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## Deconstruction vs. the *Aristotle Quartet*

The architectural avant-garde has fought often enough over alternatives that appeared as opposites – structure and chaos, ornament and purity, permanence and change, reason and intuition. And often enough it has been shown that such alternatives were in fact complementary. Although I would like to tell you that the traditional and the deconstructivist architectural movements are one pair of complementary alternatives, I cannot. In fact, these are two architectural movements that are about as distinct and opposite could be. I found this out on a recent trip to LA. Nothing in my entire educational career has made me more sure that I made the correct decision when deciding to transfer to Notre Dame's School of Architecture from Syracuse University's program than when I descended into that deconstructivist world.

Many people wonder why it is that two architectural *techniques* ('technique' defined as *the pursuit of rationality and efficiency to the utmost possibilities*) cannot be taught as complementary to each other. The reason is an ancient concept of architecture called the Aristotle Quartet.

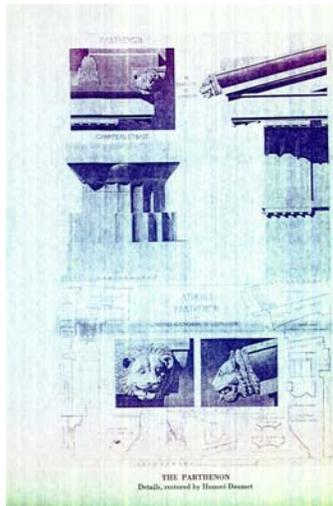


Fig. 1.1

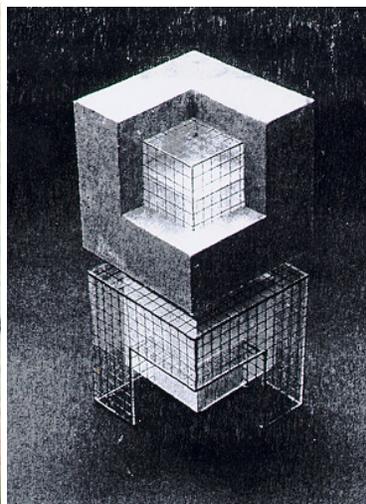


Fig. 1.2

Figure 1.1:  
The pursuit of rationality and the efficiency to the utmost possibilities is seen in Athens, the Acropolis. The true efficiency of the Greek Doric temple.

Figure 1.2:  
Deconstructionist simplicity. Peter Eisenman, model of house 11a (never built).

The *Aristotle Quartet* is a concept that focuses on the art of architecture and the imitation of nature. The four main points in this architectural philosophy are that architecture must consist of: 1. Matter, 2. Form, 3. Efficient cause, 4. Final cause. By "efficient cause" I mean an efficient cause other than the *self*! Once you imitate nature you are producing a thing of art not a 'causi sui' (*self-cause*).

Within this art of architecture Hegel concluded that architecture was whatever that was in a building which did not point to utility. He stated that architecture was an 'artistic supplement' added to the simple building. But this is more than just a purpose of architecture. Architecture includes such aspects as: space, form, and utility, but also within this artistic architectural realm. Architecture is then the space of representation. As soon as it is distinguished from the simple building, it represents something other than itself: the social structures, the power of the King, the idea of God, and so on.

Order and reason, which are two very important concepts of traditional philosophy, are two concepts which deconstructionism fails to adhere to and are defined as follows. Order, which is the system of laws that govern organization as a means of reason. And reason which is used as a guiding tool and then adding personal ideals later. Reason holds imagination in temperance. This last point is what is severely lacking in deconstruction. There is no reason or order; it is all complete ambiguity.

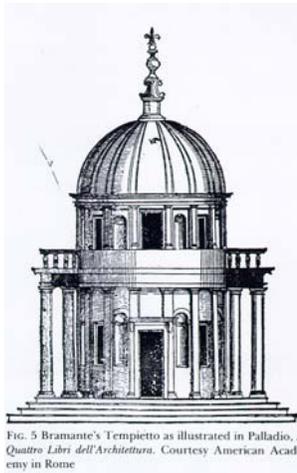


Fig. 2.1

Fig. 2.1: Order, reason, and representation. Bramante's Tempietto.  
Fig. 2.2: Literal representation. Frank Gehery's Fish Restaurant.

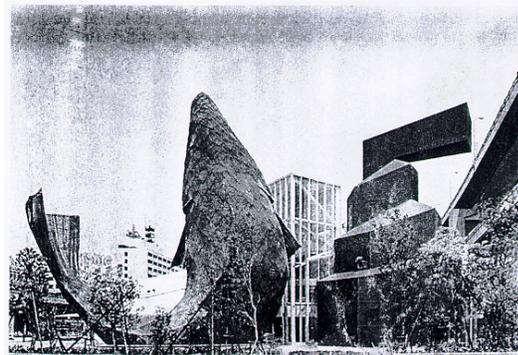


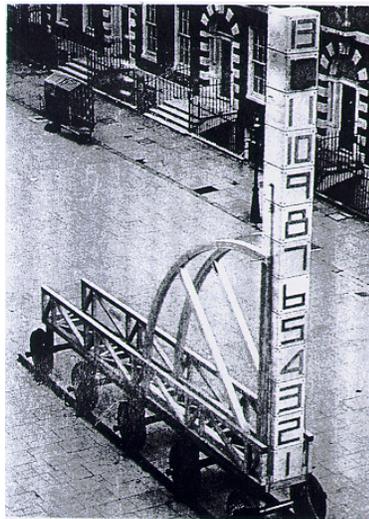
Fig. 2.2

Human comfort and well being is very important in the traditional philosophy, along with quality and richness of the culture. Proportioning gives boundaries of beauty. Buildings are done with other buildings. Cities are formed by other cities. There must be a relationship of context, design, and hierarchy.

The main philosophy behind deconstruction is that architecture and all its so-called truths can never be. It is always the expression of lack, a shortcoming, and a non-completion. There is no scale, proportion, or even beauty, because the human cannot really grasp what true beauty is. There is no hierarchy or context. Deconstruction always misses something, either a

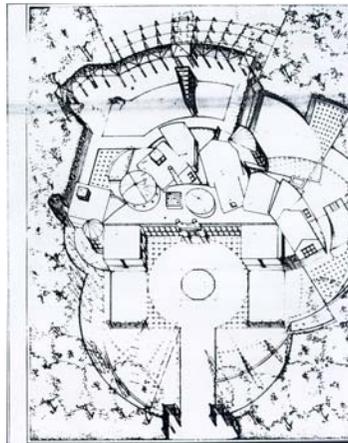
reality or a concept. And it is here that Aristotelian Quartet point 1 and 2, matter and form, are missed. According to the deconstructionist architect Bernard Tschumi, “the only alternative to the paradox is silence, a final anarchistic statement that might provide modern architectural history with its ultimate punch line, its self-destruction.”

It has been implied that the experience of a space shows itself as a slow history, but that a total revelation of it is historically impossible because no point in time is perfection truly available. One can never see it in totality, nor can one express it. One is condemned to it, and cannot go outside and see the whole. Space cannot be dominated. The top of the deconstructionist pyramid of dematerialization is an imaginary place that can never be reached or understood totally by the human being. The analysis of the architectural object, the breaking-down of its forms and elements, all cut away from the question of the subject and dematerialized before the viewer’s eyes. Only the architect who constructed it holds the key to unlock the door of confusion and architectural disjunction.



*The self-destruction of architecture. John Hejduk: the collapse of time (to commemorate the victims of the Gestapo. Passers by could watch over a four week period while Time, represented by a set of stacked cubes (coffins?) numbered one to 13, fell to a 45 degree angle and then collapsed onto their carrier.*

The deconstructionist view of nature is that architecture is contradictory to nature and that you must escape this paradox by shifting the actual nature of the debate and then altering the paradox altogether. If an architectural work consists of questioning the nature of architecture, what prevents us from making this questioning a work of architecture in itself? Certain objects on a gridded system are now shifted to reveal a new form which creates a movement within the space.



*The gridded system shift.* Stanley Tigerman: private residence, Highland Park, Illinois. 1988-90

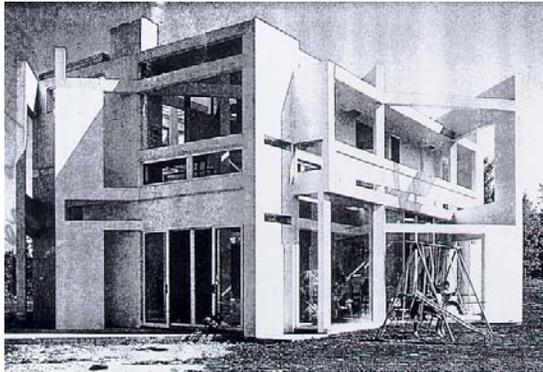
Descartes ended the Aristotelian tradition according to which space and time were categories that enabled the classification of sensory knowledge. Space became absolute. Traditionally you can sense your way through a series of complex spaces. Being able to sense where you are and where you are going is key, but deconstruction loses this ability and you can't sense anything without signage.

The renewed importance given to conceptual aims in architecture quickly became established. Concepts became architecture, information was architecture, the attitude was architecture, and the architect was architecture. Escaping the ideological compromises of building, the architect could finally achieve the satisfaction that the making of material objects was no longer needed.

At an architectural conference in LA, Pierre Koenig noted, "I feel it (traditional teaching) is irrelevant to the new way of life, no longer is there a need for the Beaux Arts way of teaching. They are just pretty pictures on the wall, but no longer a necessary form of teaching." The truth is that what is lacking in today's non-Beaux arts teaching is the concept of scale, hierarchy, and form. Architecture resembles art, rather than the architecture that it is. It is known that Gehry makes 'garbage' concept models for his buildings; this is done by crumpling up garbage, putting glue on it, and sticking it on a piece of cardboard for ideas.

Thus deconstruction and the self-resounding architect was born: "Me" Architecture. This modernist 'Me' culture has manipulated, designed, etc. for the 'me' also known as the architect and his thought process. To be able to go turning on a computer and make any shape with no theory or form behind it, and to result in total ambiguity is today's architect's reality. There is no truth behind it.

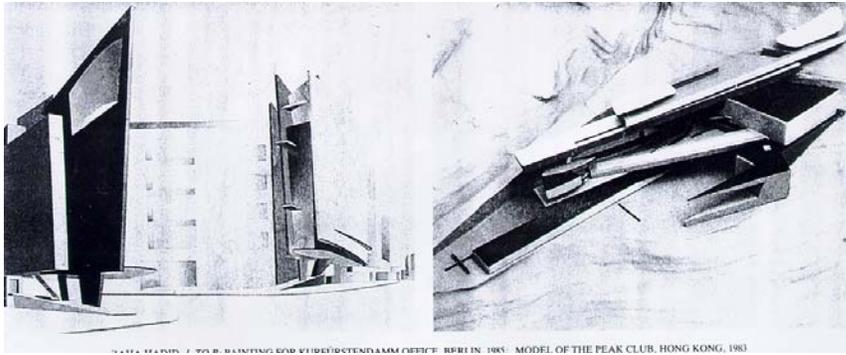
Architecture is losing its identity. The architect is more interested in self-achievement and self-worth and making a statement than making architecture. Alas, they are the architect's ideas, which unless explained by him are usually unknown by the viewer of the piece. This "piece" of architecture almost serves as an art form which cannot ever really be known only contemplated over in one's mind. And this is where deconstruction unduly falls into conflict with the Aristotle Quartet. If it is all about 'me' architecture and self-cause which is rule number 3, Efficient Cause, then this is not valid within the Quartet standards.



*"Me" architecture.*  
Unless the architect explains himself, his ideas are usually unknown by the viewer of the piece.  
Peter Eisenman:  
House III.

Dematerialization in architecture is observed in deconstruction when it ultimately frees itself from reality altogether. Form does not need to call for external justifications. In this dematerialized world of concepts there is a removal of architecture from its intricate and complex element: space. This means the removal from everything, logic, reason, rules, space and ultimately falling into a 'hole'.

Here architecture is dislocated and dissociated by language or culture or economy into the specialized realms. This is where deconstructionists try to rediscover lost unity, energies, and impulses by falling into disillusion. Bataille suggested that it was to transform the experience of the space into a banal prison. The meaning of this metaphor was revised to say that: one never knows whether he is inside or not, since he cannot grasp it in one look. (Who in their right mind wants to subject themselves to a 'prison' or uncomfortable space anyway? The natural want of a human being is to be in a space of comfort and reason, not the uncomfot and stagnation of a prison.)



*The dematerialization of architecture when architecture frees itself from reality.*  
 Zaha Hadid: Painting for an office in Berlin, 1985 and model of the Peak Club, Hong Kong 1983. (never built)

With the industrialized materials being used today, it is often difficult to conceive how the architecture was made. For the Modern architect's use of materials, they hardly look beyond reality. They are just looking at materials. The Post-Modern architect is very confusing in his use of symbols and the odd placement of traditional elements. He is not really disliked by modernists because he is looked at as an ally with the modernists for the coy use of elements with modern sections. The Deconstructionist architects are considered in the time line of history the 'final phase' of architecture. Whereas historicism is a revival of the past, modernists believe they are the apogees (the ends), the heroes of architecture. History does judge relativism (a truth or meaning in the context of which it is found). Every point of history is a view from a certain aspect or certain person's point of view.

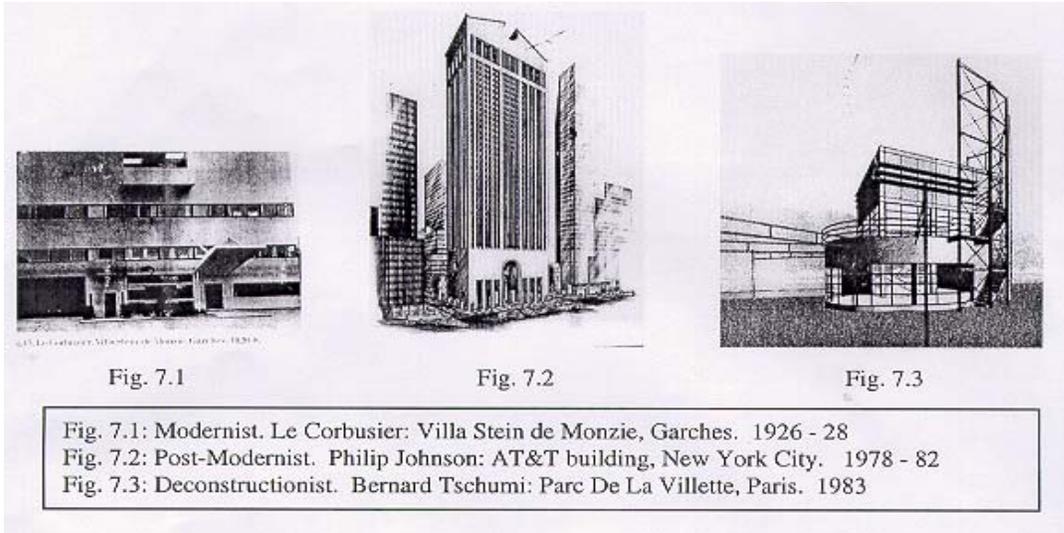


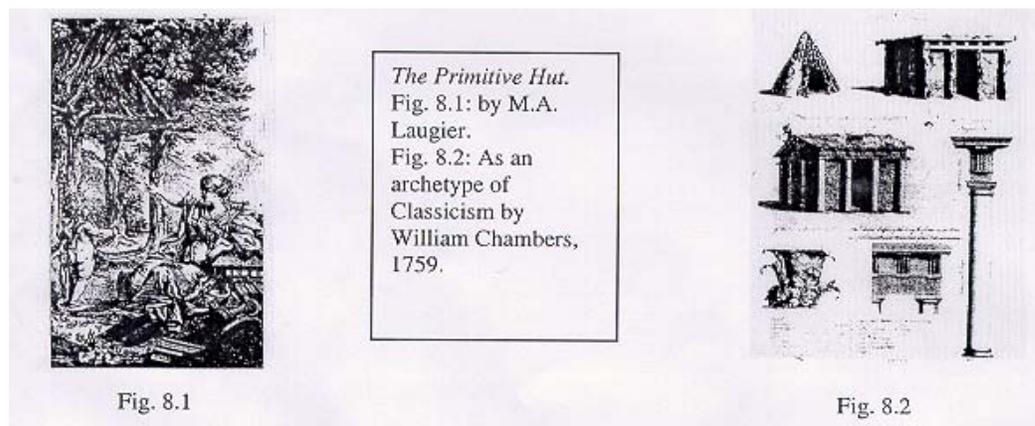
Fig. 7.1: Modernist. Le Corbusier: Villa Stein de Monzie, Garches. 1926 - 28  
 Fig. 7.2: Post-Modernist. Philip Johnson: AT&T building, New York City. 1978 - 82  
 Fig. 7.3: Deconstructionist. Bernard Tschumi: Parc De La Villette, Paris. 1983

From the Egyptians to the deconstructionists, there are multiple points of view to be looked at and observed. Linking things together with the deconstruction

as the apogee, everything is obliterated; truth, justice, construction, knowledge, even human understanding is eradicated! Looking well beyond reality into the unknown, and the unbuildable.

Refusing to give reality to anything, the complexity of deconstruction is that there are no limits or regulations. Deconstruction considers architecture as a thing of the mind, as a dematerialized or conceptual discipline with its linguistic or morphological variations. It is very cold. There is no substance. No function. Modernism is pretending to prepare for the future but not really doing so. The process involved in building, living, etc. is a collision of emotions with the building architects of today that have uniquely accepted authority. Frank Gehry and Peter Eisenman went to extensive psychoanalysis to help them to understand their double motives and how they are quite normal in American life: a youthful renunciation of Judaism, a turn to atheism and then a return to ethnic identity, even the role of professional outcast...the different.

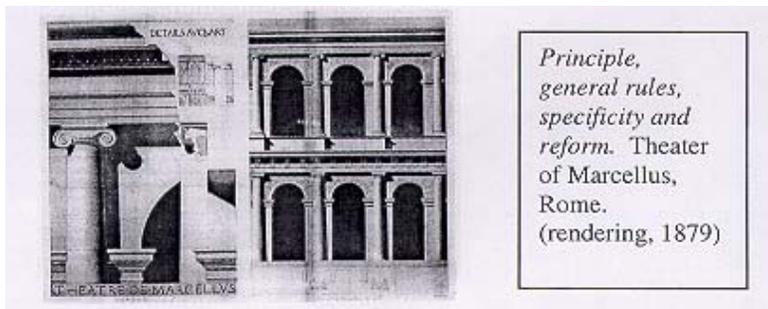
There is a very strong development of deconstructionist architecture, unlike anything in the past where things were improving because of a gaining of knowledge from past experiences. But the deconstructionist view is slightly warped when it comes to past experiences and architecture. Tschumi notes that, "our forefathers only built their hut after they had conceived its image. This production of the mind, this creation is what constitutes architecture, that which we now can define as the art to produce any building and bring it to perfection." They do not see the primitive hut as a beginning but as an origin. Architectural theorist Quatremere de Quincy would strongly disagree to



this testimony. "The hut is a beginning and not an origin, for a certain distance had to be traversed to arrive at it. The locus of the origin was somewhere between a natural shelter and the first interpretations of constructive elements devoid of purely natural connotations."

Aaron Betsky, the moderator for the panel on the 'Transformation of Architecture' at the 2000 Forum, states, "Classical architecture today is not coming up with a new idea, but just reinventing old ones. It's all been done before." This is a common misconception of modernists today. Traditional concepts are not about style, but they are about spatial concepts and hierarchies. It's ironic how deconstructivists preach to their students "to be thankful for the people before you" (meaning Gehry, Eisenman, and Israel), they are literally contradicting themselves! They are constantly disregarding their past in which they disavow the traditional values and methods, the true precedents. Deconstructionists work without a theory and then later come up with a theory behind their work, instead of looking to sound, logical precedents of the past.

Traditionally, a rule is derived from a rational and common sense, an experience or a calculation. The principal is a general rule and goes into a more specific set of rules that are generated from the initial principal. We can use work of the ancients as guidelines, but we do not have to follow them mindlessly. We look at what they have done and take what we will of it. Looking at these principals we can see how from this justice is derived. After justice is confirmed sets of rules are made in conjunction with this justice system, and from these general rules, more specific laws are made. If this is thought of as unjust, we change or reform it. All of these principals are derived from past experience, not a new objective that is conceived from an unknown.



Deconstruction just throws all principals, rules and truths out the window. Tectonically the architecture would not be able to support itself. Tectonics was first derived from the word techne (knowledge of craft involving humans), which was given a symbolic form in architecture. In a lot of traditional building, the architect gets too caught up with beauty. Architecture is more than just beauty and tectonics (imitation of craft). Traditionalism

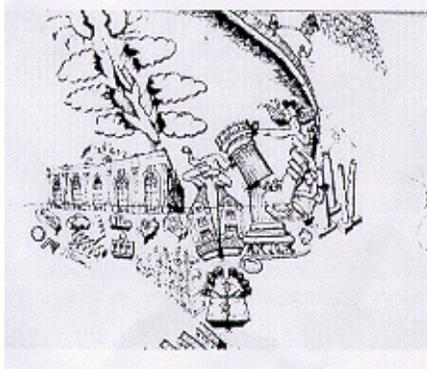
alludes to craft, but detaches from it. How far can someone detach before a rupture occurs? When deconstruction takes the use of technology (the efficient use of materials that does not have to do with human form) and stretches it to the limits of the imagination, so that it disrupts the craft of the architecture that is being created, it has reached a rupture. Koenig states his belief that today, "Cheap building techniques are the way. As long as it is fast and economical it's good."

This building technique has now become the major point. Instead of permanence and rationality, architects today build for themselves, and what they build only lasts for 40 years before it needs a major renovation. Ultimately, this is not as economical as the architect may have originally conceived, but they don't care about the future, only about the now. The truth is that if you spend the initial money that you are going to need in 40 years for that renovation, and put it into solid construction technique, the building will last longer than a small number of years. Julius Shulman told the 2000 Forum attendees a brief tale of the modernist architect Mies Van der Rohe and his attitudes towards his architecture. "A client of Mies Van der Rohe called me one day to tell me her roof had begun to leak. I suggested that she call the architect. When she told me that she already did, and his response, I was taken aback! He told her to 'move out of the way of the leaky roof, and then she wouldn't get wet!'" To think that architects and architecture today has regressed to this, is completely disheartening.

Although architecture is a rupture in nature, you have to be able to recognize the origin to apply it. Deconstructionists refuse to do this. Mark Mack wants to, "bring variety into the reality" with his architecture, as does every other deconstructionist architect out there. While this is always nice, the problem today is that we have various architects out there trying to get their own name on the map. Different structures are popping up all over the place trying to compete for recognition with one another. Urbanistically this is probably the worst thing that could happen. Once again order, scale, and hierarchy are thrown out the window, and the modern city has become a place of dense architectural noise.

Deconstruction has no order or reason. It has no traditional motives and is completely arbitrary. Deconstruction is considered the end, the finale, a final phase to the architectural history book. It has no values or rules, there is no sense of permanence. This eliminates discussion because the architect has his

own singular idea of architecture which nobody but he knows or understands. It is seen as an opposite to traditionalism. It is in breach of the Aristotle Quartet. This among other reasons is why it cannot be a complementary design technique to the traditional approach.



*Deconstruction as  
the finale to  
history...the  
deconstruction of  
the Traditional.*  
Stanley Tigerman:  
Exile II, Chicago  
to LA. 1984

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