be useful at this point, to describe in more detail the vision and rationale of such a designer. Descartes' *Discourse on Method* uses the following architectural metaphor to illustrate his arguments for the value

of rational, autonomous philosophical systems over non-rational forms of knowledge. In a more literal sense, this has also been much the same model and value system from which society, (not only architects) have conceived architectural projects within the past few centuries:

...there is not usually so much perfection in works composed of several parts and produced by different craftsmen as in the works of one man. Thus we see that buildings undertaken and completed by a single architect are usually more attractive and better planned than those which several have tried to patch up by adapting old walls built for different purposes. Again, ancient cities which have gradually grown up from mere villages into large towns are usually ill proportioned, compared with those orderly towns which planners lay out as they fancy on level ground. Looking at buildings of the former individually, you will often find as much art in them if not more than in those of the latter; but in view of their arrangement - a tall one here, a small one there - and the way they make the street crooked and irregular you would say it is chance rather than the will of men using reason, that placed them so. And when you consider that there have always been certain officials whose job it is to see that private buildings embellish public places you will understand how difficult it is to make something perfect by working only on what others have produced.<sup>4</sup>

Less obvious perhaps, but equally as significant as the architectural projects already sited, is the planning approach taken by the Barcelona planning department, under the leadership of Oriol Bohigas. Their recent projects point to a significant structural change from the modernist Cartesian model of both philosophy and planning.<sup>5</sup> This department envisioned no grandiose mega-projects or unified vision of the city, but instead conceived of their work as a series of projects or

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4. Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. F.E. Sutcliffe (Suffolk: Penguin Books, 1968) p.35.

5. Though it was not until technological advances of the twentieth century and the necessity to rebuild much of war-torn Europe that this vision of planning became realizable at a large scale.

interventions into the existing urban fabric. This response to existing conditions, as they see it - the city is a series of fragments and accidents - addresses, as Richard Ingersoll points out, "the tragic flaw of the Modern Movement...was not its formal solutions per se, but its inability to accept the preexisting truth of the built environment in simultaneity with the utopian programme it proposed."<sup>6</sup>

In many ways, Bohigas' approach represents a radical change, as it redefines the issues of planning based upon their observations of the problems and characteristics of the late twentieth century European city. From this reconceptualizing, the process and product also represent a departure from the norms of modernist planning. Their series of small interventions by numerous architects are a far cry from the singular, unified, all-encompassing visions of Plan Voisin or Broadacre City. As such, these interventions also represent a departure from the modernist authoritarian approach and desire to rebuild or start anew.

In other areas of architecture, the challenging of an authoritarian stance is also a dissolution of the originary stance. This has meant an acknowledgement and often clear deference to sources, rather than originality and rejection of the past. Aldo Rossi's examination of traditional form for a typology of architecture and the city and Leon Krier's advocacy of 'traditional' city form as a means of improving the city are both architectural critiques whose claims are not derived from the stance of an originary subject (though in the case of Leon Krier, the heroic

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6. Richard Ingersoll, "Postmodern Urbanism: Forward into the Past," Design Book Review 17 (Winter 1989): 21.

stance remains). In the same way, increasing collaboration between the design professions and with other professions<sup>7</sup> is also a recognition that the work of many can have as value as the plans of a single architect, as well as an example of the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries.

While conditions of modern authorship have been called into question, equally, the point of view the viewer/user/reader is being reconceived. Just as the 'subject' is no longer a unitary, authoritarian figure, no longer is there an assumption of a unitary audience, as a receiver of communication. For our purposes here, this becomes an issue of the interpretation of the cultural artifact. While Derridean "marks" and Tschumi's *folies*, leave the text open to interpretation, so too does SITE assume a heterogeneous audience. Most of their works are based upon an understanding of differing interpretations and a form of dialectic with users. As Allison Sky of SITE remarks about the *Laurie Mallett House*, it aims to "tell a different story to whomever is reading it," every visitor "from a delivery person to the garbage man to her circle of friends, who are artists and intellectuals," respond to the house and its narratives.<sup>8</sup> "This is characteristic of all our projects," Sky continues, "they are about communication and the way in which they engage you has a lot to do with what you bring to them."

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7. See the October 1989 issue of Landscape Architecture on "Collaboration".

8. Herbert Munschamp, "Interview with SITE," SITE (New York: Rizzoli, 1989) p. 16.

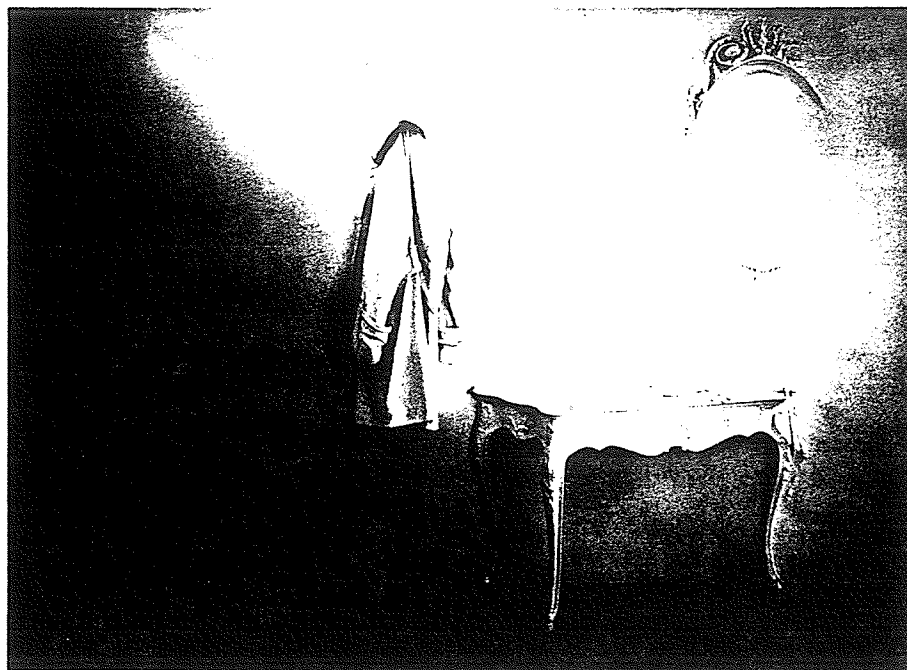


Figure 19: Interior, *Laurie Mallet House* , by SITE. From *SITE*.

*p o l i t i c a l   a n d   p a t r i a r c h a l*

Issues of 'authorship' or authority have another characteristic, its drive to reproduce a particular, or more problematically, a singular point of view. Typically, modern representation, or the designated "reality" does not accommodate interpretation and other viewpoints, as it strives to reproduce a singular, unitary and coherent point of view. It assumes to speak for all as universal knowledge. Inherent in this type of discourse is an inability to acknowledge differentiation and coexistence, a desire to repress the voices of 'others.' Postmodernists contend that "it is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be represented and what cannot that the postmodernist operation is being staged - not in order to

transcend representation but in order to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting, or invalidating others."<sup>9</sup>

Feminist critiques<sup>10</sup> have pointedly questioned the singularity of this point of view, one which allows neither for gender or race, yet purports to speak for all. As Craig Owens has written, "the representational system of the West admits only one vision - that of the constitutive male subject - or, rather, they posit the subject of representation as absolutely centered, unitary, masculine."<sup>11</sup> Certain feminists argue that this vision of the 'subject' and its representation guides the viewer's gaze to assume a masculine stance, particularly when the subject of representation is 'female.'<sup>12</sup> It also strives to fix, categorize, and universalize images of the world.

Feminists maintain that "no one narrative can possibly account for all aspects of human experience,"<sup>13</sup> and so we must allow for a heterogeneity of narratives. Women insist upon difference, rather than 'otherness'; difference without opposition. This stance does not necessarily advocate pluralism, but a n acknowledgement of the validity of difference.

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9. Owens, p. 59.

10. I include feminist issues here because the ties of patriarchy to modernism are inescapable, and so inevitably this is reflected in the creation of our artifacts and the organization of architectural space and city fabric. Additionally, I believe some feminist critiques of the dualistic nature of patriarchy can serve as models for a critique of our assumptions about nature.

11. Owens, p. 58.

12. On the issue representation and the stance of the viewer, see John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972.)

13. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

This would mean allowing for difference, variety, complexity, rather than attempting to explain the world through universal (and often simplified) images or truths. 14

Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman challenge the 'subject of representation,' as Kruger's image-text collages and Sherman's self portraits of deny the traditional fixing gaze we use when viewing images,

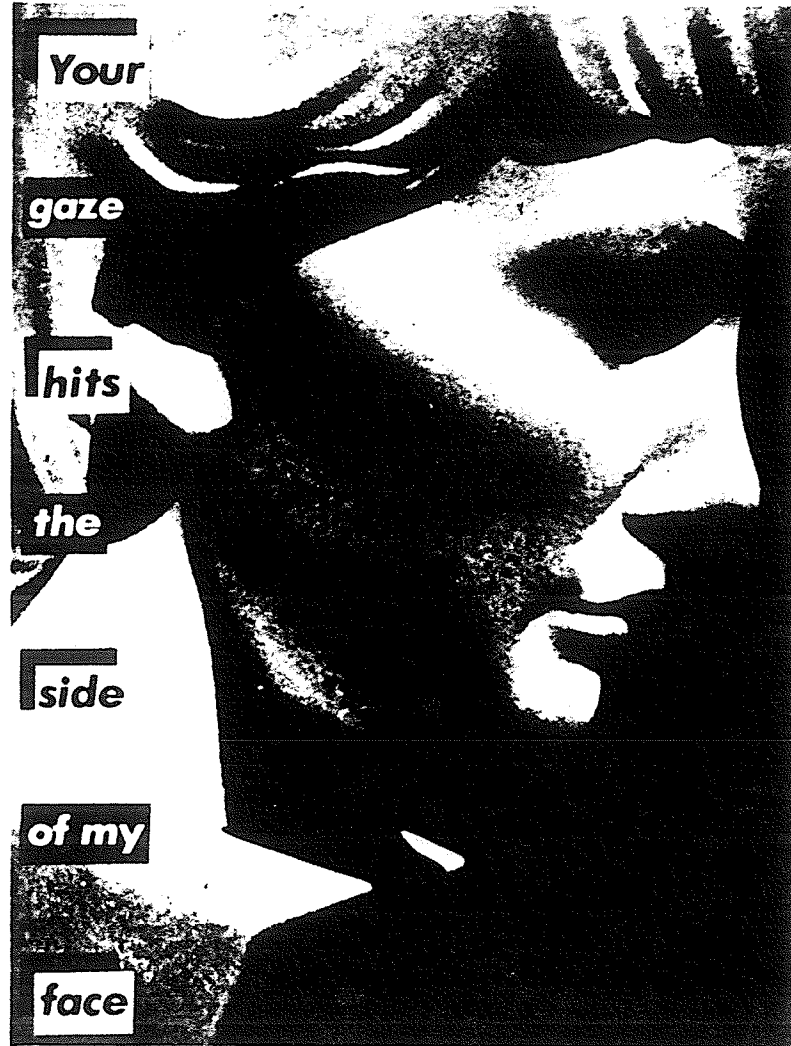


Figure 20: *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face*, 1981, by Barbara Kruger.  
From *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture*.

14. Though from another point of view, 'Critical Regionalism,' and its mediation of the 'international' with local vocabularies and cultures similarly advocates 'difference'.

one which reifies the female image of representation as an object of male desire. Kruger's works, which parody the visual rules employed by mass media, display ads and newspaper headlines, defy fixed meanings, as they often confront assumed congruences between text with image. As Kruger states, "we replicate certain works and pictures and watch them stray from or coincide with your notions of facts and fictions." Sherman's 'untitled film stills' and later self-portraits also parody the constructed images of women projected by the media. Sherman disguises herself as prototypical B-movie heroines from the 1950's and 1960's, and then photographs herself in these types of backgrounds. As Sherman is the same woman, but with a different identity in each 'film still,' she confronts the construction and reification of female through her images.



Figure 21 : *Untitled Film Still*, 1980. by Cindy Sherman. From *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture*.

Architectural forms have some developed strategies which install and subvert the conventions of reified, unitary buildings. Charles Jencks, writing on "Architecture and Discontinuity" has cited a number of works that are discontinuous, such as Stirlings' *Clore Gallery*, and the work of Jeremy Dixon. Discontinuity becomes one of the key intents of these works, which do not try to convey a sense of building as an integrated whole, but one which responds in many different ways within the context of the same building. It has also been argued that these disjunctive approaches to architecture convey the contemporary sensibility of disjointed pluralism that exists within Western culture.

Some architects have also attempted to move away from the univocality of modern architecture. Jencks maintains that buildings must communicate with both the public and the architectural community, with both elite and popular tastes. This type of communication he terms 'double coding', a simultaneous communication at various levels, which conveys something to both designers and users. Jencks cites James Stirling's *Neue Staatsgalerie* in Stuttgart (Figure 22) as exemplary of this concept of double-coding. Both traditional and modernist languages have been collaged by Stirling to compose this addition to an existing gallery, in this case, using a classical background of form and materials with modernist details and anomalies. Where the architects of modern buildings strive for simplicity, unity and harmony of composition, Stirling mediates the traditional and modern in a usage of languages that are "not synthesized but rather juxtaposed in tension, an allegory to schizophrenic culture."<sup>15</sup>

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15. Charles Jencks, What is Postmodernism? (London and New York: Academy Editions/St. Martin's Press, 1987) p. 19.

For example, Jencks cites, Stirling uses a traditional pedimental or temple type form for the entrance, but constructs through a modern use of steel and colors.

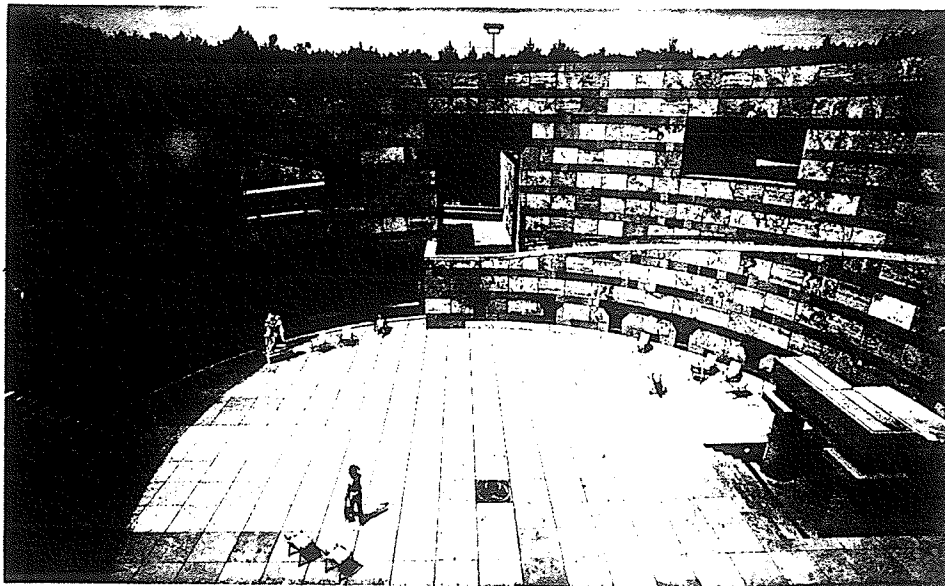


Figure 22: *Neue Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart* by James Stirling. From Jencks, *What is Postmodernism?*

Stirlings' use of this language is often ironic, for example, some blocks have been 'punched out' of the parking garage wall and left on the ground to reveal the automobiles, calling attention to a modern use of a traditional form. This gesture also reveals the modern technology used to support this supposedly solid stone wall, revealing the superficiality of the image of solidity. Jencks comments, "it's as if Stirling were saying through his hybrid language and uneasy confrontations that we live in a complex world where we can't deny the past and conventional beauty, or the present and current technological and social reality."<sup>16</sup>

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16. Ibid.

While 'double coded' architecture is one challenge to modern architecture in terms of meaning and communication, this strategy has often been addressed as a matter of style. In many cases it has easily become a stylistic layer over a still modern building form and organization. The architectural recuperation of meaning and symbol, often the 'classic,' is seen as universal language. Bernard Tschumi criticizes these activities as a contravention of other postmodernisms,

which assault meaning, or more precisely, a rejection of a well-defined signified that guarantees the authenticity of the work of art. To dismantle meaning, showing that it is never transparent, but socially produced, was a key objective in a new critical approach that questioned the humanist assumptions of style.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the point to make here is that within a general field of postmodernism, there are a number of varied 'postmodern' views. Where deconstruction advocates a dispersal of meaning as essence, truth or originality, paradoxically, a postmodern reaction is also to create relationships out of previously 'atomistic,' or isolated objects. For instance, the use of a double language is not the only postmodern aspect of the *Stattsgalerie*. The means by which it addresses context and the fabric of the city is also postmodern, such as the outdoor rotunda sculpture court which provides across-block access for the public, connecting other areas of the city by traversing the building rather than having to pass around it. This provision for the public and city connections mediates building and city in ways that modernism or the International Style often neglected.

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17. Tschumi, p. 39.

It is opposition to the fragmentation of the urban fabric by the technologizing of the modern city that Leon Krier addresses the problems facing contemporary planning. For Krier, the belief in unlimited technological growth and industrialized development have, in a short time, disregarded the cumulative historical and cultural knowledge of building and destroyed the traditional forms of city and landscape. The industrial 'anti-city' establishes 'monofunctional' zoning practices which fragment and segregate activities within the city. For Krier, these industrial practices have not brought about any significant improvements, but resulted in high energy consumption, social isolation inhabitants and a ravaged countryside. According to Krier, the suburbs created by this type of planning have become homogeneous, undifferentiated 'no-man's lands,' or wastelands, based upon the ease of traffic movement, and lacking a sense of meaning, symbolism or coherence, neither city nor countryside.

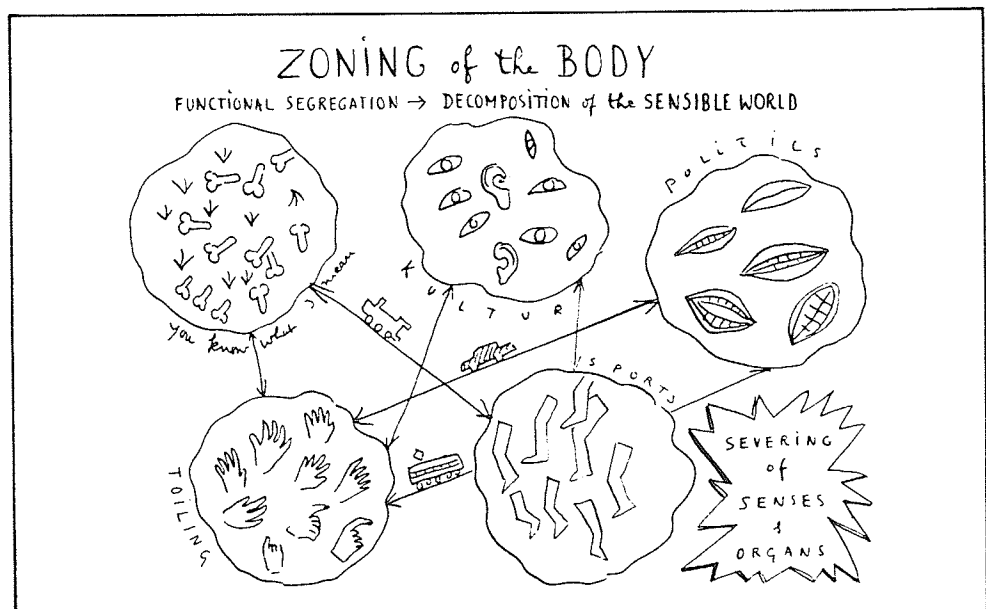


Figure 23: Illustration from Krier's *Critique of Zoning*. From *AD Profile 54*.

Proposing an alternative framework, an organically and historically based model, Krier puts forth a model for the 'Reconstruction of the City,' a global project to reinstate the principles of pre-industrial European cities and their urban quarters. For Krier, the city should be made up of finite quarters, which integrate all functions within its fabric, in a composition of meaningful relationships between its elements, such as the private and public realms of street, plaza, and monuments. The limits to these districts should be determined by the comfort of the 'walking man,' not the distances attainable by the automobile. Additionally, boundaries between city and countryside should be distinct, preserving both landscape and city as separate entities.

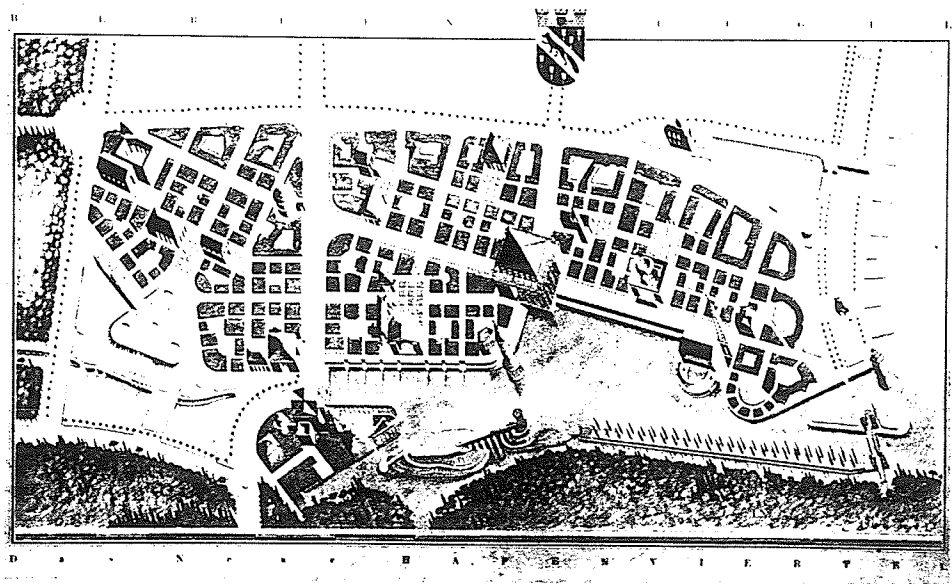


Figure 24: *Berlin-Tegel* Proposal by Leon Krier. From *Postmodernism: The New Classicism*.

Rather viewing the city as a technological solution to urban problems, Krier employs an organic analogy of the city as a built organism, and focuses on the relationship or dialectics between the elements of the

city, rather than on its parts as isolated objects. This critique refocuses the functional priorities of modernist form-making to the moral, ecological, and social implications of building a city as a work of art or series of relationships. For Krier, Jaquelin Robertson has observed, "the *city* is the focus and purpose of design, the giver of meaning; individual buildings are born out of *its* order and requirement. They are never isolated works of art in and of themselves. The city is the work of art."<sup>18</sup>

As an architect/urbanist/critic, Krier's polemics on are often considered to be on the periphery of the postmodern debate (though all postmodern debates deal with edges to some extent). His alliance with traditional, classical, or typological forms for the reconstruction of the city and his advocacy of unified, rather than pluralistic or mediation between past and present conditions have lead many to consider Krier as a 'modernist.' However, amongst Krier's concerns are the atomistic relationships created between parts created by modern planning. His critique of the modern city arising from these concerns and his comparisons with the ideas of organic wholeness are pointed insights into some of the problems encountered by inhabitants of modern cities.

While Krier has advocated the traditional European city as a model for planning, I question whether North American society, is ready to accept the idea of less car-oriented cities (though it may be an ecological necessity). It is perhaps for this reason the Krier's models appear

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<sup>18</sup>. Jaquelin Robertson, "The Empire Strikes Back", Leon Krier: Houses, Palaces, Cities, ed., Dr. Andreas Papdakis, Architectural Design, Vol. 54, No,7/8 1984 pg. 13

somewhat utopian or romanticized for North Americans. Globally, (as this is the scale at which Krier advocates the implementation of his ideas), the application of the European city as a paradigm for global planning could create possibilities of transporting another 'International Style' for planning. Rather, if Krier advocated this theory as a methodology for the analysis at a more regional level, of other pre-industrial cities, it may be more realistic.

An American implementation of Krier's theories is the resort town of Seaside, Florida, by architects Andre Duane and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. The team developed a master plan and graphic zoning code conceived as a cohesive community (with all its related components and variety) similar to pre-1940 towns of the American South. Duane and Plater-Zyberk took a regional approach to planning the town, through a study of small southern towns, particularly in terms of established

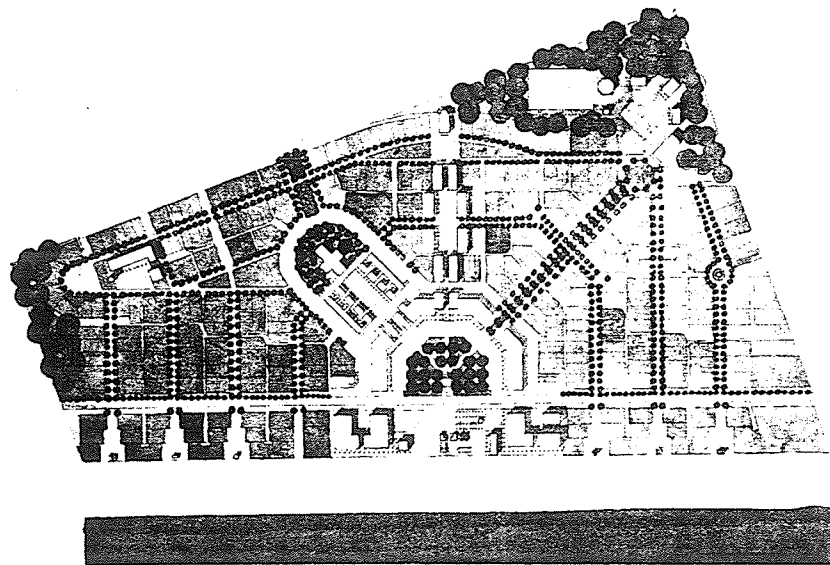


Figure 25: Plan, *Seaside*, Florida by Duane and Plater-Zyberk. From *Postmodernism: The New Classicism*.

relationships between public and private spaces, circulation, and building types. Rather than a segregated approach to zoning with a centralized public, the master plan disperses civic amenities throughout the town, and connects them through public spaces, such as a boulevard, square, and marketplace, to a central square. The code is intended to not only to designate land use, but create spatial definitions of the streets through guidelines for frontages and fences, and increase public interaction through the provision of porches, pedestrian walkways and civic spaces. The architects have strived to create both continuity and variety in the urban fabric through their zoning code, which is "intended to control only those aspects of building that directly affect the public realm",<sup>19</sup> and which allows interpretation by other designers sympathetic to a vernacular or classical vocabulary. Charles Jencks has suggested that "sensitive flexibility"<sup>20</sup> of the zoning code is strength of Duany and Plater-Zyberk's approach at Seaside. This approach is regional in its organization of space, rather than universal; it revives the principle forms and spaces of the past without resorting to a recreation of it.

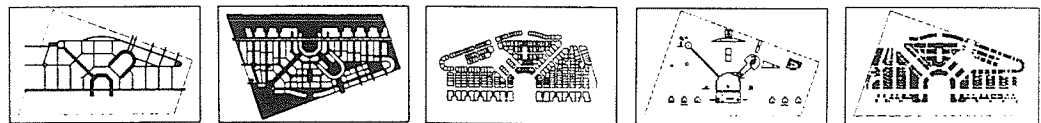


Figure 26: Urban Components, *Seaside*, Florida by Duaney and Plater-Zyberk. From *Postmodernism, the New Classicism*.

19. "The Town of Seaside," *Center*, Vol, 1, No. 1, 1985. pg. 111.

20. Charles Jencks, *Postmodernism: The New Classicism in Art and Architecture*, pg. 200.

*V i s i b i l i t y / I n v i s i b i l i t y*

The critiques of certain 'postmodern feminists' have also pointedly focused upon the issue of visibility/invisibility in our culture, as "the exteriority of women to Western representation exposes its limits."<sup>21</sup> In his article, "On the Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism" Craig Owens discusses how the hierarchy of visible/invisible has been taken up by some feminists artists as a key concern regarding patriarchal systems. They argue that rarely are women the 'subject' of representation, rather they only enter representation as 'object,' or as representations for something unrepresentable' such as truth, beauty or the sublime. This operation renders them invisible as persons, that is, they are assumed to be unable to speak for themselves.

While both men and women are adversely restricted by this system, for women, this binary system is deeply problematic as it silences a female voice in all aspects of cultural activity. Even theoretical discourse claims to account for every form of social experience, yet often only conveys a masculine point of view. Women, therefore, challenge the exclusion of themselves from our cultural systems; for example their exclusion from theory, where the traditional viewpoint allows only the dominant perspective of the "unitary, masculine vision."<sup>22</sup>

Certain postmodern feminists have long supported this viewpoint and attempted to explicate the fabricated nature of this value system

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21. Owens, p. 59.

22. Ibid., p. 58.

which, they argue, is based upon masculine/feminine differentiations as a system that structures our entire system of reality.<sup>23</sup> The point of this issue here, is that we find this same structure organizing our attitudes and relationships towards nature. According to Carolyn Merchant, the binary model that insists on the control and domination of women is the same model that insists upon the control and domination of nature. Historically, woman and 'mother' nature have an age old association; an affinity with regards to the way man has chosen to view and describe them, and often label them as the irrational counterpart to male rationality. That is, both women and nature have historically been dominated and relegated to the marginal realms of consideration. While women have been rarely presented as 'subject' of the representation, nature has similarly been presented as a vehicle to convey other meanings and ideas.

Seventeenth century landscape paintings such as *Points Out the View*, by Claude Lorrain (Figure 27) utilized landscape images to convey Enlightenment ideals of pastoral and sublime. So too, was the picturesque landscape designed to be viewed as an object of the gaze, of observation, a passive landscape of purely visual participation.<sup>24</sup> This view is somewhat similar to the scientific, detached observation of nature, for ...

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23. On how binary thinking structures our perceptions of women and nature, see Rosemary Ruether, *New Women, New Earth*, (Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1975), and Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978)
24. The primacy of vision is another critique of modernism. The writings of Michel Foucault have often focused upon the relationship of vision and power structures, and how 'the gaze' tends to objectify and master. In architectural critiques, Kenneth Frampton argues that architectural design often centers solely upon visual expression, negating the other tactile senses.



Figure 27: *Pointing Out the View*, (1648) by Claude Lorraine. From *A World with a View: An Inquiry into the Nature of Scenic Values*.

In these picture the observer is placed in a commanding position: he dominates the scenery and his gaze is immediately directed towards the horizon, from where it returns slowly to the foreground, allowing him to observe at his ease the various parts which he had first perceived in rapid succession.<sup>25</sup>

Rather than 'realistic' portrayals of nature, these images of imagined landscapes, and the designs which followed from these ideals, helped transform our views and assumptions of what constitutes a 'natural' nature.

These comparisons lead me to suggest that the view of nature and landscapes as picturesque and pastoral can be seen as the 'other' side of the modernist dichotomy which places architecture, as a vehicle of technology and progress, on the side of superiority. Due to these hierarchical

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25. Alessandra Ponte, "Artificial Landscapes: The Case of Humphry Repton," *Lotus International* 52, (1986/4), pg. 55.

tendencies, the pastoral landscape and landscape architecture could scarcely, and rarely, have taken on the forms or language of technology as ardently as the Bauhaus or International Style, for the 'other' is rarely associated with scientific (hence technological) privilege, but with domination and control.<sup>26</sup>

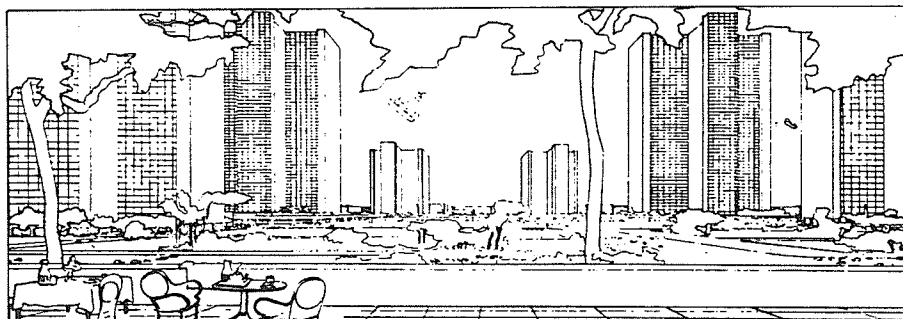


Figure 28: Perspective, *Contemporary City for 3 Million*, 1922, by Le Corbusier. From *Modernist Visions and the Contemporary American City*.

Today, landscape architects still deal with these long-held assumptions of the landscape - that is, as natural, passive, and often in the twentieth century, as invisible. For instance, many of the proposals for cities by modernists such as Le Corbusier envision the landscape as a passive, neutral foil for highly technologised buildings. This idea has

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26. This could be held as one reason (among many, including the youth of the profession) why landscape architects feel that it is more difficult to command the same professional status as architects. Architecture is considered the superior side of the hierarchy while landscape is seen as inferior, regardless of the real contributions of either profession. Landscape architects work with nature and a predominantly contextual frame of reference, and until the increased ecological concerns of the late 1980's, nature has not been considered as significant as the products of man's superior intellect and rationality.

transgressed to the use, or archetype, of landscape as background, a "featureless place for people in a hurry."<sup>27</sup>

The implications of these critiques are many, as it means changing both the system and the objects of representation. It does not mean adding women to discourse, but changing the nature of discourse. Similarly, it does not mean adding landscape to architecture, but disrupting the binary model and it operates within the architectural fields. A rethinking of the picturesque then, is a re-evaluation not of style, but of the values embodied in it. This relegation of nature to the marginal side of dichotomies implies that the forms and influences of modernism on the landscape could be radically different than those in architecture. Possibly, the confusion encountered by landscape architects and others in defining or finding modern (hence, defining postmodern) landscapes, may be due to their search for forms equivalent to architectural modernity, whereas these forms may actually be something quite different.

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27. Jacobs.

A n A r c h i t e c t u r e o f  
" B e t w e e n "

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*"Making a bridge between the visionary and the traditional in progressive architecture of the 1980's has very little to do with the creation or resurrection of form. It is not a matter of form but of attitude."*

James Wines, *De-architecture*.

At this juncture, the explorations which constitute this thesis focus again upon the foundational premises of modernism; that of the scientific, rational, and binary framework of Western thought. Certain architects, such as Tschumi and Eisenman, have argued that this dualistic attitude has affected the fundamentals of architectural thinking. For postmodernists, one of the central issues that arises from this is how to begin and/or continue to think in non-binary terms. More specifically, the concern here is how this can be achieved in the general field of architecture.<sup>1</sup>

What has also unfolded through the course of this inquiry are a number of related strategies for dealing with modernist thinking which relect upon the world in non-binary terms. One means of displacing modernist architectural thinking is through what Peter Eisenman has called an architecture of 'between.' This would be an architecture which on the one hand, when viewed as a text, displaces the natural and conventional of architecture and challenges architectural 'truths' and

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<sup>1</sup>. A field within which I include landscape architecture and urban design.

deeply rooted assumptions. Though I have brought up this issue in other areas of this thesis, I believe the point is worth stressing again here, as Jacques Derrida eloquently reminds us of the depth and breadth to which the "architecture of architecture" extends:

Down even to its archaic foundation, the most fundamental concept of architecture has been constructed. This naturalized architecture is bequeathed to us: we inhabit it, it inhabits us, we think it is destined for habitation, and it is no longer an object for us at all. But we must recognize in it an artefact, a construction, a monument. It did not fall from the sky; it is not natural, even if it informs a specific scheme of relations of physis, the sky, the earth, the human and the divine. This architecture of architecture has a history; it is historical through and through. Its heritage inaugurates the intimacy of our economy, the law of our hearth (oikos), our familial, religious and political 'oikonomy', all the places of birth and death, temple, school, stadium, agora, square, sepulchre. It goes right through us [nous transit ] to the point that we forget its very historicity: we take it for nature. It is common sense itself.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, there is an architecture of landscape and of nature, structures which govern our most fundamental concepts of nature. We deal not with nature, but with very specific notions of nature mediated by the assumptions of our culture.<sup>3</sup> A displacement of the natural and conventional of the 'landscape' is also necessary then, as landscape is no less an "artefact, a construction, a monument" than architecture.<sup>4</sup> It is an environment profoundly altered by human intervention, 'a confluence of

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2. Derrida, "Point de folie," pg. 65.

3. Carolyn Merchant's book, "The Death of Nature," documents changing notions in man's conception of nature change in conjunction with the scientific revolution, and argue that in fact, we operate with a very scientific notion of nature today.

4. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, an artefact is defined as a "product of human art and workmanship," or "thing not naturally present."

culture and nature.<sup>5</sup> However, traditional notions of landscape have been governed by the notion of landscape or park as the replica of 'nature.' (Possibly another 'realist' interpretation of the 'metaphysics of presence'). A component of a postmodernist 'landscape' might address this issue. For example, Ian Hamilton Findlay, through his garden at Stonypath, reminds us that the landscape is, in fact, cultural. (Figure 29)

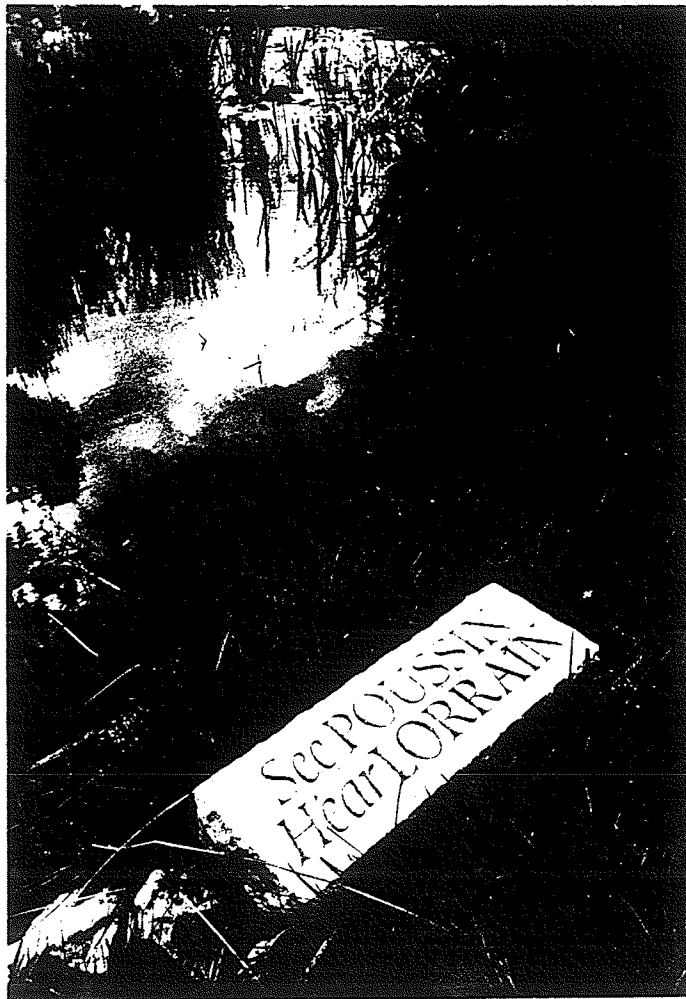


Figure 29: *See Poussin/Hear Lorraine*, by Ian Hamilton Findlay. From *Earthworks*.

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5. Peter Jacobs, "Truth and Beauty," paper presented to the Landscape and the Avant-Garde Conference, University of Minnesota; Minneapolis, Minnesota. April, 1989.

The challenge to these notions involves reconsidering and rearticulating the values that we impose upon our ideas of nature, for our perceptions of the landscape are taken as something realistically evident, not constructed throughout its entire breadth. When we speak of nature, we are usually referring to an environment in a natural state, but nature is an environment profoundly influenced by cultural projections. Just as a photograph is never a 'realistic' representation, neither are our perceptions of nature neutral, but informed by similar selection processes and cultural biases. Both design theory and practice accommodate and perpetuate those assumptions and perceptions.

Postmodernism then, calls for a recognition and articulation of those values as they exist in the field of architecture, both historically and in the contemporary situation. A reconceptualizing of landscape should also involve reflection upon the history of landscape in light of a contemporary cultural context in which has begun to explore the implications of binary thinking. This might involve "a study of their origins, their status, and their consequences for research and design."<sup>6</sup> More specifically, a study in terms (but not only) of dualistic and dominant relationships: between culture and environment and between man and nature.

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6. Karen Franck, "A Feminist Approach to Architecture: Acknowledging Women's Ways of Knowing," from Architecture: A Place for Women, ed. Ellen Perry Berkeley, (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution, 1989) pg. 204.

b e t w e e n o f c a t e g o r i e s

An architecture of 'between,' also explores the 'between' of categories which have generally been conceived or defined in oppositional terms. Eisenman writes:

Such an architecture would no longer seek a separation of categories; a hierarchy of values or the traditional classification systems of functional and formal typology; it would instead seek to blur these and other structures. This idea of blurring is not less rigorous, less rational, but it admits the irrational to the rational.<sup>7</sup>

This blurring of categories admits previously opposed and separated terms within the domains of the other. The blurring of categories might also be described as a series of "border tensions", as Linda Hutcheon writes, "a transgression of boundaries between genre, between disciplines or discourses, between high and mass culture, and most problematically perhaps between practice and theory."<sup>8</sup>

This transgression involves, in part, a recognition of the lines of division created by binaries, as much as what lies on either side of it. Typically, this line has divided architecture and landscape as bearers of reason/irrational, active/passive, culture/nature associations. Architecture has traditional associations with the notion of artifact, as a cultural endeavor or product; landscape has been identified with nature, or non-cultural. Barbara Stauffacher-Solomon discusses one of the primary lines of division instituted between the pair architecture/landscape, one

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7. Eisenman, "Blue Line Text," pg. 8.

8. Hutcheon, Politics, pg. 18.

which is literally drawn upon the page before one attempts to carry out a practice to segregate fields of practice:

Though architects and landscape designers may pursue different fantasies they have one thing in common. Both draw separate ideas before they are built or planted on the same site. To facilitate this endeavor a disastrous but convenient convention has been devised. Universities and offices allow a building, drawn by one person, or groups, to receive a thick black line around it (probably with everything within the line eradicated) to be handed to another person, or groups, to draw everything outside the black line. This black line is the buffer. Supposedly it is only seen on the piece of paper, but it seems to have made its mark on the built and planted landscape.<sup>9</sup>

Postmodernism involves a rethinking and/or dissolution of this line of division. These notions of landscape and architecture as separate endeavors and forms have been challenged by the building-landscapes of Emilio Ambasz and SITE. Ambasz's *San Antonio Conservatory*, (Figure 30) and houses at Cordoba, Spain and Bierges, Belgium, (Figure 31) transgress the limits to what constitutes building and landscape, for they work in the space 'between' the oppositions of landscape and architecture. The *San Antonio Conservatory* addresses the traditional separation of building and nature through a reversal of the generally accepted greenhouse/conservatory typology. The landscape here forms the walls and enclosures, rather than creating a building which exists as a separate object, dominating exterior space. Ambasz's houses similarly mediate land and building; both maintain a distinct identity, yet are integral to, and dependant upon the other.

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<sup>9</sup>. Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, Green Architecture and Agrarian Garden, (New York: Rizzoli, 1988) pg. 84.

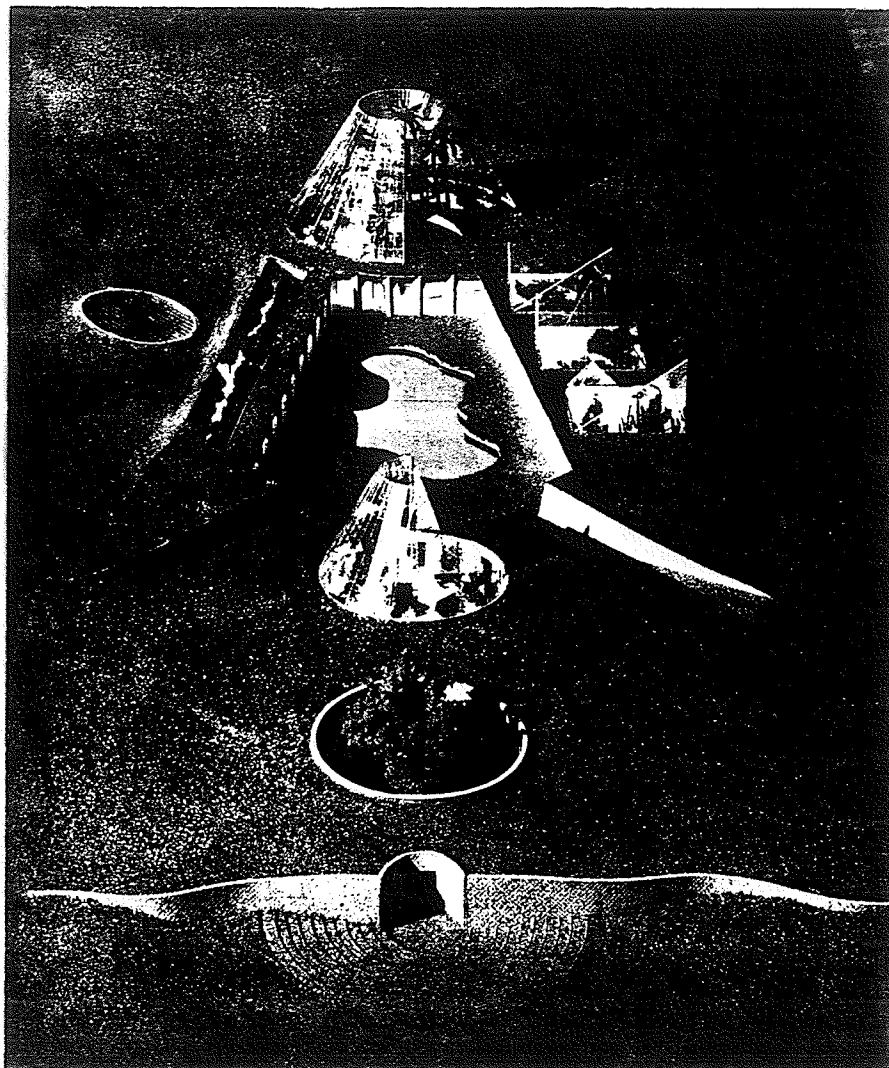


Figure 30: The San Antonio Conservatory by Emilio Ambasz. From *The Poetics of the Pragmatic*.

A number of SITE's projects similarly challenge what constitutes architecture and landscape, particularly as traditionally defined by separation in an urban context. Their *Los Angeles Civic Centre*, and *Pershing Square Redevelopment*, can be read as reversals of our traditional notions of built/unbuilt, of what constitutes architecture or wall. Their work typically situates binaries pairs such as culture/building, culture/nature, building/nature within an architectural context that resists

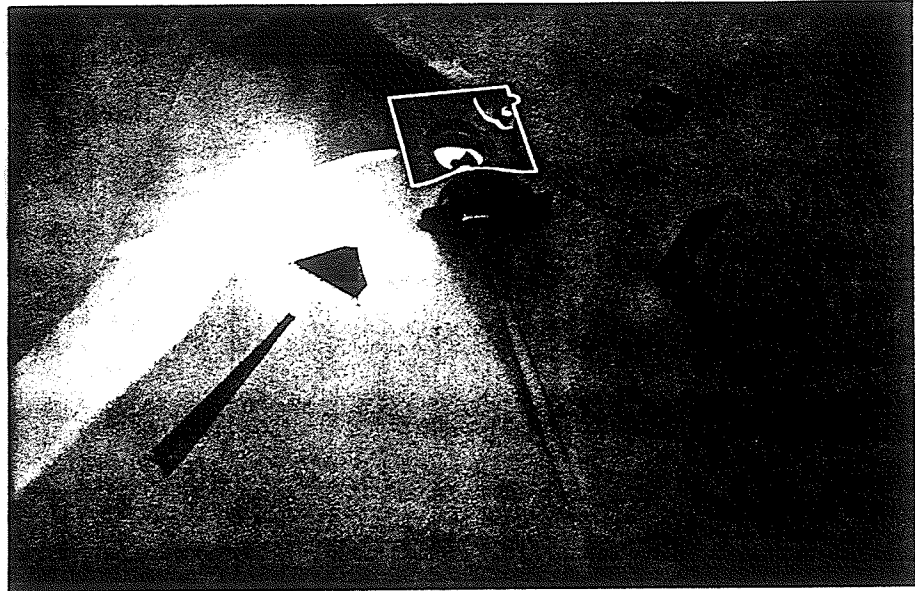


Figure 31: *Manoir D'Angoussart, Bierges, Belgium*, by Emilio Ambasz. From *The Poetics of the Pragmatic*.

traditional notions of empowerment and so challenges our assumptions of dominance of terms. While SITE often describes their work as more of a narrative than a displacement of binaries, their illustration of tension or binaries through narrative, a narrative in which there is no dialectical resolution of terms or categories points out the existence and artificiality of these terms in our society.

q u e s t i o n i n g . . .

o f e x c l u s i o n , l i m i t s , b o u n d a r i e s

Another means of challenging this non-binary thinking has been through the exploration of the limits and boundaries of these categories or frames within the discipline of architecture. As Bernard Tschumi writes:

The notion of the limit is evident in the practice of Joyce, Artaud and Bataille, who all worked at the edge of philosophy and non-philosophy, of literature and non-literature. That attention paid today to Derrida's 'deconstructive' approach also represents an interest in the work at the limit: that analysis of concepts in the most rigorous and internalized manner, but also their analysis from without, to question what these concepts and their history hide, as repression or dissimulation. Such examples suggest that there is a need to consider the question of limits in architecture.<sup>10</sup>

This thinking about limits expands to numerous fields, and so challenges modernity through other means. Traditionally, modernity divided and segregated knowledge into autonomous fields of expertise. The institutionalization of this divisive approach by the university "resulted in the autonomy of academic disciplines and the effective separation of philosophical, moral, scientific, and aesthetic discourses."<sup>11</sup> Paul Jay has observed a blurring of the lines between the discipline of architecture and other fields as a result of the structuralist critique of the compartmentalization of knowledge and its "skepticism regarding autonomous 'spheres' of culture or fields of knowledge."<sup>12</sup>

. . . . t o e x p a n d e d f i e l d s

Similarly, Rosalind Krauss describes this blurring of disciplines as an expansion of fields. In her essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," Krauss describes recent postmodern transformations in the area of sculpture.

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10. Tschumi, "Parc de la Villette," pg. 34.

11. Jay, pg. 29.

12. Ibid.

What identified modernist thinking in sculpture was, in part, a strict identification of sculpture in binary terms, such as *non-architecture / non-landscape*, built/non-built, or culture/nature. Modernist thinking demanded a "purity and separateness of the various mediums,"<sup>13</sup> and practices, each supposedly with their own internal logic and set of rules.<sup>14</sup> This point of view in sculpture reached its extreme in siteless, exclusionary, and self-referential works, conceived not in terms of what was, but what they weren't.

Postmodernism in sculpture, on the other hand, is characterized by a structural transformation and historical rupture from the binaries and exclusionary boundaries imposed by modern or post-Renaissance art, to an expanded field "generated by problematizing oppositions,." This was

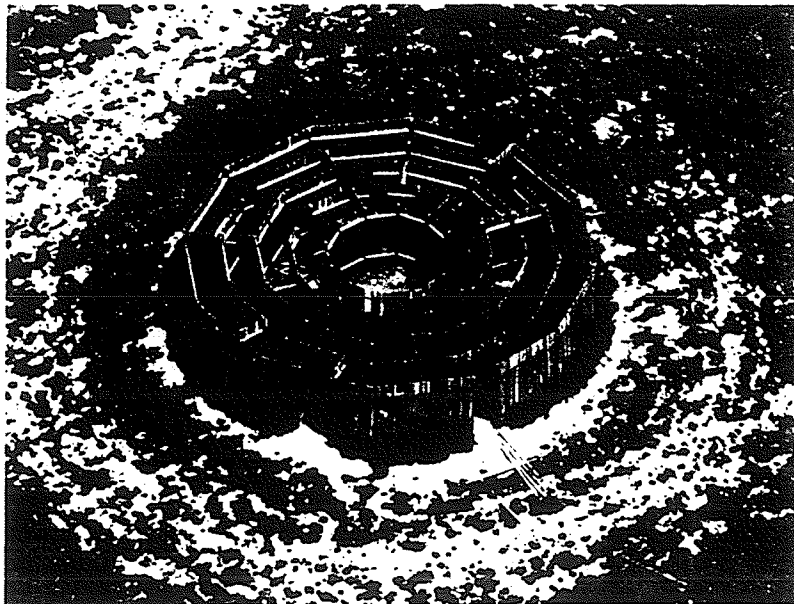


Figure 32: From "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *The Anti-Aesthetic*.

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13. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *The Anti-Aesthetic*, pg. 41.

14. *Ibid.*, pg. 33.

achieved by a manipulation of former categories and reconceptualizing an expansion of the pair *architecture/landscape*. Krauss illustrates this inclusionary expansion in Figure 32, a restructuring which provides "for an expanded but finite set of related positions"<sup>15</sup> within a given field.

Within this expanded field, postmodern practices are no longer defined in terms of categories or medias

..but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium... might be used...It follows, then, that within any one of the positions generated by the given logical space, many different mediums might be employed. It follows as well that any single artist might occupy, successively, any one of the positions. <sup>16</sup>

This description might aptly describe postmodern practices not only within the fields of art, but of architecture and other disciplines. For example, architecture in a period in which reaches outside of the strict boundaries of the building envelope to a renewed interest in landscape and the city fabric; an interest in context and relationships. Landscape architecture has moved into the rural, urban and other landscapes from its early relegation to gardens, parks and cemeteries. The pushing of boundaries in the field architecture/landscape has overlapping areas for landscape architects and environmental artists, opening possibilities previously unthinkable. (Figure 33) These transgressions might be termed architectural intertextuality.

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15. Ibid., pg. 41.

16. Ibid.

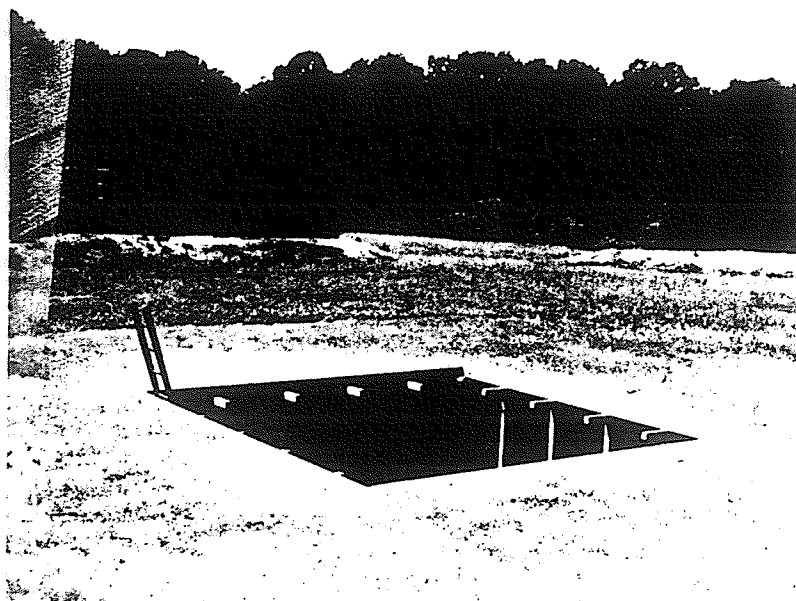


Figure 33 : *Perimeters/Pavillions/Decoys*, 1978. By Mary Miss. From "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *The Anti-Aesthetic*.

### t h e o r y / p r a c t i c e

One of the most central structural changes in modernity and practice of the 'between' has been the change in relationships between theory and practice. Where modernity set up rigorous divisions of theory/practice and reason/matter as a structure for knowledge, postmodern works attempt to cut across those boundaries. Theory and practice become inseparable in postmodern works, as they characteristically "dissolve the line between creative and critical forms."<sup>17</sup> As Bernard Tschumi writes, "it is above all the historical split between architecture and its theory that is eroded by the principles of deconstruction."<sup>18</sup> Those whose works are in primarily

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17. Foster, pg. x.

18. Tschumi, pg. 38.

theoretical fields break open their medium through a practice of the ideas they expound; those whose works are highly visual inscribe theory into their practice.

This rethinking of theory/practice relationships is distinctive not in terms of any particular discipline, but in terms of a general trend throughout all fields.<sup>19</sup> Paul Jay has described this phenomenon as 'critical theory' - an attitude or body of knowledge not particular to a discipline but of a more general deconstructive theory. As Jay writes, it 'analyses the foundational, often unexamined, assumptions that define and delimit fields of study and how scholarship and criticism in those fields must proceed.'<sup>20</sup> As it relates to landscape, 'critical theory' can be understood in terms of a general deconstructive activity which focuses on the institutionalization, or organization, and authorization, of the nature and bounds of architectural architectural categories and conventions. It is work which transgresses those boundaries.

Traditionally, landscape architecture has been a practice which has not developed a self-conscious body of theoretical knowledge.<sup>21</sup> The situation in landscape is not one in which the profession does not follow

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<sup>19</sup>. Jay, pg. 28.

<sup>20</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>. See Krog, "The Language of Modern" Landscape Architecture, Vol. 75., March/April, 1985, pp 56. Additionally, it can be noted that many recent books on landscape and garden have been written by architects, such as "The Poetics of Gardens" by Moore et al., "Green Architecture and the Agrarian Garden" by Barbara Stauffacher-Solomon. There have been some forages in more theoretical directions by those such as Hough, or Landscape Journal (but what kind of theory are we talking about here, not all research leads to theory but to extending the basis of practical knowledge.

theory or a set of possibilities, but that we have often been unaware of what those points of view or frameworks are. As with other fields, we have 'naturalized' the assumptions of the profession. In other words, landscape architects have not been particularly articulate in expressing their theories or in analyzing their views.<sup>22</sup> The result of this is a landscape profession that "has no operational body of criticism."

As an alternative to dualistic thinking, this view of 'critical theory' suggests an opportunity to integrate what are traditionally seen as separate categories, to form a new set of relations between landscape practice and theory, and between architecture and landscape. This involves self-conscious practices informed by theory and a reconceptualization of culture and nature. It might also involve practices which challenge assumptions from which theory is then generated. Additionally, to go beyond the functional and the pragmatic in design and the dominant determinant of the organization of space and the determinant or form.

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<sup>22</sup>. Peter Jacobs.

*P o s t m o d e r n R e a d i n g s o f  
t h e U r b a n L a n d s c a p e :  
A C a s e S t u d y*

---

*b a c k g r o u n d : t h e  
c o m m u n i t y o f S t . N o r b e r t*

The issues related to the community of St. Norbert are complex; a number of cultural, historical and environmental factors interweave to form the present fabric. As a result, St. Norbert has the potential to capitalize upon its unique situation, an opportunity for a rich symbolic expressiveness that is sensitive to its historic, cultural, and natural characteristics.

The current physical form of St. Norbert neglects, negates, or subdues, many of the features or characteristics that comprise its identity as a community - these factors live on in the psyche of long term residents and other interested parties, however, often once they pass away, so to may this knowledge. Typically, these characteristics involve historical and cultural connections to the environment, and a sense of place, meaning, and symbolism, which situate and/or differentiates St. Norbert from other communities.

Not only is St. Norbert one of the oldest communities in Western Canada, but it is also the site of a historical event, crucial to determining

the direction of settlement and land subdivision in the prairies. St. Norbert is one of the sites of the Riel Resistance in which Louis Riel and a group of Metis fought for the recognition of Manitoba as a province, and to maintain their existing river lots. Essentially this rebellion was a political, cultural and land-based issue.

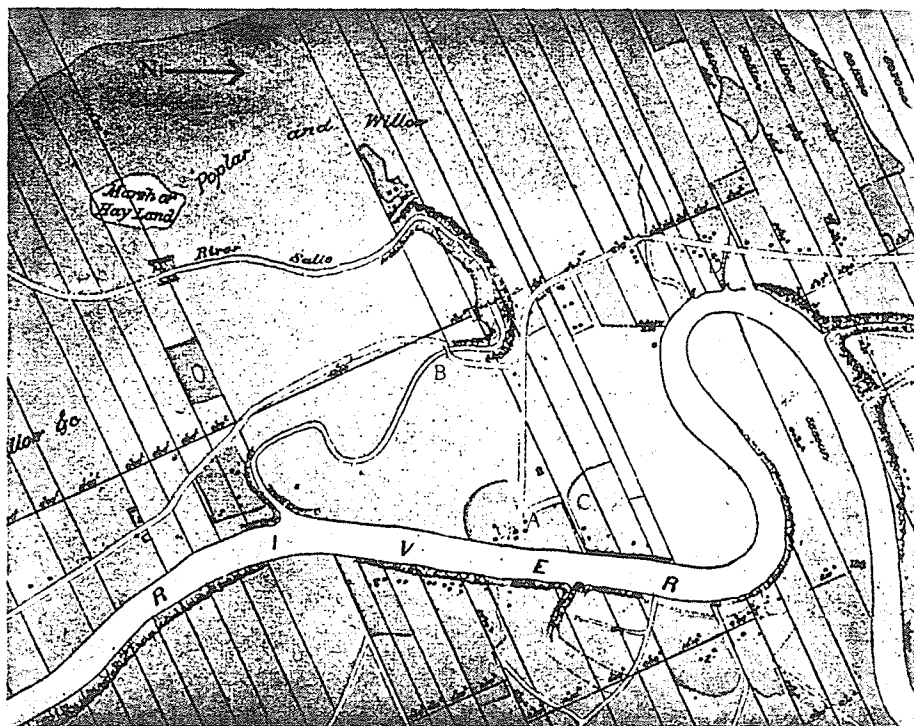


Figure 34: Map of River Lots in the St. Norbert Area. 1894 From Manitoba Archives

The river lots were strongly connected to the natural features of an area. One of the predominant features of these lots were their connection to the rivers, the woodlots and the prairie, and as trade developed, the Pembina trail, which connected each lot to other communities. For the Metis, this form was integral to their way of life, an important to be connection to all features inherent in the prairie landscape: the river, the woodlot and the prairie. This form also bridged the Indian sense of

communal closeness to the land and the Western concern with settlement and trade.

The rebellion can be considered a turning point for the community of St. Norbert, for although the Metis "won the battle, they lost the war," as these people won the recognition of the province of Manitoba, but only a temporary recognition of their land claims. Later events and laws imposed from the east prevented the Metis from keeping their claims to the land resulting in an exodus of Metis to Saskatchewan. However, the existing river lots retained their status as a legal form of land division along many of the waterways of the prairies, contrasting the grid pattern later imposed over the rest of the prairies.



Figure 35: Riel and several of his Council and supporters. From *Manitoba Archives*.

The Riel Resistance then, also signaled a cultural turning point, as it marked the beginning of a chain of events leading to the influx of

'settlers' from the east. It also marks the beginning of the exodus of many of the Metis from St Norbert and the newly recognized province of Manitoba, transforming the cultural fabric of St. Norbert from a Metis to a French-Canadian community

Though in some ways the contrast from Metis to French Canadian cultures must have been abrupt, this change also retained some forms of continuity, as the people remained essentially agricultural, French-speaking, and Catholic. For both the Metis and the French, religion and the church were central to their way of life. In this light some of the religious icons of the community can be seen as representative of both of these peoples.

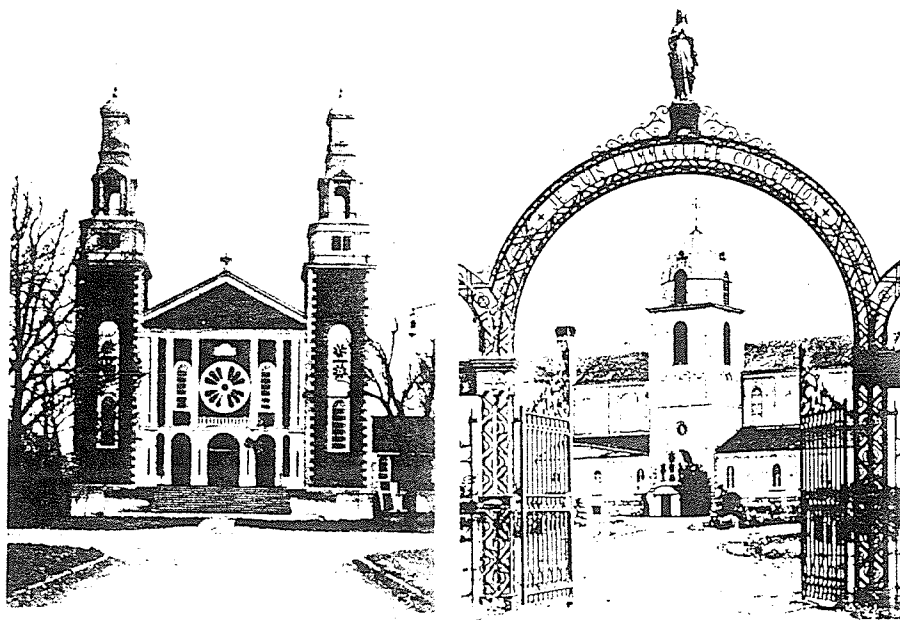


Figure 36: St. Norbert Church, and Notre Dame de Lourdes sites.

Contemporary St. Norbert has retained a number of important religious sites/buildings/monuments from French settlement, such as the St. Norbert Church and the Notre Dame de Lourdes site which was home to

the Trappist Fathers. Though at one time these sites were both spiritual and physical foci of town life, forming part of a sense of a cohesive whole, these sites in some sense now appear as isolated islands within a transformed fabric and cultural milieu. These sites, however, retain the potential to contribute to an overall improvement of the fabric, but increasingly are threatened by a lack of planning, poor zoning regulations, and continued development in sensitive areas.

At present, the land is often conceived in 'developable' and 'non-developable' terms. Land which has not been developed or infilled due to topographical considerations, such as the seasonal risk of flooding, are often seen as 'left-over' parcels - not as valued as other lands. However, these same lands, often form the most interesting areas, as they are adjacent to the rivers and have retained their natural vegetation. Though these areas are numerous and diverse, from within the community, there



Figure 37: The La Salle River near its confluence with the Red River. From Historic Resources Branch.

little sense of their presence for the focus of community development has been not to these features, but to the religious institutions and later to trade and commerce along Pembina Highway. This is typical of most development within Winnipeg, which has turned its back to the natural features of the area, particularly its rivers.

St. Norbert, particularly along Pembina highway, presently lacks both structural and visual coherence, community identity, transitions to the historical fabric, and no longer physically represents its origins as a Metis and French parish. In space-structural terms, the area lacks a sense of organizational features (neither formal nor informal) which add a sense of visual and physical coherence and identification.

#### *t h e p r o c e s s / p r o p o s a l*

A modernist approach to the urban landscape often strived for a notion of universality and a primacy of functional consideration, frequently leading to homogeneous communities without sense of place. By contrast, this proposal strives for a sense of visual and physical coherence, complexity, and a regional and site-specific approach to the urban landscape.

The proposal is composed of three separate interventions into the fabric of St. Norbert. They are seen as three issues that a landscape architect might propose: a statement concerning the community and its heritage, an approach to integration and connections, and a proposal for future

residential expansion. Though each intervention is derived from a different issue and subsequent response, the resulting composite extends the richness of each intervention, for the meetings and juxtapositions of these interventions strengthen and add an additional layer of complexity to the individual intents. One approach common to each intervention is the attempt to use the fabric of the community itself to express community process. The following sections are brief explanations of each of the components.

*Marks, Lines, and Interventions*

(Plate 1)

The concept of 'line' is both an abstraction of land allotment methods and a literal transposition of legal land notations and delineations - the line as a means of representing legal land concepts. Traditionally, but particularly since the growing privatization of the commons in the 16th and 17th centuries, the line has increasingly come to designate ownership, boundary and division of the land, a particular Western notion of the environment, one associated with values of domination and control, the subject and privatization. With the advent of 'colonization,' these values harshly contrasted with native concepts of the land, a conflict in which white ownership eventually prevailed.

This proposal is inspired by these concepts of line, and the early river lot patterns established in the prairie landscape. These lines have been translated into a general 'planting scheme' for the community, one which traverses through its entire fabric. As these lines encounter various buildings and surfaces, they are transformed in each situation: from a

variety of planting materials, slashes through existing vegetation, or interventions in the pavement. For instance, as the lines cross roadways, it becomes a strip of paving surface which contrasts with asphalt. As a line passes through St. Norbert school, it can take the form of a painted line, or a slice through the wall. This reminder of historic patterns is a continual reference to the Metis and French heritage of this community.

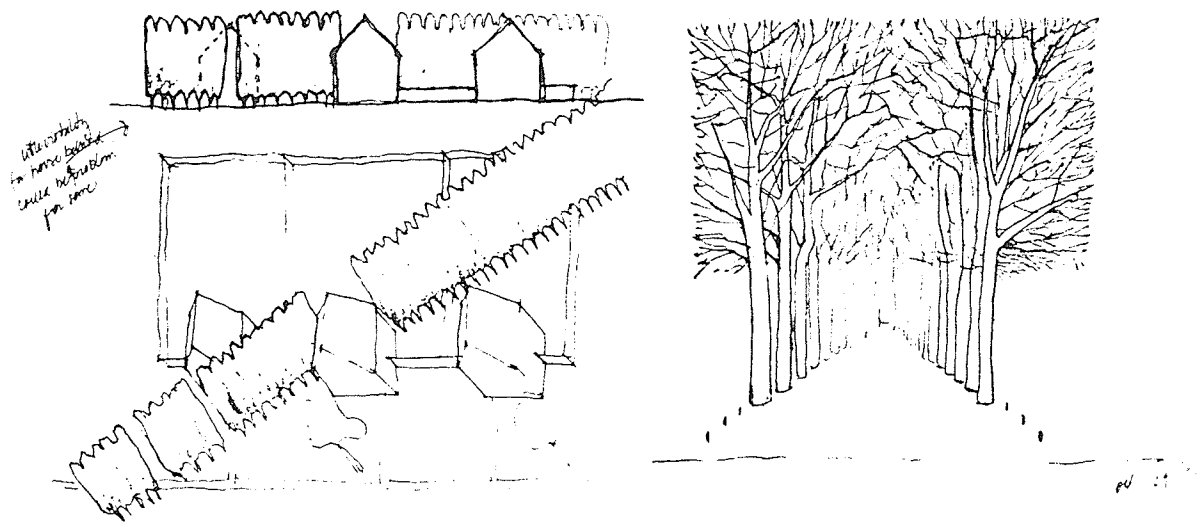


Figure 38: Sketches showing planting variations for line interventions.

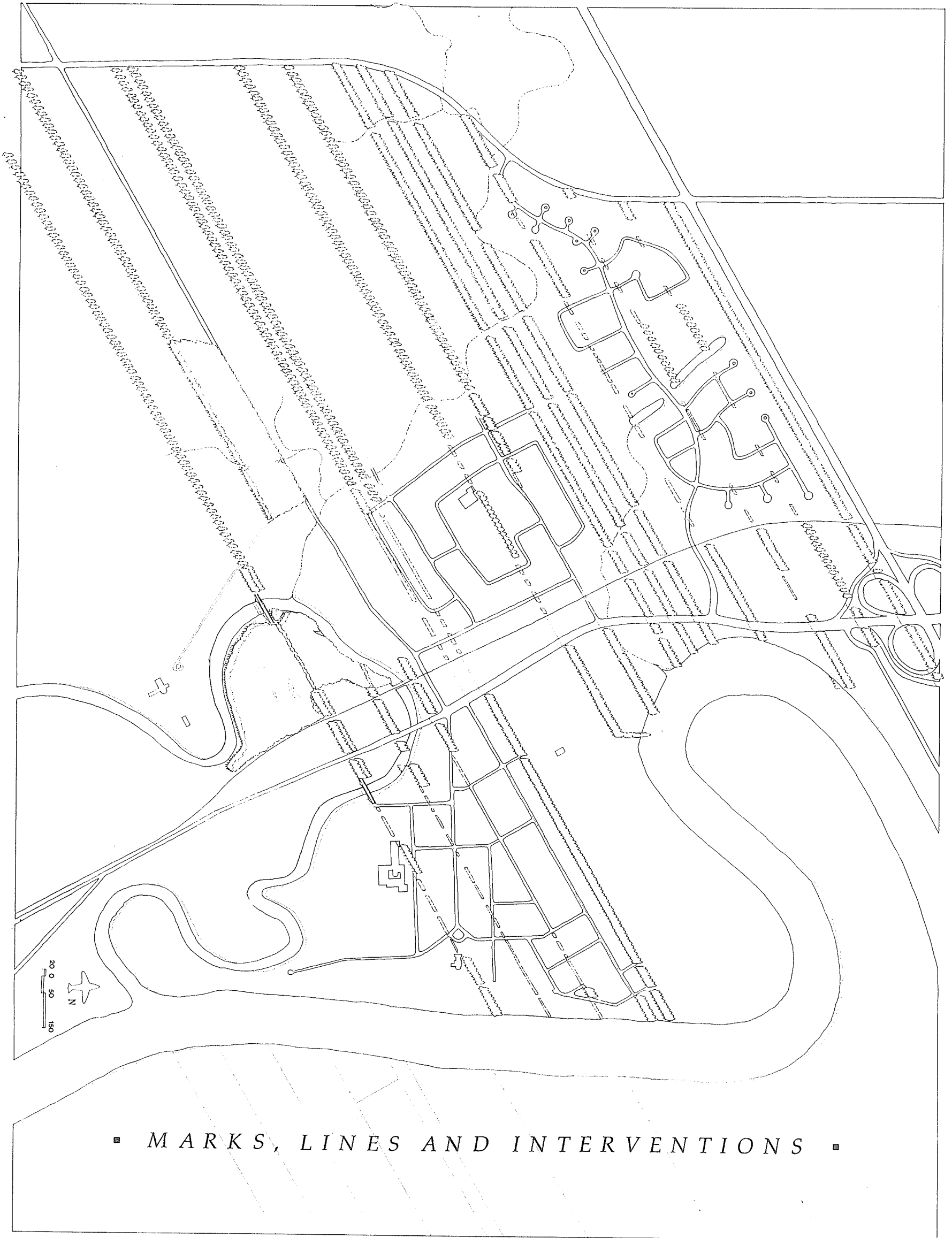
At the same time, these variations in form create both discontinuous and diverse lines, ones that may be read as a series of shorter lines. The discontinuity of these lines subvert modernist notions of completeness or unity, but remain coherent as they can be conceptually connected.

The logic of western 'boundaries' and 'divisions' is subverted in these discontinuous traverses through the landscape - the lines are no longer intended to subdivide and differentiate one person's land from another, rather, what is on either side is similar, instead different. The

normal 'divisive' quality of line is transformed, as these lines are embedded as a characteristic of the urban fabric, the existing fabric remains 'whole' in the sense that it is not been further divided.

These lines and the contemporary land organization 'collide' at certain sites, illustrating a discontinuity of one older system to the present patterns, perhaps most evident in the area of Parc la Salle; in places where the land subdivisions respect the older patterns, the systems run parallel to each other. The use of trees as a planting scheme recalls the windbreaks of the rural landscape, however, their typical context is reversed and inserted into an urban context, creating a contrast and juxtaposition of urban and rural elements.

This proposal is one which invites the participation of the residents of St. Norbert. Should they wish, they can continue these lines across their private property in some form of their choosing. This would contribute even further to a concept of discontinuity and diversity. Should they choose not to participate, the flexibility of the lines accommodates this possibility. Participation could make this proposal an educational process about the design and history of the area. Participation as part of the process is also important to developing and maintaining a sense of community. At the other extreme, this concept is artifactual, present and long term. It is a personal vision, which may also reflect the views of others.



▪ MARKS, LINES AND INTERVENTIONS ▪

*Framework for a Continuum of Waterways, Historic Features and Native*

*Plant Communities*

(plate 2)

St. Norbert is located near the forks of two significant waterways, the Red River and the La Salle. However, from most areas in the community, this is not immediately evident, as development has focused inward upon the man-made aspects of the city. At the same time, St. Norbert has been fortunate in retaining some large areas of river bottom forest along these waterways which are rich in a variety of native species, due to the unsuitability of these lands for building, and the limit or barrier to development provided by the dike erected to protect the community from flood waters. Though these isolated areas are somewhat accessible to the public, these access points are difficult to find.

The intent here is to connect and create a sense of place, from not only to access the community to the water ways and plant communities, but also to connect those aspects of the community of cultural significance, such as the farmer's market as part of a system. Perhaps most the most significant cultural features are the historic St. Norbert Church, the Notre Dame de Lourdes site, the former X-Kalay building, and the Roman Catholic Cemetery.

An atomistic view of the city and fragmentary zoning practices have resulted in traditional means of land allocation within cities which tend to parcel the 'green' or 'open spaces' as blocks of space within the fabric. By contrast, these spaces are seen as woven into the urban fabric both through the allocation of public land, a low maintenance, 'soft'

pathway system with marked entrances (through gateways, stairs, etc.) which create more of a sense of presence at major entry points. The forests are to be left as close to their natural state as possible, not to turn it into a pastoral, or picturesque type parkland, in order to maintain the integrity of the vegetation and of the natural drainage systems.

This approach is also extended outside of the St. Norbert community proper, to the newer residential areas to the west and north-west in order to tie them into a larger fabric. Due to development and farming practices in these areas, little of the original native vegetation remains and the natural drainage systems have been diminished. A revegetation of native plant material is proposed along the waterways. These waterways follow the natural drainage systems of the area, which in this area are proposed to collect the surface run-off from the area to flow into the system. While recent development in Winnipeg has utilized retention ponds for the drainage of surface run-off, this connects two existing ponds as part of the larger, natural system.

Bridges are proposed along Pembina highway and other major roadways, as they cross the waterways. This serves two purposes, one, to maintain the integrity of the river valleys, and two, to locate and/or announce the boundaries of the community - and entry and exit points along Pembina Highway. These bridges begin to differentiate St. Norbert from the rest of the continuous commercial strip which forms Pembina Highway.



▪ FRAMEWORK for a CONTINUUM OF WATERWAYS, HISTORIC FEATURES, AND NATIVE PLANT COMMUNITIES ▪

*Framework for the Extension of the Community of St. Norbert* (plate 3)

Inevitably, expansion of the City of Winnipeg will reach the areas west of St. Norbert proper. This proposal addresses this scenario, showing that new communities can be generated that are sensitive to their context and contribute a unique sense of place.

Generated from the river lot patterns, this form follows the same east-west orientations. More than a pattern however, one of the significant features of the river lots were their access to river, woodlot, and prairie for everyone. In attempting to provide similar access, the streets are terminated by public, rather than private lands. At the eastern portion, the waterway and native plant communities create an accessible edge; to the west, the streets are open to views of the prairie, an area that has been designated by the city of Winnipeg as a public reserve of land. Thus, movement through the community, always retains visible and physical access to elements of the prairie landscape. This is a reversal of the traditional approach Winnipeg has taken to development along its rivers and retention ponds, where the land adjacent to water often becomes private property.

This approach provides for multiple foci for this community. In keeping with the integration of water and plant communities, a central feature of this development is a water 'strip' and promenade, creating a public spine through the community. This waterway is a man-made body, foreign to the area, and is signified as such through its linear geometry.

To continue the concept of pedestrian access and connections, smaller green spaces weave through the community, to the green spaces and central water body.

To facilitate a heterogeneous composition of housing types and residential types, a variety of lot sizes are used here. This heterogeneity currently exists in St. Norbert, but is a reversal of the traditional exclusionary composition of suburban developments which aim for a homogeneous population compositions.

*Postmodern Readings of the Urban Landscape: a Composite* (plate 4)

At one time, the edges of the three districts in the St. Norbert area were perhaps typical of most suburban development, indistinct and undefinable. What emerges from the composite is four polycentric communities bordered in integrated into a natural and cultural network. The juxtaposition of these three proposals creates the opportunity for even further interventions:

The addition of new public buildings, whose uses are as yet unspecified, in order to continue the tradition of local architectural focal points. These would be located at meeting points of roadways and the lines which traverse the community.

The extension to St. Norbert is given access to the Red River along one of the river lot lines, reinforcing the concept of connection and of the 'Marks, Lines, and Interventions.'

Pedestrian bridges to link the Notre Dame site and St. Norbert proper are also located along these lines.

The roadways of the extension to St. Norbert are transformed into boulevards as they meet the rows of trees, which follow the old property lines.



▪ FRAMEWORK for the  
EXTENSION OF THE COMMUNITY OF  
ST. NORBERT ▪



▪ POSTMODERN READINGS  
OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE: A COMPOSITE ▪

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