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Christian Bergum

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Simulations

Christian Bergum

Introduction

The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, in his book, *The Order of Things*, portrays two discontinuous systems of representation characteristic to Western Culture. They are the "Classical" and "Modern." Underpinning and preceding these systems were changes in the epistemological orders. In Foucault's words, they are seen as "mutations." Today, the younger French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard portrays yet another "mutation" occurring. In his book, *Simulations*, he describes the emergence of a new third order, one of "Simulations," and like Foucault, he ties this to a fundamental change now taking place in our current epistemology. According to Baudrillard, we have proceeded from an episteme once based on "the natural law of value," to that of "the utilitarian law of value," and today to "the structural law of value." In his words, "abstraction today" is no longer based upon "being and appearance," nor that of "energy and determination," but rather on "indeterminacy and the code." In contemporary society, media, computerization, television, and politics, it has become "the generation of models of a real without origin or reality: a 'hyper-real' or 'hyperreality' that now characterizes our Western world."

This paper examines the ideas of these philosophers and their implications for architecture. The very edges of what we once thought demarked the realm of architecture and things considered to be "architectural" are once again under at-

tack and being modeled by things heretofore considered non-architectural. The line between the real and imaginary disappears. What was formerly considered memorable and timeless in architecture, today merges with the hyperreal, irrefereential, and profane. This paper examines this contemporary epistemological dilemma and attempts at grappling with this disappearance of the edge by looking at a sample built project.

Post-Structuralism/Deconstruction

The post-Structuralist philosopher Jean Baudrillard describes an unsettling picture of contemporary life. Abstraction today has progressed beyond the *classical* and *modern* systems that Foucault once

described.¹ According to Baudrillard in his book *Simulations*, "Three orders of appearance, parallel to the mutations of value, have followed one another since the Renaissance; they are *counterfeit*, *production* and *simulation*." "Counterfeit" was the dominant scheme of the classical period, from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution; "production" was the dominant scheme of the Industrial Era; and "simulation" has become the reigning scheme of the current era. Like Foucault, Baudrillard ascribes these changes in appearance to mutations of the law of value. However, Baudrillard takes it further to a third order of simulacrum. Whereas, the first order was based on the natural law of value, and the second on the commercial law of value or



Andy Warhol, *Campbell, Campbell, Campbell, Campbell*, 1960.

utility, the third is based on the *structural* law of value and is controlled by the unique metaphysics of the "code."²

For Baudrillard, the creative works produced by mankind "proceeded from a universe of natural laws to a universe of force and tensions of force," followed by today's "universe of structures and binary opposition." After the classical metaphysics of "being and appearance," and after that of modern "energy and determination," comes that of "indeterminacy and the code."³ "Cybernetic control, modulation, test/feedback, and question/answer" characterize the "new operational configuration" for the generation of simulacra. The computer becomes not only the tool of scientific inquiry, but also the final storage bank of the research. "Digitality is the new metaphysics, and



René Magritte, *L'usage de la parole I*, 1928-29.

DNA its origin." The genetic code gives rise to the "genesis of simulacra" that we mimic today.

For the sociologist Baudrillard, abstraction is no longer that of the classical "figure, double, or mirror." No longer is it a "discourse, referential being or substance." And after Modernism, reality is no longer present in the concept or the force that carries the objects or discourses. No longer is abstraction a result of the movement, zeitgeist, synthesis or understanding that carries the figure and the text in tandem. According to Baudrillard, abstraction today is the generation of models and of a "real without origin or reality: a hyperreal."⁵ Thereby the figure is the form that precedes the discourse. The procession of figurative (or linguistic) simulacra engenders the discourse itself. So "modeling and genetic miniaturization" become the dimension of this simulation, and "real" (i.e., the hyperreal) is produced from "matrices, memory banks, and command modules." The determinancies of the "classical" natural laws and the "modern" conceptions are replaced by

the indeterminancies of the contemporary societal and media codes.

Indeterminancy

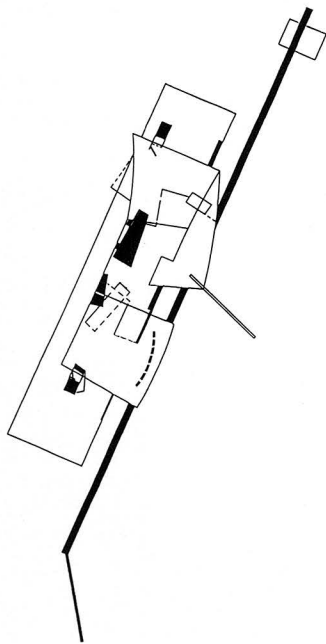
In his book, *Simulations*, Baudrillard associated the changes in society and art, like Foucault, with mutations in the law of value.⁶ According to Baudrillard, the simulacra constructed by man "proceed from a universe of natural laws to a universe of force and tensions of force," and today to a "universe of structures and binary oppositions." In this sense, the designer today relies upon a value system that is based on indeterminacy and the code. Whereas the classical urban design relied upon the natural value of objects and of language as signifiers, and the modern on the morality of the zeitgeistist determination — that is, the value of utility, the present-day designer relies on the structural law of value, and the indeterminate and binary structure of the code.

The characteristics of cybernetic control, modulation, test, feedback, and question/answer form the new operational configuration for the generation of form.

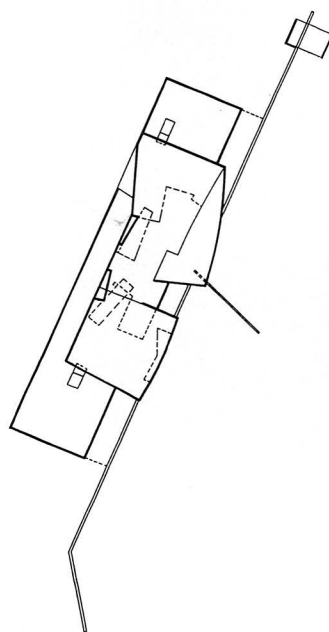
Like art and the media, architecture and urbanism are subjected to the same procession of simulacra that engenders its very production. As it becomes its own pure simulacrum, it models its own reality in deference to itself. Since architecture and urbanism today are no longer that of the classical image, double, or mirror, nor that of the modern esprit, or functionality, it cannot be measured against some referential being, object or nature, nor zeitgeist synthesis or concept of functionality, existentiality, or phenomenology. Since it is the generation of a "reality without origin or reality," a hyperreality that subsists here and there in the procession of simulacra that engendered and formed it, it can only be measured against the procession of simulacra that formed it. The integrity of the endangering similar must be maintained. In a fashion similar to René Magritte's, who paid close attention to mimetic detail and to resemblance of the objects he chose to toss into his paintings, the designer must likewise, under the structural law of value, pay close attention and maintain the character of the paintings or objects that have engendered according to his choice,

the final architectural realization. In this way, these projects, like Magritte's paintings, evoke that mysteriousness: that ineffable alienness beneath the surface familiarity of the world. Unlike the early modern abstractions that often dissected objects resulting in painting of unrecognizable objects and characteristics, these and Margritte's "are highly discernible, recognizable, and familiar objects."

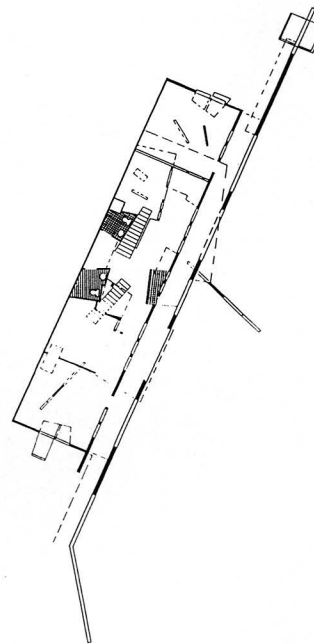
In the aesthetic sense, these projects are complete deconstructions of the referential orders of beauty. They depict a geometry that can be read at multiple levels. The humanistic notion of human-scale reference is unhinged and juxtaposed onto the modernist's motopian scale (e.g. Le Corbusier's buildings that are designed to be seen from speeding down the freeway), or onto movement-scale (e.g. the Futurists, St. Elia), and are grafted without hierarchy. Surfacing from this is another kind of aesthetic order, a third-order, one of not-knowing. Pathgrids are interchanged for roadway-grids, walls for paths, roofs, and enclosures for pavements and terraces. "This" aesthetic and "that" aesthetic, is replaced by a



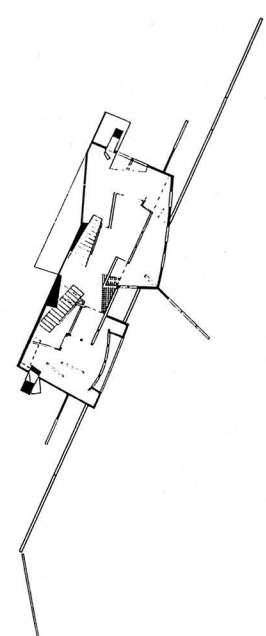
Collage of Suprematist Art and Site Setbacks



Roof Plan



Floor Plan



Loft Plan

hetero-aesthetic, and a hypergeometry. It is an unfinished, open-ended and uncompleted aesthetic that defers to ongoing re-reading.

Architectural Indeterminacy

Since the iconology of the classical and the determinacy of the modern conception are now replaced by the indeterminacy of the code, architectural form no longer has to be rational, for it is no longer measured against some conception or negative instance. Thus, this new form of architecture is unusually indeterminate, and merits as much consideration as the classical or the modern forms. The joy and wonder of excavating and uncovering new forms is a joy that gives pleasure not only to the builders but to the public at large. The recent architectural competition for a performing arts complex at the Ohio State University provided fine entries from both the classical (post-modern classical) and the modern, yet the jury chose the one that they probably understood the least, the one that seemed most puzzling, familiar forms engendering one another in a most uncertain fashion, and as a whole, unsatisfyingly incomplete. The procession of simulacra, in this instance, objects, pathways, streets, and building foundations on site are cast into juxtaposition, each engendering the other, like a Magritte painting or Libeskind drawing: disturbingly un-hierarchical and full of circulatory similitudes. The acceptance of the urban simulacrum or a hyperreality for the real comes in an age when, by means of similitude relayed indefinitely along a series the image itself along with the idea it carries, loses its identity.

Form is offered as a pure simulacrum. In this sense, it is indeterminate and irreferential. The public must now exchange their role as "users," and become "readers." It is no longer offered to them as a designed synthesis, but as Eisenman suggests, it is offered as a fragment of "writing," that the public must now decode for themselves.⁷ It is not a completed synthesis of forms, but incomplete

and highly seductive. The urban simulacra, like the paintings of Magritte or Warhol, the poetry of *Appolinaire*, and the television media present a multitude of circulatory similitudes neither this nor that, which exhibit in themselves already all the possibility of interpretation.⁸ Rather than there being a singular set of predetermined "readings" or "uses," there are now multitude of possible "readings" and "uses," that have not yet been named, that the public may encode and enact. These urban forms not only survive the onslaught of referenda, they fully engender them. They are, in fact, the representations of them by simulation.

"Is this architecture?" you ask. Or is it

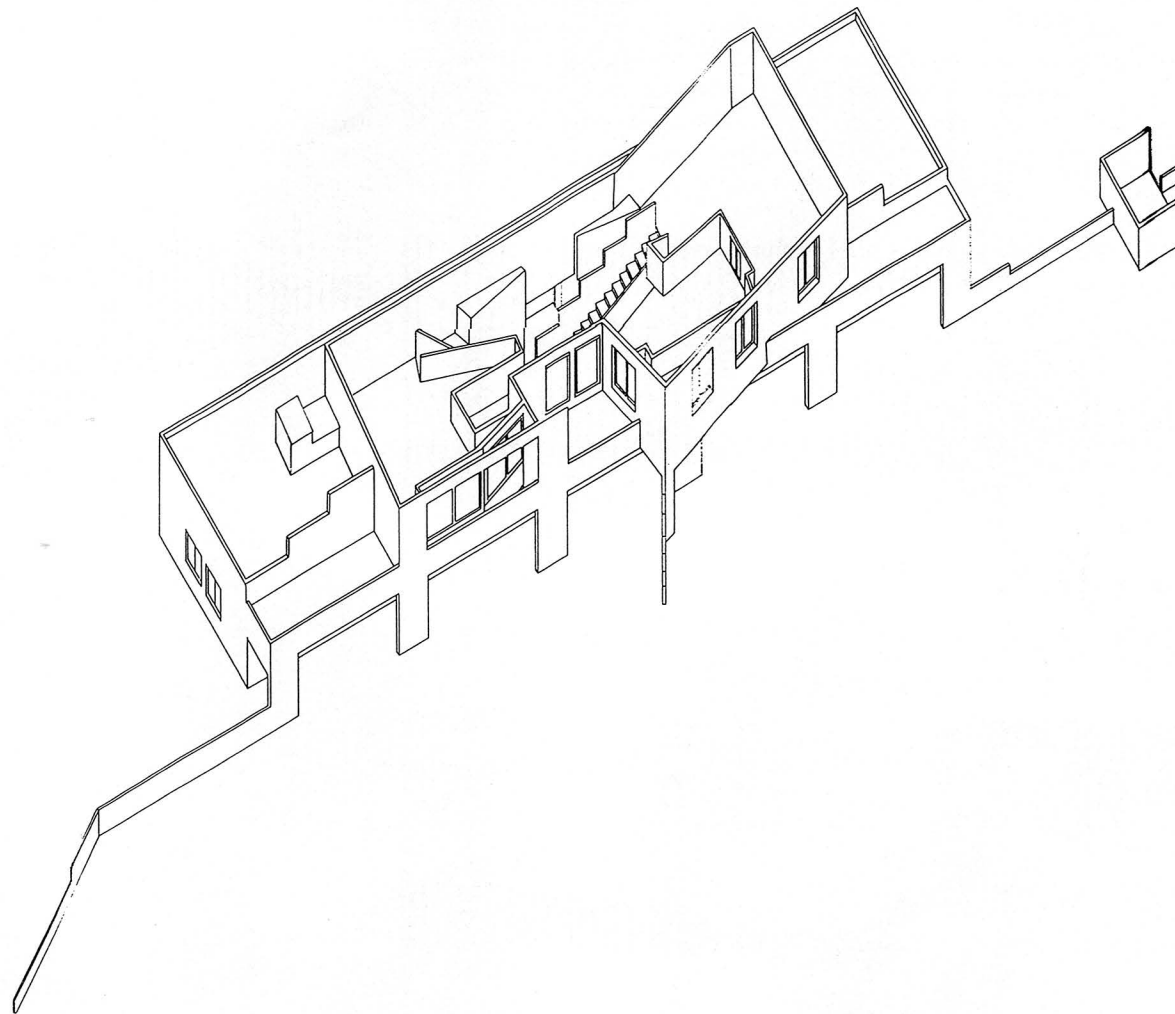
painting, collage, montage, or something else? Before saying "yes" or "no," it is sufficient to say that it is an architectural art of another sort. This third-order form arises from the indeterminacy of the structural law of value rooted in the contemporary dilemma of epistemology.

Sample Built Project

A sample office building was modeled as an intersection-object. The plan intersects with suprematist art, and the site with collage art building site lines, building setbacks, painterly gestures and shapes collide and resolve into a mysterious architectural plan. The familiar notation and detail establish the architectural con-

tent, yet at the same time, the plan contains gestures found elsewhere in collage art. The edge between art and architecture is effaced in an era of indeterminacy and epistemological "not-knowing."

Likewise the building begins with no preconceived program, but rather becomes an object offered to the public. It is offered as a reading event. The public becomes readers prior to becoming users. And the public in this case "read" this building as an attorney's office "here," builders office "there," conference room in this "area," and draftsman's loft "overhead." To this day, some overlapping spaces have yet to be named, and are claimed by all used in a multitude of ways.



Axonometric



Interior

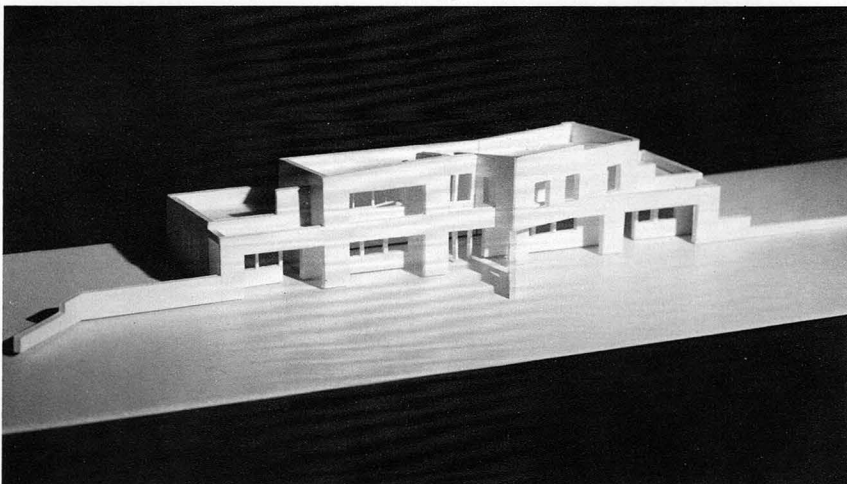
A psychologist's lease, singles out no separate sole "place," but dances amongst the various spaces as the occasion arises.

In this way, the preconceived ideas concerning architectural uses are deconstructed by the public. When the architectural object is offered as a reading event, the heretofore categories and edges either merge, intersect, or become lost, and indeterminate. In the age of simulation, as the philosopher Baudrillard suggests, the "real" and "reality" subsist within, and are ultimately exchanged for the "hyper-real" and "hypereality." That which was formerly considered memorable and timeless in architecture, engenders the

profane and heretofore non-architectural. If the philosophers are correct, and today we live in such an age and society, then the art of architecture shall depict the very inability to set further any boundaries at all. Rather uncertainty and indeterminacy, circularity, and the incessant deferring to a multitude of memorabilia simultaneously, shall all become characteristics of our contemporary architecture.



Exterior



Model

1. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxii-xxiii.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, p. 103.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid, p.2.
6. Baudrillard *Simulations*, p. 83.
7. Peter Eisenman. "The End of the Classical" *Montana State Architectural Review* (Spring 1985), pp.2-11 Reprinted from *Perspecta*, 12, 1985.
8. Baudrillard *Simulations*, pp.120-121.