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Remembering Essentials

Stuart E. Cohen

A counterrevolution in architecture has taken place. This counterrevolution, a reaction to modernism, reestablished the belief that architectural forms have meaning, and that meaning can never reside solely in visual or spatial order but depends as well on memory, association, and learning. No matter how relative we believe our understanding of meaning to be, even if we make the assignment and interpretation of it entirely the province of the person seeing, reading, or experiencing a work, we no longer believe that architectural forms can be empty.

If the interpretation of meaning is dependent on the recognition of both form and formal structure, then our personal memory and our collective recorded memory are the basis of both the understanding and creation of architecture.

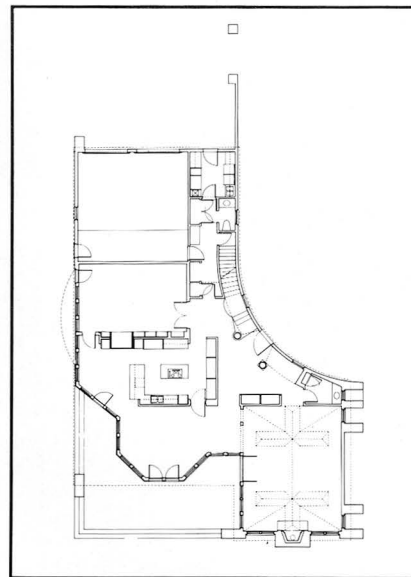
I believe that the creation of architecture requires memory of typology, precedent, and context. The conscious use of a precedent, a specific work of architecture, as a model for adaptation or transformation, goes beyond typology and carries with it memory of a specific meaning.

Contemporary examples of the use of precedent may be found where we least expect. Bernard Tschumi's follies at *Le Parc de La Villette*, often illustrated as examples of architectural "deconstruction," utilize rather than confound or challenge the relationship between architectural memory and interpretive meaning. Like the miniature classical temples built in English gardens they are transpositions,

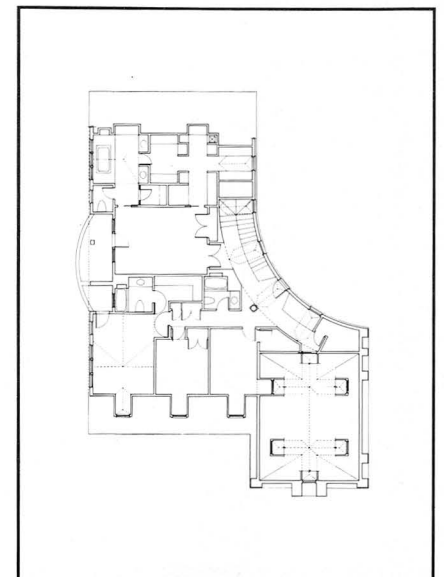
through the specific meanings of their forms, of an implied ideal world and its social order. The folly in the garden pits man's order against the overwhelming forces of nature. Tschumi's follies are poignantly dwarfed by the vast emptiness of La Villette's open spaces. Like miniature temples, these little Red Tatlin Towers and Monuments to the Third International may be read as failed symbols of man's social utopias set against the original Eden: The Garden. That such a reading of La Villette is possible depends on our memories, among others, of the architecture of Russian Constructivism. Similarly the revolutionary impact of the original constructivist forms depended, on their capacity to invoke remembered images of non-architectural models such as machines and bridges.

When we acknowledge that architectural form has meaning we acknowledge that *memory is essential to architecture*. Memory is the means by which we bring meaning to the individual act of creation or interpretation.

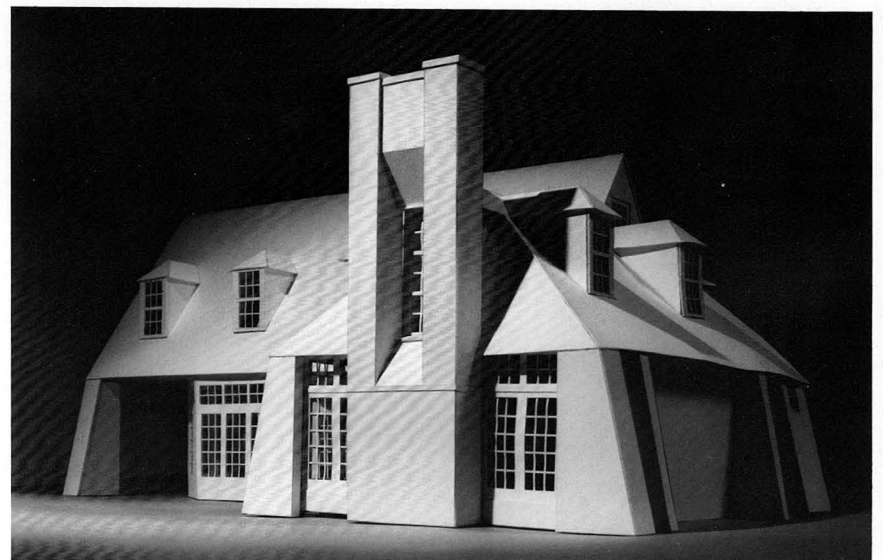
To suggest that *architecture is essential to memory* is a different proposition. It suggests that architecture is a primary repository of social, cultural, and artistic values and ideas. It suggests that architecture records for posterity our aspirations and goals. It suggests that it can represent and record the relative importance of our institutions within society, and that our experience of it allows us to understand and remember the values and ideas it portrays.



First Floor Plan

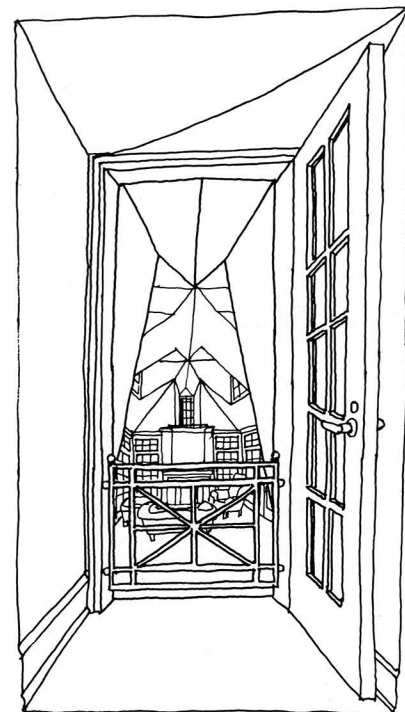
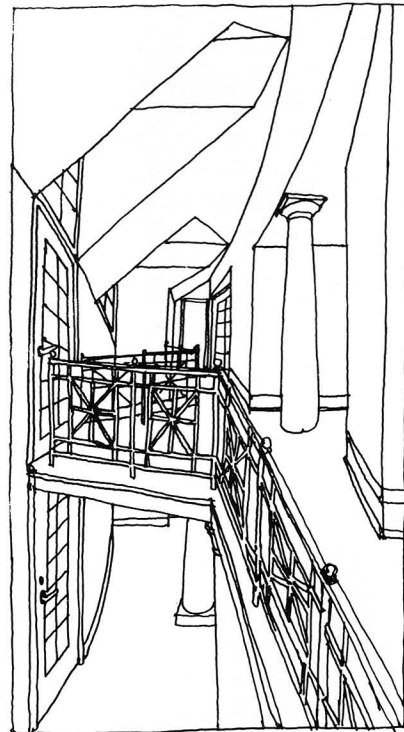


Second Floor Plan



Grund Residence, Glencoe, Illinois

The Grund Residence with its curving principal facade, draws upon memories of Lutyen's Gray Walls Gullane, and French country houses, as well as the stucco cottages of Voysey and the gabled forms of the great American country house. It contains favorite architectural themes such as: the conflation in plan and section using the concepts of spatial definition as contained and continuous; poche and free plan; traditional and modern space; or the seemingly irreconcilable difficulties of picturesque composition ruled by geometric alignment. The Grund Residence is a design done in admiration of architectural memories which have become personal essentials.



Drawings: Stuart Cohen and Julie Hacker
Model: Paul Todd and Ken Fougere

PHOTOGRAPH:

Orlando Cabanban Photography