

*By way of an Introduction: These pages contain individual chapters from my 1990 book, Postmodern Sophistications. I have obtained the rights to the essays am making them available separately. The entire text of the book is also available on Research Gate.*

*The underlying aim of this collection of essays was to question the opposition between the Sophists and Plato. That classic dispute has been the model for many discussions of tensions within our society:: on the one hand you have the clever manipulative salesmen who care nothing about truth. On the other hand the rigorous scientific investigation that never quite makes contact with politics. Rootless nihilism vs. naturally grounded values. Anarchy vs. Rules.*

*In this book I developed a pragmatic middleground, using themes from Heidegger and Dewey; in later writings I rely more on Hegel. But the point remains the same: don't listen to the Straussians and others who try to force on our politics or art or philosophy a simple opposition between truth-loving traditionalists (Socrates) and flaky relativistic postmoderns (the Sophists). It was not so simple in Greece and it's not so simple today.*

*Part of the book deals with postmodern critiques of rational knowledge, with Lyotard and Habermas on center stage. Their opposition between postmodern and modern views remains relevant, although post-1990 developments in deconstruction and critical theory have widened and deepened the debate. The points made in these essays remain useful, if not complete.*

*The second part of the book deals with architecture. The word postmodern has gone out of fashion in architecture. But the earlier use of the term for an attempt to bring substantive content into formal modernity retains important.*

*My conclusions about postmodern architecture's failure to escape modern distance from history also remain true, as does my argument that that*

*proclaimed modern distance from history is itself an illusion, that we are more embedded in history than the moderns wanted to think, although that embodiment is not as total and restrictive as we have imagined true of our ancestors.*

*If you find any of these ideas useful, true, provocative, let me know. If you find them absurd or useless airy nothings, I'd still be delighted to learn from your reactions.*

*David Kolb, January 2018*

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*This essay looks at ways of expanding our historical limits and languages.*

## **Chapter 10. Extending Architectural Vocabularies**

Architects work within a field of design possibilities, but we should avoid conceiving them as surveyors of that field instead of its inhabitants. Limits look different when you live within them rather than look down upon them from above.

Modernist theory celebrates the breaking of limits; the modern self, freed from the blinders of traditional culture, becomes capable of exploring an endless field of creative possibilities. If not all these possibilities can be realized, this is because we do not possess a perfect science or infinite resources, but such restrictions function quite differently than did the traditional limitations that kept people from surveying the wider field.

I argued in the last chapter that no architect really works within an unlimited field of possibilities. My point was that a vocabulary is needed to open possibilities for knowledge and creativity, and those possibilities remain qualitatively limited. But the vocabulary is only one third of the story. There is also the question how we are to conceive change and self-criticism in architectural vocabularies, if there is no steady conquest of

unlimited possibilities. And there is the question of self-conscious multiplicity: how do we build differently together?

Of all this century's arts architecture has been the most infected with the notion of progress and with the idea that tradition as such could be put behind us. It has also most actively retained the nineteenth century ideal of the form-giving genius. In reaction there have been discussions of architectural semiotics that emphasize the importance of the vocabularies within with architects work. Many of these discussions unfortunately reinforce the picture of the architect as a floating subjectivity rather than an inhabitant. If we avoid that danger we still face the problems of change and multiplicity. In this chapter I address the question of change.

### Limits

A limit is where something ends, or where something begins. It depends which way you are going. Experienced as an end a limit is a frustration, as when we come to a wall or a coastline and want to continue. A limit can only be experienced as an end if we want to go farther, if, as Hegel says, we are already in some way beyond the limit. A limit that does not block a desire is not experienced as a shock. As a beginning, when you walk in through the gate, a limit opens possibilities. This is the deeper function; without limits as beginnings we could not experience the definite desires and objects that bring limits as endings.

For the moderns, any traditional architectural vocabulary restricted the possibilities for design solutions; by contrast, modern architecture was to open all possibilities to the desire for rational control and elegant function. For the ironic postmoderns, both the traditional styles and the modern ban on history are felt to restrict the play of reference and quotation; postmodern architecture is to access all styles while belonging to none. In both modernism and ironic postmodernism traditional vocabularies are seen as imposing limitations on some wider field.

But vocabularies also work as beginnings; they set up the contrasts that open possibilities. For example, language rules may cut the field of possible word sequences down to those that are grammatical. But language rules could not select the grammatical

sequences if other limits as beginnings had not set up the contrasts that differentiated the words from one another. This allowed the combinatorial operations that generated the field in the first place. Limits as beginnings make possible limits as endings.

If possibilities depend on contrasts, and if there is no master language to provide the definitive set of contrasting basic elements, then there is no total, widest field of possibilities containing as subsets all the more limited vocabularies.[begin note] The spatial image of a "field" of possibilities misleads us by suggesting some indefinite extent, perhaps divided here and there by walls that we can see over. It suggests that possibilities lie spread out before the distanced eye, to be organized or classified as we see fit.[end note]

Architects use more than one vocabulary and those vocabularies relate along axes of comparison with salience and distance, as I discussed in the last chapter. The resulting complex of vocabularies does not form a strict system but a loosely related assemblage that is itself limited and in contrast with other personal or regional assemblages. These in turn allow moves in various larger social codes and games. Such assemblages are not selections from some master list of possibilities; they are what open possibilities for the architect. They are something the architect inhabits, not something the architect stares at.

The architect is aware of the existence of other vocabularies and complexes of styles. Influenced by "the tradition of the new," we seek for novel solutions. So, as the limits of the current vocabularies open possibilities, they also function as barriers. But merely willing that it happen will not create a new style nor change the current relations between vocabularies. Breakthroughs happen but not on order. The resulting emphasis on novelty can distort everyday practice. The success of organized science proves that it is possible to set up training and institutional arrangements that encourage breakthroughs while preserving a decent level of everyday "normal science." It is doubtful whether current architectural training and institutional arrangements succeed so well at this double goal.

### Changes and Metaphors

How then do the limits change and new possibilities emerge? We do not merely

step across the limits as we might climb over a stone wall into a neighboring field that we could see all along. But neither do we make a sally into empty space. Our steps firm up the ground as we move, as firm as it ever is, and we move from and with what we already are. We do not create out of nothing; we do not choose the influences and connections of our creation. But though there are always connections, there are no rules, no algorithms to generate the new possibilities. Rules and algorithms operate within languages; they need already distinguished and contrasting elements to operate upon. Changing the set of elements requires another kind of operation.

I will call that operation *metaphor*. This use of the term stems from Max Black, and has been developed by Nelson Goodman and Paul Ricoeur. They have enlarged the theory of metaphor to include more than the striking use of names and adjectives that since Aristotle has been taken as central to metaphor. That older conception makes metaphor a deviant operation of substitution within an already established set of elements and rules. In the newer theory, systems interact in an operation by which new elements and rules can be created through deviant use of the old.

This use of the term *metaphor* also differs from that which has become customary in structuralist and Lacanian circles. Their association of metaphor with substitution is closer in spirit to the Aristotelian tradition. My use also differs from discussions of buildings that resemble another object, such as Saarinen's "Yale Whale" skating rink. For the general theory of interactive metaphor, cf. Black 1962, Goodman 1976, Ricoeur 1975. Goodman and Elgin (1987, chapter 2) extend Goodman's theories about artistic meaning to architecture. This theory does not demand that there exist ultimate basic elements at the root of all vocabularies, elements that would be the first uncombined elements in some basic language. But it does demand that there be relatively settled expectations that can be violated.

Metaphor in this sense expands the limits of what can be said. This does not involve simple importation of a foreign element. If Venturi's country house quotes an English original, that is not in itself a metaphor. What is necessary, in Ricoeur's words, is that some *impertinence* be committed. Some expectations become frustrated, some systems broken, or two systems collided. This impertinence leads to new pertinence.

For instance, in Portland, Maine, a renovation of some row houses blended references (in the mansard roof) to the houses in the neighborhood with references (in the facade) to the Greek Revival granite post and lintel storefronts common elsewhere in Portland.

During the design process the U.S. Department of the Interior, which was involved in the financing and historic-preservation approval of the project, brought objection to the roof form on the grounds that it was inappropriate to the period references of the building's facade. . . . I would suggest that the composition is exciting precisely because it is "incorrect." It demands of the historian as well as of the passerby a reexamination of the building's parts in order to discover the significance of their juxtaposition. (S. Moore 1983, 11)

This is a case where incorrectness, "impertinence" in Ricoeur's terms, seems to be in the process of creating new pertinence. Notice that this mixture of vocabularies is not a ironic comment about the vocabularies in question, but an attempt to expand signification.

We can distinguish several kinds of intersection that create new meaning. One transfers a single item (for example we speak of a blue mood but not of green and violet moods.) The second transfers a whole set of interrelated items (for example, we might begin to talk of moods using the full range of color predicates; this would also reinvigorate the dead metaphor about blue).

Examples of the transfer of single elements might include the quotations in Graves' *Riverbend* or in the new Olin library at Wesleyan University. It is possible for such transfers to become normalized and no longer commit the impertinence that creates new meaning. Such routinization enlarges the target vocabulary. As Ricoeur says, in the dictionary there are no metaphors, only multiple meanings (1977, 96).

The second, more complex type of change brings into a vocabulary a whole field of elements already interrelated by their own rules. This is a more productive transfer. For example, in Bofill's huge apartment blocks the classical orders and French royal styles are

put into the vocabulary of modern modular housing. Kenzo Tange combined the *béton brut* of late Le Corbusier with traditional Japanese protruding beams and other shapes from the native wooden architecture. In these cases, new possibilities were created that permitted whole families of new forms.

We can distinguish these transfers from another operation that changes the combination rules. For instance, when the classical orders began to be built on top of one another something new was created out of the old contrasts. Such an operation can also twist, fragment, and recombine the relations within a given system. Miriam Gusevich (1987) refers to these operations as paradigmatic and syntagmatic transgressions, and illustrates them in the work of Le Corbusier. This move is seen in many postmodern buildings, since it allows for ironic and parodic effects.

There is still another type of operation, one that is akin to the creation of a new language. This has no immediate parallel in literary operations on the level of the word or sentence, but it resembles the way a new genre of text might be created by a creative misunderstanding of an earlier genre. Sometimes architects create new vocabularies that rely on former buildings but are not directly composed of the intended elements of the original vocabularies. Buildings are experienced in many ways other than through architectural analysis. So we might "cut up" a building differently than was intended. For instance, an architect might visit Bali and bring home new forms. The traveler might not have transferred directly from the intended vocabulary of Borobudur, but nonetheless the architect might develop new forms for home use.

The modern movement itself perhaps involved such a transfer. Architects visited factories, railroad stations, and industrial yards. When they came home they developed a new analysis of wall, support, and function. They had not necessarily learned the vocabularies of the engineers who build the industrial buildings. Perhaps those builders were thinking in terms of an older vocabulary where steel beams were akin to columns. Someone might build something very close to a curtain wall while still seeing it as a version of columns and masonry. A visitor might re-analyze the construction and come up with new forms and vocabularies. This type of change differs from the earlier ones in that it does not involve the intersection of already differentiated prior vocabularies.

The various operations I have discussed can be combined with one another. All of them change the current vocabulary or the relations of salience among vocabularies. The result is new possibilities. This does not mean, however, that our architectural possibilities keep on expanding. For when languages change possibilities are lost as well as gained. If limits are beginnings as well as endings, changing the limits can destroy meanings and combinations made possible by the old differences. In the context of today's styles, we cannot use the classical orders with the meanings Vitruvius found in them. This is a story that discussions of architectural change seldom tell.

In none of these cases does the architect create out of nothing. Though they cannot be programmed or predicted, such innovations become retrospectively comprehensible. Like any metaphor they can be traced back, if not exhaustively paraphrased. Also, like any metaphor they do not respect previous divisions between what is essential and what is accidental. One vocabulary may define a division between the essence of the building and some accidental added decoration, but this may be twisted or abolished by a metaphorical change.[begin note] Vattimo (1988, 87-88) argues that it is typical of postmodern thought not to make distinctions between the central identity of a work of art and added decorative touches. This seems right, especially for postmodern literature, but throughout the string of metaphorical changes and traces that make up the tradition such identities are less stable than they seem.[end note]

It might seem that architectural metaphor cannot provide self-criticism. As Klotz says, "playing with an order is predicated on one's acceptance of it" (1988, 392). But this is to mistake irony for metaphor. As I pointed out earlier, irony establishes distance from some order, perhaps reverses it, but does not challenge its internal structure. Habermas is right to see in this a conservative move. Metaphor, on the other hand, reaches into the order and changes the internal relations. It makes new spaces for thought and life; the old order is challenged when its limits are transgressed into a different space. Criticism need not be located above the language or work being criticized. It can take place through an extension from within, or a crossbreeding from without, that wins new territory. Criticism need not be aimed at some unitary future goal; as Kuhn would say concerning the advance of science, criticism is *from*, not *to*.

My concern has been with extending architectural vocabularies. However, there are other kinds of operations that can be performed on those vocabularies. They can be manipulated for ironic or parodic effects that do not extend the language. They can also be combined and transgressed in ways which bring into prominence, and perhaps question, not so much the architectural vocabulary itself but the boundaries and oppositions within the wider social codes and games into which the architectural moves are always inserted. This last is an important operation for helping us discover where we live. (Cf. McCumber (1989) for an extended discussion of the becoming of meaning as seen in Heidegger, and how this relates to social context and interaction as seen in Habermas.)

There are dangers in conceiving of change as I have suggested. This way of thinking fits all too well into the standard modern discussion of subjects and objects, intended meanings and unitary forms, where all the initiative is on the side of the powerful self that organizes and reorganizes a world of neutral data.

But there is no self above it all; we are set in motion by and within our languages. We are more at the mercy of language than we are its masters, and in so far as architecture involves something akin to language it shares the devious ways language has with us. Nor is there a master language, nor a first language without traces of previous metaphorical construction. Nor, finally, do the operations I described have to be intentional in order to produce new meaning. Juxtapositions and crossings happen, and there is no way to avoid unintended contrasts. We may by an effort of abstraction perceive the older buildings in lower Manhattan as they looked before the World Trade Center changed their scale, but we cannot will away the new contrasts.

A more apt criticism of the previous section would be that while it conceives of meaning as differential, it does think sufficiently about meaning as deferral, and so stays within the orbit of repetition and an architecture still policed by the traditional *telos* (cf. Benjamin 1988). To this charge I would plead guilty, since I am not convinced that deconstructive theories and experiments are useful for the body of architecture that must fill the fabric of our cities. In the final three chapters I argue that deconstructive monuments must remain exceptional and marginal if they are to avoid collapsing into a new metaphysical discourse.

## Many Forms

In the remainder of this chapter I will soften the discussion of architectural vocabularies by pointing out how little the form and meaning of buildings depends on our intentions. I argued in the last chapter against the idea that there is a master language of architecture. All buildings do not share a basic vocabulary. Now I want to argue that even a single building does not have a unique form or vocabulary, either over time or in the present. To whatever extent a building is one unique *parole*, it does not belong to one unique *langue*.

My discussion will concern the geometric and perceptual properties of buildings and the receptions they undergo. There are more radical things to be said about architectural form and intention. But the ordinary concepts are much used, and even in their terms there is no unique form (or intention) belonging to a building. This means that there is no unique signifier that is the building.

There are several varieties of form that a building may possess. I will distinguish, first, the *operative form* or structure of a building; this includes the particular way the loads are carried, heat and ventilation are distributed, and other "engineering" problems solved. This form could be described through diagrams of stress and bracing, maps of ductwork, and so on.

There is also the *geometrical form* of the building as a total volume; this could be described by an equation, though the mathematics would be too complex to be useful. This form includes everything: the exterior volume and detail, and the interior spaces with their detail. A description of the geometrical form of a building is not from any particular point of view. We cannot directly perceive a volume this way, but we can build it up by repeated viewings from various angles.

Then there is what I will call the *presented form* of the building; this is a projection of the geometrical form from a particular perspective or a particular route through the building, and in a particular built context of other shapes. The presented form could be recorded by photographs of a building in context.

Also there is the *perceived form(s)* of the building; this is how the presented form

is taken by a person who interacts with it with a given history and background of community practices and architectural vocabularies. This background provides the contrasts within which the building is perceived. The perceived form also involves routes through and sequences within the building. There is no way of picturing this form, but it can be suggested by montage techniques.

There is in addition what might be called the *lived form* of the building, which is not describable in the subject-object terms used for the others. This belongs to the inhabiting body and its movements as a sense of possible motions, gestures, and styles of action. This form is not perceived; it is present in our habitual patterns and ways of interacting with the building. It is tempting to regard this as the basis from which the other forms are abstracted, but the sets of contrasts that involve the other forms have their own independence. And a lived gesture has no meaning apart from its own sets of contrasts.

A building can have only one operative form, but that could change without affecting the other forms (for instance, the heating system could be redesigned or new bracing introduced without any visible effect). The geometrical form of a building is by definition total and unique, but it has no single decomposition into component forms. A building may have many presented forms from different points of view, and from the same point of view over time, depending on changes in the environment. A building can have many perceived forms at once, depending on the history, practices, and vocabularies of those who use it.

Whatever theory of the meaning of architecture one adopts, the perceived form (and in some ways the lived form) is its visual and spatial signifier, not the meaning signified. Signifiers are constituted by contrast; for example, the letter "p" could remain the same shape while those of its features that stand in contrasts might vary from one system to another. In the Roman alphabet "p" is distinguished from "o" by the stem's presence, from "b" by the stem's position. In other alphabets the same shape might be distinguished perhaps by the size of the loop, or by a circular rather than oval loop, or by being on the line rather than above it. A building has many features that can stand in different contrasts, so the building can be or include many different signifiers. The total geometrical form of the building may remain constant, but the building does not stand in signifying contrasts

by virtue of its total geometrical form. It "means" by virtue of this or that feature. A building's total geometrical form can be analyzed into features and routes in many ways, which can stand in many contrasts, so a building can be a variety of signifiers.

Operative form concerns how the building works at its material tasks of keeping erect, resisting the wind, providing light and ventilation, and so on. There might be several operative systems of bracing, or several systems of ventilation, but these add together in the one operative form. Operative form is what buildings share with machines. An automobile transmission works as it does because of the shape of the various gears and the mountings that bring them into contact with one another in definite ways. So also a building's steel skeleton or flying buttresses or ductwork functions through its shape and arrangement. Operative form is defined by contrasts with other technical means of achieving the same goals.

There is little ambiguity about operative form but its status is not quite so straightforward as it might seem. Part of the modern movement's aim was to reduce the difference between operative and perceived form. If that difference could be reduced to zero the operative structural form would stand honestly revealed. But this cannot be achieved. In the Seagram building, for example, fire regulations prevented Mies from expressing the structural beams directly; the steel beams visible on the facade are added doubles of the actual supports. But even if the actual beams could have been exposed, the operative form would not have been "honestly" expressed. The presentation of operative form, perhaps by uncovering trusses and ductwork, immediately puts those items into other contrasts. They are now visually involved; they now contrast with other ways the building might look, not just with other ways of supporting loads or distributing air. They stand implicated with history, with alternative technologies, and with other possible ways of expressing or not expressing the operative structure. Then there are the associations gathered from similar buildings, from the use, and from conventional meanings of the resulting form.

Foster's Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank building makes dramatic use of an external supporting structure from which the building is visibly suspended, and of the "sunscoop" that brings light to the atrium. But these structural elements are doubled when they are

presented. They are available in different contexts at once; the play of the contexts and meanings is enjoyable, but it is not the harmonious perception of a unitary form.

Turning the point around, we can imagine a building with its operative form hidden and the appearance of another structural system pasted on (perhaps a modern Gothic cathedral with a hidden steel frame and the look of masonry construction). It could be arranged that people knew about the hidden operative form; this would change the perceived form of the building even though nothing about the visually presented form was different. Or it could be arranged that the hidden operative form was truly hidden, and everything about the building felt and said that it was supported in the traditional Gothic way. In terms of perceived form such a perfect deception would *be* the imitated kind of structure. This would be dishonest (in modernist terms) but there is no reason to deny that it might be sometimes desirable. (However, cf. Harries' discussion of self-representation (1984 and 1988a).)

We saw in the last chapter that constancy of geometric form begs the question of architectural vocabulary. The complex shape of the whole does not specify any particular decomposition into simpler units, no matter how simple and intuitive they might appear. Indeed, various architectural vocabularies can specify different *kinds* of analyses of geometrical form. When Wojtowicz and Fawcett say "architectural form is exact and precise because it is expressed with geometry" (Wojtowicz 1986, 15), they confuse precision with uniqueness. What I have called the geometric form of a building is precise and exact, but the analyses and contrasts that control the perceived form will vary.

Furthermore, constant geometrical form cannot stabilize the presented form of a building, since that depends on the environment. Consider the case of Hagia Sophia. When the basilica was changed into a mosque its overall geometrical form was not altered much. But the balance of the composition and the presented form of the domes were altered because the church was enclosed within the angular volume created by the added minarets. The same geometrical form now produces different presented and perceived forms. This kind of change happens all the time, as when the World Trade center grossly affected the perceived form of the older buildings in lower Manhattan. Analogous changes happen in literature, when novels or poems are read in new contexts.

The perceived form of a building gives architects the most trouble. Dependent on the reception of the building, it cannot be controlled very well. (Why architects might want to control it is a separate question, treated below.) For example, the Pantheon in Rome has endured for a long time. It became a Christian church, then more of a museum. While it is still made of the same bricks in the same positions, the building's presented and perceived forms have changed as the building's context and uses have changed. As the sets of contrasts into which the building is inserted change, the building provides different signifiers; the signifieds also change as the building finds itself within different forms of life.

This example, however, forces me to qualify and extend my claims. After all, in many ways the meaning of the Pantheon does not seem to have changed so much. Furthermore, the decomposition of the building into parts seems easy: the dome and its oculus, the large enclosed space, the entry with its columns and portico. Doesn't this challenge my claims about the variability of form?

Christian Norberg-Schulz argues that the Pantheon embodies a basic Roman combination: the man-made world is oriented towards the cardinal points of the compass in a way that claims cosmic validity. The horizontal axes from the cardinal points meet in the rotunda under a dome where "the vertical axis which rises up from this center through the large opening in the zenith" unifying earth and heaven (Norberg-Schulz 1980, 52, 165).

But for a Germanic invader in the fifth century who had never experienced a dome, the "meaning" of domes in general would not be clear and the particular qualities of the Pantheon's dome would not be naturally obvious. For an eighteenth century Roman who routinely lived with the large Roman churches, the Pantheon stood in new contrasts; a modern who has experienced even larger open interiors spanned by steel trusses finds the Pantheon within yet another set. These examples are not matters of subjective interpretation; as the building fits into those different forms of life it stands within different sets of contrasts and "makes different moves."

Still there is something right about what Norberg-Schulz says. In claiming that a

building's geometrical form has no one definitive way of being analyzed I mean to encourage doubts about other less sweeping claims to continuity as well. But that is not to deny continuity. Some ways of analyzing buildings are very deeply ingrained in our culture. The platonic solids seem almost unavoidable. And Norberg-Schulz is correct to point to other continuities of form and signification that may tie to racial features such as our erect posture and our common experience of the heavens and the weather (cf. Norberg-Schulz 1984, 1985). Karsten Harries has written about these and other "natural" sets of contrasts stemming from our posture and location and common experiences such as gravity and support, light and dark, enclosed and open (Cf. Harries 1980, 1983, 1984a, 1988, 1988a.)[begin note] Harries argues that because of these universal human experiences, we encounter space and basic architectural forms differently than is reported by the Cartesian subject facing an indifferent extension, or by the aesthetic subject contemplating a unified aesthetic object. This seems right, but I indicated earlier my reservations about any attempt to make such pre-reflective experiences the privileged source of meaning.[end note]

An even stronger argument might be made for certain sorts of "analysis" of edges and volumes that seem to be inherent in our brain's visual systems. For instance it is probably unavoidable that we perceive a surface with a molding not as a ruffled surface but as a plane with a molding laid over it.

Such continuities are important, but there is no universal language to be garnered from them. To whatever degree they are universal, such natural contrasts are facts about us that need to be taken into account, but they are not the basic elements of any vocabulary. They may be involved in the constitution of an architectural vocabulary without themselves being elements within it. They can guide choices of and within vocabularies, when that is appropriate. Or they can be ignored or played against, when that is appropriate. In either case the judgment of appropriateness is something beyond these "natural" contrasts and meanings.

Many Intentions

There is another question to be raised in connection with the example of the

Pantheon. We know enough about Roman society and architecture to be fairly clear about the original context and use of the Pantheon, and how a Roman would have analyzed its form and meaning. Granted there have been other ways the Pantheon has been lived with, the Roman way seems to have a certain priority, since they built it; they got there first. Just what importance do we give to the original intention? Does it limit the plurality of forms and meanings?

Whatever the status of intended meaning in literature, it is alive and well in current architectural practice. Because there are many co-workers who may have their own ideas, the architect will often be consulted about the intention behind features of the design. At least for buildings in the media's eye questions whether the design successfully realized the original intentions often dominate critical discussion. There are usually records of what the owner or corporation or town committee wanted; likely the architect's presentations involved statements of intention. So architectural intentions exist more publicly than do intentions for other genres of art.

Furthermore, an architect is routinely expected to take more precautions against variant interpretations than is a novelist or painter. The architect knows that the building will sooner or later find new functions beyond those specified in the owner's program. The building will likely outlast the saliency of its particular vocabulary. Eventually the intended meaning and function will become less important, perhaps even unknown. But the owner wants the building's meaning to endure as long as possible. The architect is urged to control the perceived form of the building.

The architect, too, wants to emphasize the success of particular solutions to particular design problems, and likely to emphasize a particular vocabulary. Within narrow limits it seems possible to design using aleatory techniques, or to make a building whose uses and meanings are intentionally left open. Some architects have experimented in these directions.[begin note] A building's operative form is subject to so many natural constraints that there is not too much space for aleatory construction. While aleatory decoration would be possible, could an aleatory plan or elevation be anything more than a randomized choice within a narrow range of parameters, where defining those parameters already did most of the work?[end note] But commissions are set and buildings

financed by people with definite ends in view. The current buildings that most clearly show that their uses are left open are wide Miesian spaces, but these, like empty stages, do not offer a wealth of meaning for multiple interpretation.

The same Charles Jencks who showed how buildings in the International Style spoke in an unintended vocabulary (not about purity and function but about power, indifference, and bureaucracy [1977, 19-37]) is anxious that this not happen to postmodern buildings. Jencks talks of the importance of coding the intended meanings of a building in multiply redundant ways so that they will survive future changes of use and context for as long as possible. This suggests that even the postmodern architect thinks of intended meaning as crucial, a conclusion that is borne out by the conversations among architects recorded in the Charlottesville and Chicago symposia, where postmodern architects argued vociferously in favor of their authorial intentions and against the alternate interpretations of their buildings advanced by other architects (cf. Robertson 1985, Tigerman 1987, and the analysis in Soltan 1987).

For all this, a building has its own stubborn independence. The author never has complete control of the work. Architecture involves many more compromises than are required of a novelist or painter. There are other people working on the project. Once finished, buildings go their own way. They last and they are unavoidable. People can put down novels, or avoid picking them up. Paintings can viewed by selected audiences. Buildings intrude upon users and interpreters of all kinds. They get re-used and re-worked.

Public discussion about buildings makes their intended meaning more prominent than in the other arts, but it is the community's practices, not the architect's intentions, that are finally important. Buildings fit into established patterns of living that are not changeable by critical or architectural fiat. We cannot automatically assume that what the architect intended does in fact rule the interpretation of a building.

Consider the case of Isozaki's plaza at the Government Center at Tsukuba. The plaza makes clear reference to the Campidoglio, but in the center where the Roman original has the statue of an Emperor, Isozaki places an empty space, with a drain from a nearby fountain pool. Isozaki has said that his intention was to assert that Japanese society

lost a center when the old imperial figure was rejected, and that the society has not found a new center (cf. Jencks 1987, 292-298). But if this is his intended meaning, must one know the Roman original in order to read it? Is Isozaki coding this for the cultural elite? Or is the intended meaning somehow there in the lines of the plaza to be felt by anyone?

To decide this we would have to look at how public spaces in Japan are organized. We would find that celebratory central monuments seldom appear in Japanese public spaces, which are usually organized in a linear fashion with the culminating point at the far end, often out of view. This weakens Isozaki's statement at Tsukuba since the absence of a central figure will be less salient in the Japanese context. [Cf. also Kurokawa's analysis of Japanese space in terms of streets rather than plazas (1988, chapter 2).]

And, in Europe, what about the lack of a real center in many plazas inside Bofill's residential groupings? Is this a statement about a lack of center in modern European civilization? As far as we can tell Bofill intended no such meaning, but with Roman and French plazas in the contrasts at play, that meaning is there whatever the architect's intentions.

This is not to say the original intentions can be completely ignored. If we look at discussions of the Gehry house in Los Angeles we see critics applying their own standards to a house intended to challenge their way of reading (cf. Marder 1985, 104). Here the silence about Gehry's intentions is not due to a change of community practice but to critical special pleading.

Part of the dispute among the interpreters of Gehry's house concerns just what standards are appropriate for criticizing a "home." But this is a dangerous question. Architectural theorists spend too much time looking for essences in order to be able to issue norms. We should look instead for continuities of practice and interpretation in which we find ourselves already involved, and which we can use or modify by metaphorical moves.

Building is like writing. Letters joined together can be used for many different purposes; a laundry bill is not a wedding invitation or a newspaper article or a novel. But that is not to say that there is no accepted way of approaching a laundry list or a

newspaper article. If there is no one correct way to approach laundry lists, there is a way we generally do approach them. We are already on the move within such conventions. They must be taken into account, which is not to say that they must be followed. But they cannot be ignored since they will influence community practice with the final product no matter what the artist wishes.

To take something into account is not the same as being ruled by it. We can always make a metaphor. What we cannot do is step into empty space, either to get the god's eye view or to create pure form out of nothing but our supposedly pure and unique intentions.