Option 1: Brian Hatton

Seminar title: RE: DOUBLING, AGAIN

Double readings, ambiguities, instabilities occur wherever representation is practiced, but their appearance may range from unconscious to intentional. As sentences may be made in either indicative or subjunctive mode, so images may be presented as definite and singular or also in some degree of inflection, ambiguity, reserve, or uncertainty. Indeed, differences between presentation and reception may offer a space in which, by suspending decision, to keep open and in play some freedom otherwise denied.

In “On Flirtation. Psychoanalytic Essays On The Uncommitted Life”, Adam Philips observes, ‘Flirtation, if it can be sustained, is a way of cultivating wishes, of playing for time. Deferral can make room.’ We may even say that such equivocations, when reflexive, are not flaws, but project a further latitude across the terms normally set upon architecture’s ‘autonomy’ and the finitude of its objects.

We trace here some sites, modes, and spaces of fluctuant or ‘flirtatious’ appearance; from Gestalt psychology in the formalism of Clement Greenberg, Colin Rowe, and Peter Eisenman, Robert Venturi’s thesaurus of ambiguities, overlapping programmes in Bernard Tschumi and Nigel Coates, to desecured and doubled subjects in photography and installations by John Hilliard, Jeff Wall, and Dan Graham.

1. Parsing the Classical Object
2. Figures, Grounds & Their Others
3. Tectonics: Ontological, Representational, ‘Fashion’
4. Diagrams from Wittkower to Rowe & Eisenman
5. Flatness & Its [Dis]Contents: Relief, Specific Objects, Working Space
7. Disjunction and Syllepsis: Tschumi and Coates
8. Doubled & Reflected Subjects: John Donne, John Hilliard, Dan Graham

A Note on Submissions
This course is concerned with ways of looking and describing. Therefore, we propose that the kinds of ways and methods which we will study may themselves be adopted by students to generate essays for submission. So as well as essays on historical topics, we also invite essays which might adapt methods of comparison, reading, analysis, diagramming etc. from Wölflin, Wittkower, Arnheim, Rowe, Eisenman, Venturi et al to make direct studies of objects and motifs.

1. Parsing the Classical Object

When Vitruvius describes the temple both as stone representation of a wooden structure and as an order of human figure/columns we already meet a double account - tectonic and iconographic - of the architectural object, which also tends to counterpose wall and pillar. Alberti, later, makes architecture a metaphysical duality (body/mind) of construction and “lineaments”. Yet when he introduces “the outlines of walls”, he advances a phenomenalist account, already resembling those in 20thC Gestalt psychology, of the alternation of figure and ground in the architectural image: ‘... in that a row of columns is nothing other than a wall that has been pierced in several places by openings. Indeed, when defining the column itself, it may not be wrong to describe it as a certain solid and continuous section of wall, which has been raised perpendicularly from the ground, up high, for the purpose of bearing the roof ...’. Such equivocations of solid and void, re-inscribing ‘lineaments and structures’ in half-columns, pilasters, aedicules and pediments, imbricated in scale and hierarchy, become the syntactic system of Renaissance, Mannerist, and Baroque architecture.

Wittkower wrote that Alberti ‘... used classical architecture as a storehouse which supplied him with the motives of a free and subjective planning of wall architecture.’ Adrian Stokes described that ‘subjective plan’ as ‘... a structure which appears to us an articulation of all that a simple wall has meant to our fancies.’ All, perhaps, except for what eludes the ‘form’ of wall itself, and
remains unformed, even dilated in its unformedness, even when displayed as sheer slab of glazen flatness in a salon by Mies Van Der Rohe, at Barcelona, or the Villa Tugendhat.

2. Figures, Grounds, and their Others

Phenomenological accounts of the constitution of images followed Gestalt psychologists’ observations that vision occurs only in the condition of figure-detached-from-ground. This underlies Don Ihde’s descriptions of multistable figures as models for eidetic rendering of complex and elusive phenomena, as well as Rudolf Arnheim’s analyses of formal structures in painting and architecture.

More fundamentally, Maurice Merleau-Ponty described painting by Cezanne and Klee as exposing the inceptive edge of perception through their probabilistic renderings of valent images emergent in configurations inexhaustible in depth and duration. Yet if the figure/ground axis is put against the pair ‘not-figure/not-ground’, as does Rosalind Krauss in “The Optical Unconscious”, the resulting ‘Klein group’ of ‘double negatives’, she proposes, assign a field across which ‘an alternative history developed against the grain of modernist opticality, to flout all its notions about essences and purifications, to refuse its concern with foundations - above all, a foundation in the presumed ontological ground of the visual.’ That alternative, Krauss says, arose in surrealist collage and the eye-defeating "precision optics" of Marcel Duchamp.

3. Tectonics: Ontological, Representational, and ‘Fasional’

Eduard Sekler situated the ‘tectonic’ in the difference between construction and structure, as an expressivity arising from the statical resistance of constructional form in a way that could not be accounted for in terms of construction alone. Both essence and manifestation, ‘tectonics’ has been presented as the phenomenology of construction. But Sekler also recognized its antithesis, the “atetonic”. Describing visually ‘w eightless’ cladding in the Stoclet house, Sekler writes; “Atectonic” is used here to describe a manner in which the expressive interaction of load and support ... is visually neglected or obscured.

Such feints and denials (including denial by repetition) could, by flirting between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ surfaces, enable subtle variations in expression, as Sekler notes in Baroque and in Mies’ works. Kenneth Frampton’s “Studies in Tectonic Culture” acknowledges Sekler’s fine distinction; yet tends to assimilate it to an essentialist account: adapting Bötticher’s pairing of ‘coreform’ and ‘artform’, Frampton supplements his idea of ‘ontological tectonic’ w ith that of ‘representational tectonic’.

The most subtle critique of Frampton’s phenomenology emerges indirectly in Mark Wigley’s “White Walls, Designer Dresses”. Wigley sets out to expose the artifact in another kind of essentialism (one indeed that Frampton also abhors) - that of the ‘purity’, supposedly undecorated and undecorating, of the ‘bare’ walls of 1920s modernism. But, going further than showing that ‘nudity look’ as another (painted) cladding, hence clothing, Wigley destabilizes any claim to ontological primacy in tectonic permanence by opening architecture to the ‘flat’ provisions of dressing in the fashion system. ‘What must be concealed is not the dresses as such but the (painted) cladding, hence clothing, Wigley destabilizes any claim to ontological primacy in tectonic permanence by opening architecture to the ‘flat’ provisions of dressing in the fashion system. What must be concealed is not the dresses as such but the

4. Diagrams from Wittkower to Rowe & Eisenman

In his essay ‘Perturbed Circles’, Robin Evans asked, ‘Where is the centre of a centralized church?’ Noting ‘not the slightest hint of anxiety’ in Wolfflin or Wittkow er as to the actual presence of a central spot, Evans proceeded to show that what hile in a ‘centralized plan the centre is immediately evident ... a centralized church does not possess an unequivocal point that can be identified w ith the same alacrity.’ Indeed, in Sant’Eligio, Rome, he found no fewer than nine possible midpoints: ‘The equivocation is thorough’ and ‘anything but accidental.’

Evans only sparsely used diagrams to trace those “equivocations” of variance w ithin ostensive unity. But when Wittkow er had come to illustrate the unity-w ithin-variety of Palladio’s symmetric villas, he induced from their varying plans a virtual 9-square diagram. This template was in turn adapted by Colin Row e to Le Corbusier’s plans in ‘The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa’. Row e used a differential reading of planlines of a kind w hicth Wittkow er had deployed in the analysis of the ‘intersecting’ facade and interior of Palladio’s Redentore. When, to this complex optical analysis, Row e added, from Robert Slutzky, alertness to the shifting planes of virtual depth in cubist paintings, the result w as ‘Transparency, Literal and Phenomenal’. This reading of Corbusian buildings valued a ‘phenomenal’ transparency that arose in a play of metonymic fragments overlapping in ambiguously stratified planes.

When such strata were traced in analytic schema such as Rowe drew for Corbusier’s League of Nations project, the resulting diagrams indicated the threshold of a ‘further architecture’ inferred from the visual and conceptual implications of the actual. It was that ‘conceptual subjunctive’ that Peter Eisenman drew out and projected; first in analyses of buildings by Terragni and Stirling, and then in his own designs, such as House II, in w hicth the doubling of the structural system (column grid + walls) allows, by excess, either to be read as a sign. For Eisenman, the diagram displaced form from its previously determined relations w ith function, meaning, and aesthetics, w hilst not entirely denying their presence. ‘When the diagram became a generative device - w hen it w as not merely used to explain the relation between building and interiority - it suggested other concerns - an alternative between the subject/author and the w ork. Such an alternative suggested a movement away from classical composition and personal expression toward a more autonomous process.’ (“Diagram Diaries”)

5. Flatness & Its [Dis]Contents: Relief, Specific Objects, Working Space

When Clement Greenberg located art’s essential autonomy in the phenomenal flatness of painting’s ‘picture-plane’, he seemed to set
ultimate terms to painting. Many concluded that painting could no longer sustain the self-critical imperative of art, which must now develop in an expanded field as a conceptual activity with no condition but that of self-referentiality. Yet flatness was already disputed by painters who started from its terms but proceeded to reinventions of relief. Relief, Adolf Hildebrand had observed, is where depth and planarity are mediated, so that ‘architecture’s task is to unify its forms as an effect of relief.’

Of Jasper Johns’ paintings, Greenberg wrote: ‘Everything that usually serves representation and illusion is left to serve nothing but itself, that is, abstraction; while everything that usually serves the abstract or decorative ... is put to the service of representation. And the more explicit this contradiction is made, the more effective the picture tends to be.’ Greenberg thought that Johns’ reliefs were the precipitations of w hat he called ‘homeless representation’ - figural vestiges that haunted abstract painting. They were, rather, w hat Leo Steinberg called the “flat-bed picture plane” which lends itself to any content which does not evoke a prior optical event. It was his aptness to adapt non-optical devices to internal logics of composition that brought Johns to Duchamp, whose Readymades were inventive moves towards that w alk-in relief, the installation: a construction which occupies the same physical, but not the same symbolic space as architecture.

That [not] architectural site turned out to be the ultimate destination of what Donald Judd in 1965 called “Specific Objects”. Both and yet neither painting nor sculpture, this work had, Greenberg remarked, ‘a look of non-art which was unavailable to painting’. The critic Michael Fried dubbed it ‘literally objecthood’. Certainly, this ‘new three-dimensional work’, as Judd plainly described it, colonised real space as Duchamp appropriated real objects as his Readymades. But Judd, abjuring any Duchampian link, drove on towards architecture: ‘Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface. Any-thing in three dimensions can be any shape, ... and can have any relation to the wall, floor, ceiling, room or exterior or none at all. Any material can be used, as is or painted. A work needs only to be interesting ...’. That ‘interest’, Judd went on to build at increasing scales - museal, architectural, urban, finally territorial, at Marfa, Texas.

The most integral eversion of painterly flatness turned out from a painter whom Fried had championed. Frank Stella began with radically reductions designed to ‘drive space out of the picture at an even rate’. Yet, by 1986, producing installation reliefs of baroque exuberance, he concluded his book ‘Working Space’: ‘Abstraction gains its freedom, its unfettered expandability, its own working space by eluding the spatial dictates of the real and the ideal image. Abstraction today works to make its own space.’


Reliefs by Johns and Rauschenberg appear in Robert Venturi’s polemical study of compound figures and double-readings in architecture, ‘Contradiction and Complexity’. The book proceeds by overlapping comparisons to show surprising analogies - ‘conceits’ in form or figure - among diverse objects. Thus, the triple planes in Johns’ ‘3 Flags’ are compared to a Vanbrugh facade, in turn recalling cathedral fronts at Foligno and Granada: ‘Vanbrugh’s giant arched openings, proportioned similarly to the arched windows upon which they are superimposed, create a strange tension not unlike that exploited in Johns’ paintings of superimposed flags.’ And praising Eero Saarinen’s collage of different materials in the same wall-plane, Venturi writes: ‘In Rauschenberg’s “Pilgrim”, the surface pattern continues from the stretcher canvas to the actual chair in front of it, making ambiguous the distinction between the painting and the furniture, and on another level, the work of art in a room. A contradiction between levels of function and meaning is recognized in these works.’

Calling for a ‘nonstraightforward architecture’ by the cultivation of ambiguity, Venturi cites Joseph Albers on art’s origin in discrepancy between a physical fact and psychic effect; but he develops his idea through literary critics Kenneth Burke, and William Empson, whose ‘Seven Types of Ambiguity’ calls Shakespeare: ‘the supreme ambiguist’. He again draws on literary criticism in the next chapter, ‘Contradictory Levels: The Phenomenon of ‘Both-And’ in Architecture’, citing Cleo Brooks on John Donne’s poetry as ‘Having it both ways ... [though] most of us in this latter day cannot. We are disciplined in the tradition of either-or, and lack the mental agility ... [and] maturity of attitude - ... to indulge in the finer distinctions and subtle reservations permitted by the tradition of both-and. The tracing of that ‘both-and’ tradition into architecture is Venturi’s purpose, in over 300 comparisons through his following chapters: ‘The Double-Functioning element’, ‘Accommodation and the Limitations of Order: The Conventional Element’, ‘Contradiction Adapted’, ‘Contradiction Opposed’, ‘The Inside and the Outside’, and ‘The Obligation toward the Difficult Whole’.


The last returns via Gestalt theory and painting to what Venturi terms ‘inflection’: ‘The way in which the whole is implied by exploiting the nature of individual parts, rather than their position or number; a means of distinguishing diverse parts while implying continuity ... The inflected element is dependent on something outside itself, in whose direction it inflects: a directional form corresponding to directional space.’ Venturi’s preface suggests that only through making a reflexive relation to such inflections within past architectural objects can contemporary architecture define its own subject.

This emerges in Venturi’s quotation of T.S. Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’: ‘The historical sense involves perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence ... the timeless and the temporal together. No artist of any kind has his complete meaning alone.’

7. Disjunction & Syllepsis: Bernard Tschumi, Nigel Coates

Questioning any formal basis for architectural autonomy, but projecting transgressive acts as agents in a disjunctive programming of ‘difference’ in space, Bernard Tschumi recast the functionalist topic of programme as “the discourse of events”. Coates found these already incipient in sites of popular pleasure and reality-triggered fantasy, in fashion, nightclubs, the beach: urban-pastoral, carnival places where roles may relax and new rules be flirted with. Thus his 1982 ‘Fashion Airport’ mixed puns: a nightclub-theatre for trying on new clothes, new identities, on a ‘runway’ beneath the ‘flytower’s’ continuously altering sets. Seeking a way to describe that double-function that the mezzanine performed there, Coates found a term in rhetoric: Syllepsis, used in a line by Pope: ‘See Pan with flocks, with fruits Pomona crown’d.’ Here, the single verb ‘crowns’ carries two predicates, ‘fruits’ and ‘flocks’.

Moving up to urban scale and drawing on local situations in contemporary subcultures, Coates projected sylleptic couplings onto
Coates' "Ecstacity" transposes syllepsis from club to global 'Cyburbs'. In its glossary: "Cyb means wired up to be intensely connected. 'Urbs' reinforces the principle of exchange associated with the Roman word for city." Ecstacity is a 'mightlihood' - a scenario that seems improbable yet likely, taking the reality-coefficient of a 'project' that might never be built, but stretching it to a phenomenological validity equal to an ecstacity already emergent and possible in our time. A continuous existential map, morphing London, Rome, Cairo, Mumbai, Toyo, Rio, and New York, Ecstacity flows: 'Architecture marks open structures that can intercept this flow to create moments of resonant fusion between self and city.' Thus it glosses G for Gestalt: "A term for the sense of unity and shape that converge on you in the moment, and makes more of the whole than the sum of the parts. The city is a field in which experience unfolds and develops. This guide traces six different gestalts of the city. Each, like a series of gauzes on a stage, can successively lift, bringing the next into view. Each depends on the culture and attitude which you bring to it. Each represents a degree of penetration of surrounding circumstances, and is therefore modified by knowledge, mood, need, and desire.'


On 'Desire', Ecstacity's glossary quotes Lacan: 'Man's desire finds its meanings in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object, as because the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other.' This session turns its axis through 90°, from equivocal relations with the object to those among mutually regarding subjects. Readings are first made of reflective exchanges in poems by John Donne - 'The Ecstasy', 'Witchcraft By A Picture', and 'Valediction: Of My Name In The Window', which closes:

'Tis much that glass should bee
As all-confessing, and through-shine as I.
'Tis more, that it show s thee to thee,
And cleare reflects thee to thine eye.
But all such rules love's magique can undone,
Here you see mee, and I am you.

Donne's reflections lead in to pictures of uncertain relations among subjects: Velazquez' "Las Meninas", Souch's double-portrait (dead+alive) of Lady Aston, Manet's "Bar At The Folies-Bergere", and Jeff Wall's recasting thereof, "Picture For Women". These introduce John Hilliard's photographic constructions, which, by exposing photographic devices within the image, render their subjects' motives unassignable. One, "Safe (For Dan Graham)" is framed in the 2-way mirror of Graham's Serpentine Gallery pavilion, 'Hedge Labyrinth'. We see a woman who is object of gaze of three men; one spies from the hedge, one from the pavilion beyond. A third, who may 'double' us as beholders, hovers behind (or before?) the 2-way glass. Unlike in "Susannah & The Elders", this woman seems aware of being ogled, and turns as if about to flirt with her beholder(s). But neither her object nor her motive is apparent, so that the interpreter 'hunts' back and forth without disclosure.

Doublings of subject and object have repeatedly structured Dan Graham's works. His magazine-pieces were both journalism 'on' topics and in the same instance themselves their own topic of iteration as art-objects. So "Homes For America" as both a report on serial forms in suburban housing and an implicit programme for a serial artwork, as if feeding back art and reality in a loop. Graham repeated such loops in his films, videos, performances, and in the subject-exchanges among visitors in his 2-way mirror architecture. Of his pavilion "Public Space/2 Audiences" Graham said: 'The work looks back; spectators see their projection of self (conventionally missing) returned specularly by the material aspects of the work.' And of "2 Adjacent Pavilions": 'I always had a kind of fantasy about these two pavilions as two Sartrean egos - two people who both reflect and are transparent to each other. And ... people outside and inside them have that relation, as well as the duality of the pavilions themselves.'

READING LIST

Adam Phillips, On Flirtation; Psychoanalytic Essays On The Uncommitted Life. Introductction & Ch. 1.

Seminar 1. Parsing The Classical Object:
Adrian Stokes, Art & Science.
Rudolf Wittkower, Principles of Architecture in the Age of Humanism.
Heinrich Wölfflin, Renaissance & Baroque.
Robin Evans, 'Mes' Paradoxical Symmetries'. In: Translations from Drawing to Building.

Seminar 2. Figures, Grounds, & Their Others
Rudolf Arnheim, Visual Thinking.
Rudolf Arnheim, Dynamics of Architectural Form.
Don Ihde, Experimental Phenomenology.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Space'. In The Phenomenology of Perception.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye & Mind'. In The Phenomenology of Perception.
Seminar 3. Tectonics: Ontological, Representational, 'Fashional'
Eduard Sekler, Josef Hoffman.
Kenneth Frampton, Studies in Tectonic Culture.
Mark Wigley, White Walls, Designer Dresses.

Seminar 4. Diagrams from Wittkower to Rowe & Eisenman.
Robin Evans, 'Perturbed Circles'. In: The Projective Cast
Rudolf Wittkower, 'Principles', In: Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes, vol. IV.
Alex Caragonne, The Texas Rangers.
Colin Rowe, 'The Mathematics Of The Ideal Villa' ['Mannerism + 'Transparency' part.1].
Colin Rowe, As I Was Saying ['Transparency' part. 2].
Peter Eisenman, Giuseppe Terragni: Transformations, Decompositions, Critiques.
Peter Eisenman, Diagram Diaries.

Seminar 5. Flatness & Its [Dis]Contents: Relief, Specific Objects, Working Space
Clement Greenberg, Art & Culture.
Clement Greenberg, Collected Essays.
Leo Steinberg, Jasper Johns.
Leo Steinberg, Other Criteria.
Michael Fried, Shape As Form: Frank Stella.
Michael Fried, Art & Objecthood.
Michael Fried, Absorption & The Beholder.
Donald Judd, Writings.
Frank Stella, Working Space.

Robert Venturi, Contradiction & Complexity.
Robert Venturi, Iconography & Electronics Upon a Generic Architecture.
William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity.

Seminar 7. Disjunction and Syllepsis: Tschumi and Coates.
Bernard Tschumi, Architecture & Disjunction.
Bernard Tschumi, Events & Spaces.
Nigel Coates, Arkaibion.
Nigel Coates, Ecstacity.

Seminar 8. Doubles & Reflected Subjects: John Donne, John Hilliard, Dan Graham
John Donne, Collected Poems.
Dan Graham, Rock My Religion.
Dan Graham, 2-Way Mirror Power.

Last Updated ( Oct 01, 2007 at 09:43 PM )

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