

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND CRITICISM

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EISENMAN
OUT **INSIDE**

1963 – 1988 ^{Selected Writings}

23. We have always read architecture. Traditionally it did not induce reading but responded to it. The use of arbitrariness here is an idea to stimulate or induce the reading of traces without references to meaning but rather to other conditions of process — that is, to stimulate pure reading without value or prejudice, as opposed to interpretation.
24. Previously, there was assumed to be an a priori language of value, a poetry, existing within architecture. Now we are saying that architecture is merely language. We read whether we know what language we are reading or not. We can read French without understanding French. We can know someone is speaking nonsense or noise. Before we are competent to read and understand poetry we can know something to be language. Reading in this context is not concerned with decoding for meaning or for poetic content but rather for indication.
25. C. F. Franco Rella, "Tempo della fine e tempo dell'inizio" (The Age of the End and the Age of the Beginning), *Casabella* 48, no. 498–99 (Jan.–Feb. 1984): 106–8. The similarity to the title of Franco Rella's article is coincidental, for we use the terms "beginning" and "end" for entirely different purposes. Rella identifies the present as the age of the end, stating that the paradoxical result of progress has been to create a culture that simultaneously desires progress and is burdened with a sense of passing and the chronic sense of irredeemable loss. The result is a culture which "does not love what has been but the end of what has been. It hates the present, the existing, and the changing. It therefore loves nothing." Rella's article poses the question of whether it is possible to build today, to design in a way that is with rather than against time. He desires the return to a sense of time-boundedness and the possibility of living in one's own age without attempting to return to the past. The mechanism by which he proposes to re-create this possibility is myth. He differentiates myth from fiction, and it is this difference which illuminates the opposition between his proposal and the propositions of this paper. Myth is defined as a traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the worldview of a people in the traditional value-laden sense, giving history and thus value to timeless or inexplicable events. Rella dismisses fiction as verisimilitude, merely creating the appearance of truth. Instead of attempting to return to the past, myth attempts to create a new beginning merely situating us at an earlier, and less acute, state of anxiety. But a myth cannot alleviate the paradox of progress. Against both of these, "The End of the Beginning and the End of the End" proposes dissimulation, which is neither the simulation of reality as we know it nor the proposal of an alternate truth, which appeals to the identical verifying structures of belief — that is, origins, transformations, and ends. "The End of the Classical" insists on maintaining a state of anxiety, proposing fiction in a self-reflexive sense, a process without origins or ends which maintains its own fictionality rather than proposing a simulation of truth.

THE FUTILITY OF OBJECTS

Decomposition and
the Processes
of Differentiation

History is not continuous.¹ It is made up of presences and absences. The presences occur when history is vital and continuous, deriving its energy from its own momentum. In architecture the continuity is defined by categories of processes and objects. These are often consonant with the destiny of man: the universal order of man, God, and nature. The absences are ruptures between a continuity which has ended and the next one which has not yet begun. The vitality of the rupture is derived from the energy that rushes in to fill the void. In the past there have been many periods of rupture, each characterized by a change in what was perceived to be the order of the universe and in the categories representing that order in architecture.

In the fifteenth century there was such a rupture. It was assumed that through the powers of reason and will man could alter his place in the order of the universe relationship, which, prior to that time, had been hierarchical and theocentric—God had mediated between man and nature. Anthropocentrism was a radical change. The objects man made in the Renaissance attempted to symbolize this new destiny. Thus, the form and order of ideal towns of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were thought to represent the form and order of “harmonic” man. This period, however, was also defined by a changed consciousness concerning what previously was an unconscious making of architecture. This change was first articulated by Alberti in his idea of composition.² The conscious idea of a compositional process changed the relationship between a cosmological change and an architectural one. (It will be argued that all such changes in cosmology have been mirrored by and in architecture.)

Again in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when man began to study man, he could no longer be said to occupy the center.³ He gradually drifted away from his former anthropocentrism. This prompted another condition of rupture, perhaps not as definitive as the Renaissance, but just as important for architecture. It was promoted by the introduction of an ideological statement of intent prior to the process of making. Where previously theory and ideology were derived from existing objects, now it was the object which followed from and contained an explicitly stated ideology.⁴

Modernism was another attempt to wipe the slate clean, to break from the historical continuity of the previous four centuries. Primarily, modernism was thought to be a rupture with the continuity of classicism. Modernism expressed this rupture not only through a change in the object and its relationship to man but also in the process, the object's making, thereby changing its own internal history. The hierarchical relationship between man and object and the creative subject was articulated through a more or less autonomous process of making.⁵

While the tabula rasa of modernism was not thought to be man-centered, it was, ironically, willed by man; his mythic shadow loomed more importantly than had been realized. Then, in 1945, those shadows became frozen realities, marked forever on the consciousness of man in the stones of Hiroshima and the smoke of Auschwitz. While the ruptures of the Renaissance and modernism were created by man in the eclipse of history, the ruptures of 1945 were created by history in the eclipse of man.⁶

A new sensibility exists. It was born in the rupture of 1945. This sensibility was neither predicated in the tenets of modernism nor brought about by their failure to achieve the

utopia of the present. Rather, it emerged from something unforeseen to modernism, in the fact that not since the advent of modern science, technology, and medicine has a generation faced, as it does today, the potential extinction of the entire civilization. This suggestion of an end in the present shattered the classical and triadic condition of past, present, and future time and, thus, its progression and continuity. Previously, the present was seen as a moment between the past and the future. Now the present contains two unrelated poles: a memory of this previous and progressive time, and an immanence, the presence of end—the end of the future—a new kind of time.⁷

In this new time a new sensibility has developed called post-modernism.⁸ In the context of this new time, the term does not define a harmless period after modernism, nor does it merely signify the crasure of modernism and the resurrection of the classical. Rather, it proposes a transgressive or negative aspect which is at the root of its own definition.⁹ It suggests that the relationship and nature of objects and processes sustained by a previous history are no longer operative. Underlying this is another view of history—that what was previously understood as the rupture between the classical and the modern can now be seen as aspects of the same continuity; first, in terms of the nature of the architectural object and its capacity to signify; second, in terms of the idea of the process of design.

The architectural object of both classicism and modernism contains the idea of original perfection. That is, the significance of any specific object is, in part, understood by some reference to simple type forms. The specific object does not so much represent type forms as it is significant of this relationship. In the classical these type forms were ideal and “natural,” characterized by symmetries, central axes, and a hierarchy of elemental parts. In the modern, type forms were Platonic and abstract, characterized more easily by references to dynamic, asymmetric, mechanistic structures than the hierarchic types of the classical. Each presumes that meaning can inhere in an object, and that such meaning accrues, at least in part, from the relationship of the object to the type form. Thus, each presumes a stable origin of the object as sign, an ordering of signs which as Foucault says is a mirror to the ordering of the world and the order of being itself.¹⁰

Composition, the classical process, suggests that the ends are as stable as the origins; transformation, the modernist process, concerns the idea of process as time. As processes, composition and transformation, in their supposed differences, were thought to have defined a rupture. However in fact, both presume that type forms are linked by an internal history to an object. Both assume that these origins are pure and ideal; on the one hand, natural, on the other, abstract.

In composition the idea originated in an order outside man—in the transformation of the natural through that order, or system of rules and proportions. In the classical, a building's autonomy was not complete within itself; it was related to the transcendental condition of nature. The classical proposed that the natural or ideal order was identical to a substance. And to the extent that this was so, the object appeared as natural.

Transformation in its specific modernist sense had no such recourse to a natural or conventional order. Transformation, while it did not necessarily suggest any ideal order, presumed that the significance of the final form resided, in part, in the process itself; in

cf. NUTTALL
ROMA CULTURE
FUTURE & PRESENT FUSE

UNTIMELINESS

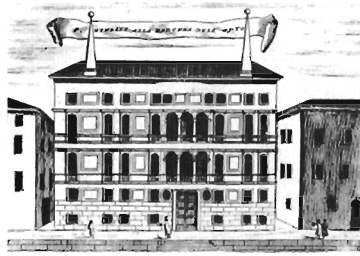
P.E. DEPLETES MODERNISM'S
NOVELTY SO HE CAN
CLAIM HIS WORK AS
THE NAME OF THE REAL
RUPTURE.

SIMILARITIES OF
CLASSICAL &
MODERN.

ORIGIN & TYPE

CLASSICAL COMPOSITION
NO AUTONOMY
RELATED TO THE
COSMOS.

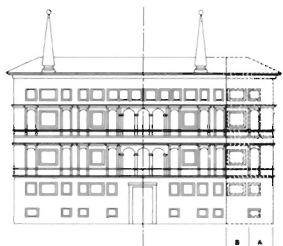
MODERNIST TRANSFORMATION
AUTONOMOUS



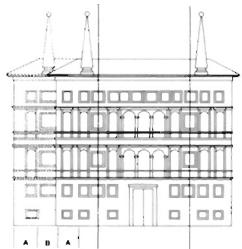
14.1 Palazzo Minelli (c. 1709), front elevation by V. Coronelli, showing asymmetrical location of the main entry.

THE TASK

THE TACTICS



14.2 Palazzo Minelli, showing addition of missing AB fragment on right.



14.3 Palazzo Minelli, showing subtraction of AB fragment of ABA bay on left, producing a symmetrical condition about two axes.

the capacity of the object to reveal its own origins and processes, to register back to an original type—by a kind of reverse mental process. It was hermetic and internalized.

Thus, if the classical and the modern were seen as an inherent part of architecture, they were so through two constant ideas: one, the capacity of meaning to inhere in a form; and two, the grounding of the processes of composition or transformation in the idea of a type. These two ideas can be considered the traditional and continuing aspects of both classicism and modernism. And in this dual sense they share the same roots. No matter what the style or ideology displayed in an object—whether neo-classical or modern, the classical contained an unchanging attitude toward the relationship of the object to the process. So what was formerly seen as a rupture between classicism and modernism is, in the context of these two ideas, now a continuity, and what is more, a continuity which sustained four hundred years of the history of architecture.

Now, if the objects and processes of the classical/modern continuity are no longer sustained by the present sensibility (in fact it will be argued below that the classical objects and processes are the only ones that cannot be related to the new conditions of time), then how does one model a new relationship of objects and processes more congruent with the present post-modern sensibility?

First, the reintroduction of history not merely as a simplistic reaction to modernism, nor as a literal classicism but rather in the concept of the negative which is imbedded in the classical tradition, potentially brings a new dimension of interpretation to the idea of history. Second, the introduction of the negative of the classical proposes the possible inversion of the nature of the object, its capacity to hold meaning, and the inversion of the processes of composition and transformation, potentially erasing the basis of the concept of type. And finally, the introduction of the idea of the negative of the classical, the impasse created by modernism's erasure of history, is avoided.¹¹ History, not as a narrative, nor as a progressive historicizing agent, is capable of being used as a critical construct, in an approximation of a non-metaphysical, non-dialectic condition of origin.

At some distance from modernism, there seem to be other objects and processes in the history of architecture which have existed that have contained such a negation of classical models. In their impure nature (purity being an aspect of both modernist and classical type forms) they propose an *other* condition for the object and, more importantly, an *other* process of making outside the classical/modernist definition.

This essay is an attempt to sketch certain aspects of this negative of classical composition by deconstructing a series of buildings which are used as heuristic approximations of this sensibility—as beginnings rather than the ends they really are. These reveal and simultaneously begin to suggest an alternative process of making called decomposition.¹² To begin to locate this idea of decomposition it is possible to propose three categories of objecthood, each of which in turn begins to suggest a process of making, which displays a trajectory moving away from the classical idea of compositional processes and objects. Provisionally, these categories, seen within a classical/modernist continuity, can be said to be not-compositional.

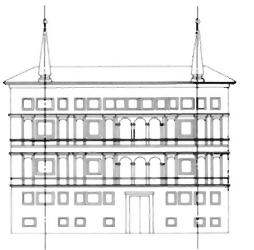
The first category originates at the very heart of the classical without being compositional. This category can be called precompositional in that it fundamentally concerns variations

PE AS ANT-ALBERTI
DE-COMPOSITION

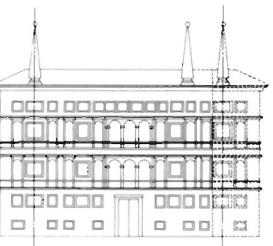
in symmetry from natural existence—additions and subtractions to simple bilateral structures which occur almost without design in plan or elevation. If composition in the Albertian sense concerned order and the making of order, that is, the transformation of some order giving type, then precomposition is essentially the denuded framework of order and not really the product of composition. While certain asymmetries may be present they do not represent the transformation from a type-form. Any number of simple buildings, whether classical or not, display such symmetry. For example, there is an asymmetrical location of the main entry in the Palazzo Minelli, as illustrated by V. Coronelli (1709) (fig. 14.1). There are several explanations which clarify this asymmetry, each implying a reference to a simple symmetrical type. First, the main entry usually defines the central axis of a previous ideal state. To sustain this interpretation, an AB fragment of an ABA bay has to be read as missing on the right (fig. 14.2). Such a reading presumes that previously there was an ideal state of classical unity, an order from which this right-hand element was subtracted. In a second reading, an ideal condition is defined by two symmetrical axes taken through the two bays of solid panels. This reading requires that an AB fragment of an ABA bay be subtracted from the left (fig. 14.3) to restore a pre-existing unity. In either of these two cases, the location of the two pinnacles is taken to be a datum; if they define two symmetrical axes (fig. 14.4), then two other readings are possible. The first suggests that by moving the right pinnacle to correspond to the position of the left pinnacle (fig. 14.5), or, conversely, the left pinnacle can be moved to correspond to the position of the one on the right (fig. 14.6), a stable condition of origin is re-created. In each case, an understanding of order comes from the idea that there is an original unity from which elements have been added or subtracted to produce what seems to be an incomplete building. Since composition in Alberti's definition is finite and does not admit such additions or subtractions, the process which produced the actual object is not strictly compositional. Palazzo Minelli, in classical terms, is precompositional because (1) what seem to be transformations are only additions and subtractions; and (2) what seems to be a type-form is only derived from a primitive vertebrate symmetry, commonly found in natural order.

A second category which begins to move the trajectory of the design process away from the classical actually concerns the composite rather than the composed. Buildings in this category, while the result of a design process, basically concern overlapping, the superimposition of two simple types by a process of addition. The result is not usually a stable, finite order but, as in the precompositional, an unstable one. Any number of buildings from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice illustrate this second category. They are more additive than compositional in that they contain and display the process of working toward an order rather than order itself.

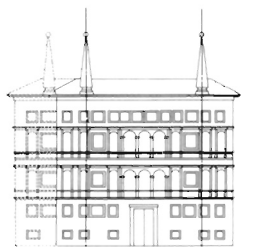
A version of the composite can be seen in the Palazzo Surian (fig. 14.7)—a first interpretation, proceeding in similar fashion as in the precompositional, questions the asymmetrical location of the central element. If this is moved one bay to the right (fig. 14.8) it restores a classical symmetry. Two other similar interpretations are possible, assuming that the twin entry doors of the central element are in fact the center of some single unity and that it is the elements on either end which have been added or subtracted. Either the right-



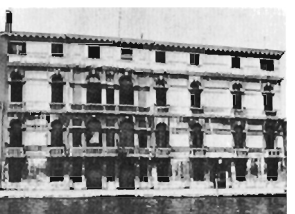
14.4 Palazzo Minelli, showing two roof pinnacles as a datum defining two different axes of symmetry.



14.5 Palazzo Minelli, showing movement of right pinnacle to correspond to the position of the left, to re-create a stable condition of origin.



14.6 Palazzo Minelli, showing movement of left pinnacle to correspond to the position of the right, producing another stable condition of origin.



14.7 Palazzo Surian, showing building as it existed in 1980.

14.8 Palazzo Surian, showing central element moved one bay to the right, restoring classical symmetry.

14.9 Palazzo Surian, showing subtraction of right bays, producing a symmetrical condition.

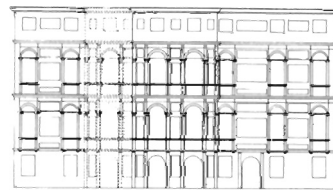
14.10 Palazzo Surian, by Antonio Visentini, showing simple symmetrical palazzo.

14.11 Palazzo Surian, showing addition of several bays at the left, producing a symmetrical condition.

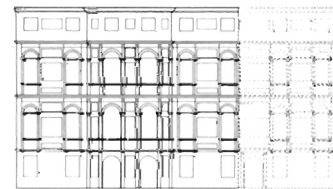
14.12 Palazzo Surian, showing Palazzo as an overlapping of two types.

14.13 Palazzo Surian, read as ABA type.

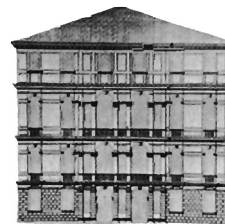
14.14 Palazzo Surian, read as ACA type.



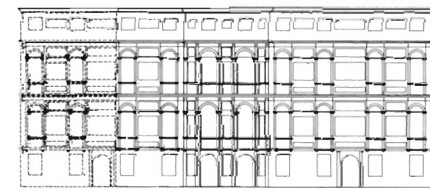
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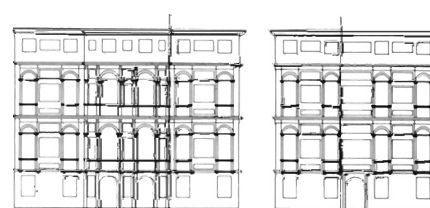
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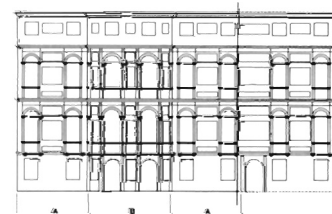
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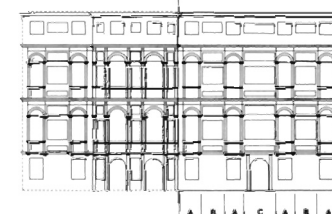
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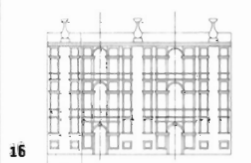


14.15 Palazzo Foscari at Carmini, as it existed in 1980.

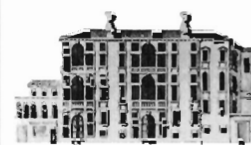
hand end (fig. 14.9) is an anomaly and can be subtracted, as in the drawing by Antonio Visentini (fig. 14.10), thus returning the building to an original unity; or a similar element to the one taken away in figure 14.10 can be added to the left, again re-creating a stable, original unity (fig. 14.11). All of the above interpretations are reductive, in that the complexity of the existing façade is interpreted as an irregularity of a single classical type. A third reading is possible, although it is also reductive; it takes into account much of the intentional complexity present in the façade rather than reducing it to the inconsequential. Here, the building is an overlapping of two models, as opposed to the composing of disparate simple wholes, which when pulled apart reveal the collision of two types (fig. 14.12). It can be read as a centralized ABA type (fig. 14.13) or as a less centralized ACA type (fig. 14.14).

In the Palazzo Surian there is no transformation of the original types. Instead of one original base, the building is merely the superimposition of two simple types. Since composition involves some form of transformation of a type to a specific form, such superimposition is merely another aspect of the composite.

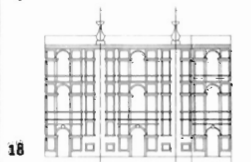
A third building, the Palazzo Foscari (fig. 14.15), combines aspects of both the other buildings but suggests a third category which can tentatively be called *extracompositional* because it seems to be at the periphery of the idea of classical composition. Upon first appearance, it is a literal fragment of some complete real (as opposed to ideal) building that had existed as a unitary whole. This interpretation is possible because within a dominant and classical mode of thought when viewing a classical organization, it is normal to think in terms of classical unity and bilateral symmetry. Thus, the initial interpretation assumes that an end bay on the left was "cut off" to accommodate a later and larger adjacent building. Inherent in this interpretation is the idea that the building would have been something like the reconstruction in figure 14.16. In this reading the two major arched elements with their two axes of symmetry suggest some form of original condition. In the eighteenth-century drawings of the building (fig. 14.17), however, this is not the case. The building as it stands today is, except for minor details, as it existed then. In another reading a second symmetrical original or type-form emerges. If the two dominant chimneys form two dual axes of symmetry, then an element composed of a third major arched opening flanked by small windows on either side (fig. 14.18) can be added to the right to complete the "composition." In another reading, part of the end bay on the right (the line of vertical windows and its adjacent blank surfaces) can be added on the left to produce a symmetry about the axis of the central chimney (fig. 14.19). If these were the only readings, there would be nothing more to command attention. Assuming that the Palazzo Foscari as built is the complete and original intention, that is, a fragment only if one has recourse to a classical typology of simple origins, then it is necessary to search in the juxtapositions of existing elements for further readings which do not involve additions or subtractions and which are more pervasive. In one such interpretation the façade can be seen as alternating ABAB elements reading from the left to right (fig. 14.20). This reading forces the outside windows of the central element away from the inside windows so that they can be seen to join across a blank surface of the façade directly below the two chimneys, as a new B bay. Add or subtract one B or one A bay on either side and the façade is symmetrical, producing a unity.



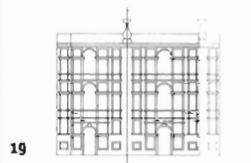
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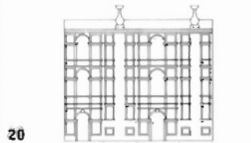
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14.16 Palazzo Foscari, showing addition of a B bay to the left, restoring symmetry.

14.17 Palazzo Foscari, (c. 1709), by V. Coronelli.

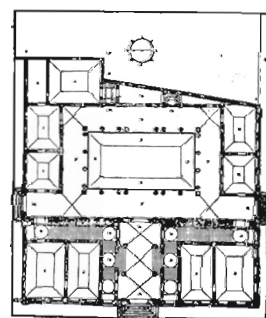
14.18 Palazzo Foscari, showing addition of an A bay to the right, creating a simple symmetry about the two dominant chimneys.

14.19 Palazzo Foscari, showing addition of a fragment of a right end bay to the left end, producing a symmetry about the axis of the central chimney.

14.20 Palazzo Foscari, showing a reading of alternating ABAB elements, from left to right.

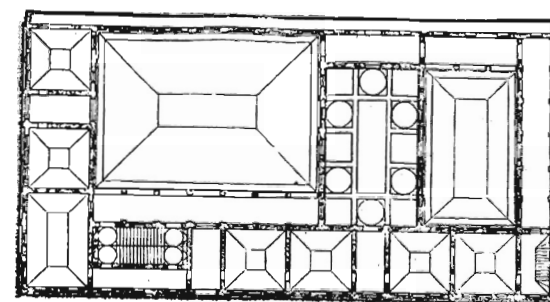
14.21 Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (1602), by Vincenzo Scamozzi.

14.22 Fabrica Fino, Bergamo (1611), by Vincenzo Scamozzi.



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CLASSICAL



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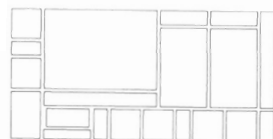
EXTRACOMPOSITIONAL

However, such possible additions or subtractions are again not within the idea of completeness inherent in classical composition. The reading of *ABAB* is a reading of discrete successive units. The repetition of these units changes the façade from a compositional reading to reading as a process of succession. This idea of succession is neither procompositional nor composite. Rather, it suggests a third category of the not-classical, which is made more significant because the reading now has no recourse to an originating type.

As long as the process of design refers back to classical types, there is a hierarchy of relationships. This hierarchy produces a preferred set of images and sameness which leads composition to produce fixed and unitary objects, and discard, overlook or reduce differences which in a classical context produce instability and change. That such preferences are part of a dominant cultural attitude can be seen in the eighteenth-century drawings of Antonio Visentini, whose *Admiranda Urbis Venetae* is a mirror of such an attitude.¹³ These volumes, which in their spirit purport to be a typological study, attempt to take many of the anomalous conditions of the Venetian palazzi and explain them as variations or transformations of classical types. The resulting plans and elevations are reductive as is the case in each palazzo discussed above.¹⁴

Underlying all such reductions is the idea that complex phenomena can be interpreted by simplification. Thus, the physical form of an architecture—the precise size, shape, number, and location of windows, doors, walls, and floors—takes on intentionality and thus significance with respect to this simpler, more ideal or natural state to which they are presumed to be related, and from which they are transformed.

Classical composition presumes that any complex data present in a façade or a plan can be understood by a reversal of the process to some singular or binary ideal or natural model. The ideal guarantees and explains the complex transformations. Thus Visentini's typological "reconstructions" are a "natural" or causal way of thinking of the Venetian



14.23 Fabrica Fino, showing spaces as positive and volumetric and walls as the outer edge of the volumes.

Types = Hierarchy



14.24 Fabrica Fino, showing ABCBA symmetry.

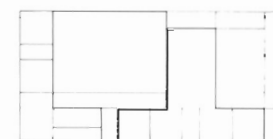
palazzi. What is important to see in Palazzo Foscari is not just an initial asymmetry, a so-called contradiction of a classical unity, or a mere "complexity"—an either/or condition which refers to an ideal—but rather that it proposes another latent and alternative sensibility, which suggests a realm of potential rupture. Even in periods of past rupture, the models for the tabula rasa always have had a classical basis. Once there is no recourse to type, then the nature of the compositional process at work and the significance of the object is called into question. And in the present period of rupture these questions begin to suggest, from their former position at the periphery of the classical, *other* categories of being and other processes of making.

Thus, once this third category is proposed, other examples in history can be examined which do not have recourse to a simple type. This is seen in a comparison of two buildings of similar dates by Vincenzo Scamozzi, the Palazzo Strozzi of 1602 in Florence (fig. 14.21), and the Fabrica Fino of 1611 in Bergamo (fig. 14.22). They illustrate the distinctions between a classical plan (the result of a compositional process) and one which is extra-compositional (the result of some *other* process). While there are many ways to interpret the Palazzo Strozzi, each explains the object with reference to a classical type. On the other hand, the Fabrica Fino, while using similar volumetric divisions (it may even contain the origins of Louis Kahn's idea of "space as structure"—an articulation of a series of contiguous volumes), has extracompositional qualities. There is no single center of gravity, no shifting axes of symmetry, no order of the whole. While this is not unusual in such complexes as Hadrian's Villa or in the narrative scheme for the Houses of Parliament proposed by Charles Barry, it becomes anomalous but not arbitrary, in the context of what seems to be classical composition.

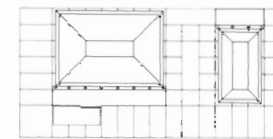
If in Palladio there is an ordering of volumes like beads on an invisible organizing string, and if in Louis Kahn there is a grid of servant and served spaces derived from the functionalist and technological shadow of the Beaux-Arts (which is also present, to a lesser degree, in the Le Corbusier of the Villa Garches), then the ordered volumetric relationships in the Fabrica Fino are neither Palladian, Beaux-Arts Academic, nor Corbusian. It is an entirely other order of gridded or interstitial space.

Within classical formal analysis, Palladio's layered spaces are connected by the proximity and alignment of window and door openings, and the *poché* of the walls defines the negative or void spaces; Scamozzi's spaces in such a context become positive and volumetric, while the walls are the edges of the volumes rather than the containers (fig. 14.23). In the entry façade (fig. 14.24) two segments of space define double symmetrical axes of entry in the *ABCBA* symmetry. There are two sets of solid *A* bays on each end, two sets of single void *B* bays which contain the central set of four solid *C* bays. However, behind this symmetrical façade is an order of space which belies and even negates such formal analysis. A hint of this is the little triangular projection on the roof line over the right entry. It is not a mere accident of drawing, or a functional modification, but a signal of what is to come on the interior.

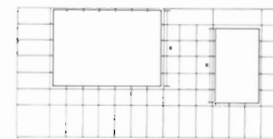
In plan, in front of the left and right entries are two partial symmetries which take the form of two interlocking T-shaped elements (fig. 14.25). The left entry is in the vertical seg-



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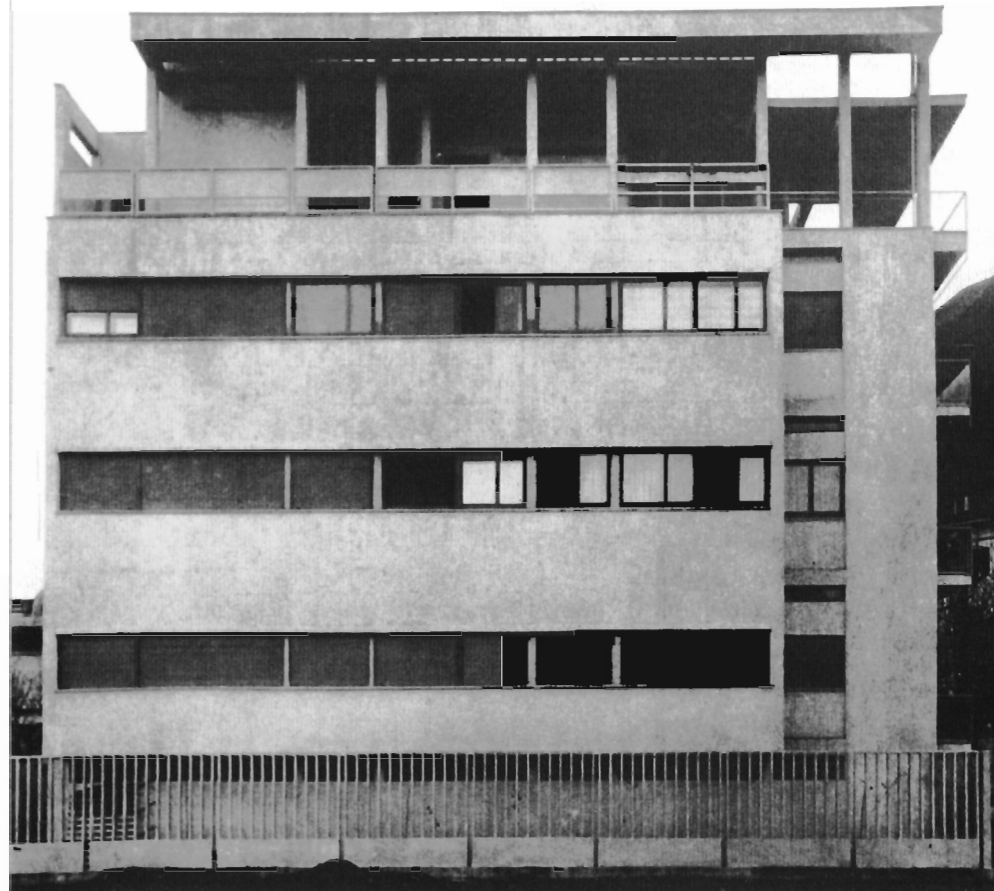
14.25 Fabrica Fino, showing partial symmetries in the form of two interlocking "T"-shaped elements.

14.26 Fabrica Fino, showing ante-chamber, row of columns, and lozenge-shaped ceiling vault within the peripheral strip of both major spaces.

14.27 Fabrica Fino, showing relationship of length to width of the two major spaces.

14.28 Fabrica Fino, showing two dissimilar exterior bands.

14.29 Fabrica Fino, showing irregularity in spatial alternation in front exterior band.



14.30 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, front view from which it appears more massive.

ment of the T; the right entry is in the horizontal segment. This is the first indication of this *other* order, understood by the following analysis: each time there is a search for classical similarities or sameness in shape, form, or number, something is confounded. In the samenesses of the Fabbrica Fino there are always differences. For example, both major spaces have an antechamber, a row of columns, and a lozenge-shaped ceiling vault with a peripheral strip (fig. 14.26) not seen in any of the other spaces. These samenesses are confounded by the fact that the entry to one is conceptually from the front, the other from the rear. Interestingly, the length of one is the same as the width of the other (fig. 14.27).

There are also two different exterior bands of space (fig. 14.28) which surround the two major spaces. These function as servant and served spaces, passage and arrival; they are marked by samenesses—central, square, vaulted, pavilion-like spaces punctuated by slots of rectangular, unvaulted spaces. One larger el-shaped band extends down the left of the building and across the front, and a second, smaller el-shaped band extends partially across the back and down the right. The left front band is marked by regular intervals of flat pilasters on the exterior as opposed to the right rear band, which is flat. However, this regularity on the left front is again denied by the order in the spaces behind the façade. The



14.31 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, corner view from which a planar reading is revealed.

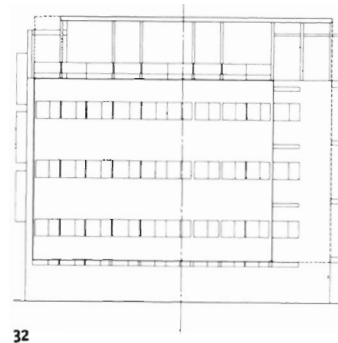
spaces begin in a regular alternation of one rectangular *B* bay and two square *A* bays. Reading from the right there is *BAABAAB* rhythm interrupted by a staircase in a *C* bay and by an anomalous bay at the bottom left-hand corner. This anomaly is read from the front as a square *A* bay, but from the left it is read as a rectangular *C* bay (fig. 14.29). Thus, as in the Palazzo Foscari, the only reading of an order in these bands is that of an inconclusive succession of spaces. Such a reading denies the hierarchies of the classical for a sequential or successional order, which calls attention not to merely size differences between bay elements but rather to the interval, the implied void—that which has been left out—between elements. This alternating and inconclusive succession does not fall within the classical canon of symmetries and asymmetries, single or multiple axes. The idea that the object is incomplete and can be completed by addition of one bay or subtraction of another again derives from the classical preconception of an ideal image.

Whereas in the Venetian examples the buildings appear to be the composite of two or more types, transformations from some simpler base conditions, this is not the case in the Fabbrica Fino, which in its suspension of progressive time suggests another aspect of this third category. The plan is a series of jewel-like fragments frozen in motion and time, in the

Succession over
time

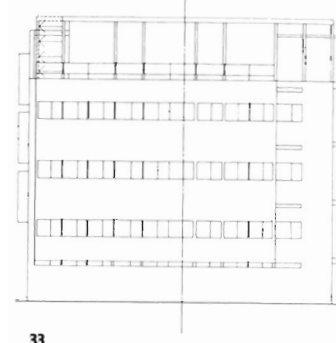
UNTIMELY

14.32 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing the projecting three-story volume as a possible base condition with its axis of symmetry.



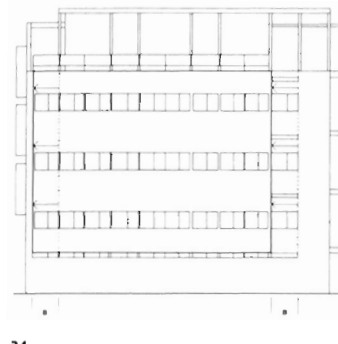
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14.33 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing extension of top frame to align with the edge of the projecting volume.



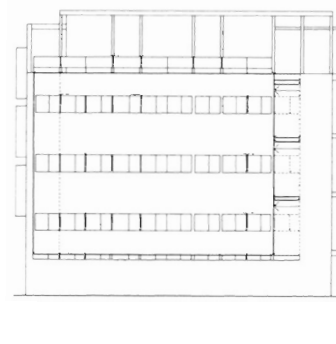
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14.34 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing shift of three-story volume one B bay to the left.



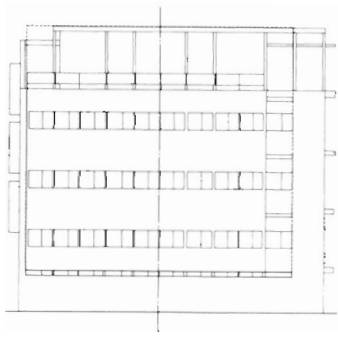
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14.35 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing horizontal slots in second B bay on the right.



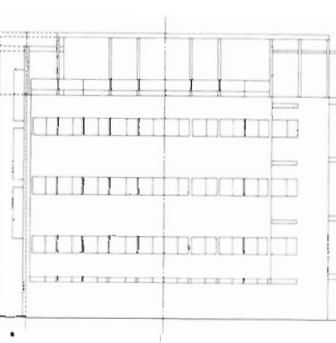
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14.36 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing horizontal window at the base of the façade as another possible base condition.



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14.37 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing addition of a single B bay to the left, producing a symmetrical condition.



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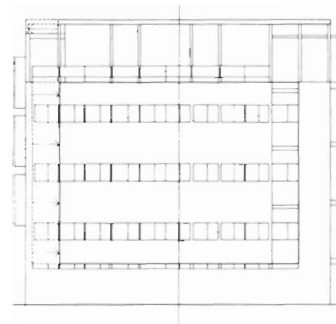
next instant clicking into place in some equally unstable or incongruous condition. These fragments are neither arbitrary nor gratuitous. There is a strong sense of an immanent order which denies a reading of the plan as merely complex fragments. Equally, it is not a complexity which is a transformation of a classical unity, such as the interlocking and complementary axes of the plan of the Palazzo Pellegrino. There is a centralizing, symmetrical, or stable order in the Fabrica Fino, which is only fragmentary and does not sustain an explanation of the entire building from a single or even multiple set of beginnings. It is

only our will to see order as a transformation of a type-form that causes us to see the whole or the pieces as a series of fragments. Instead these fragments suggest suspended "differences"—that the compositional process which controls them rather than being at the periphery of the classical may be at the center of some other order.

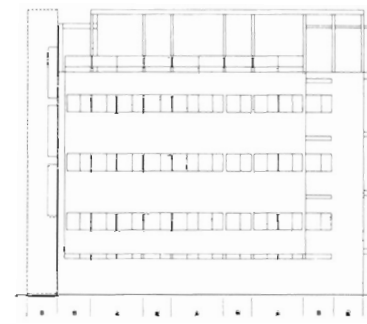
There is one final aspect of this third or extra-compositional category which can be seen in Giuseppe Terragni's *Giuliani Frigerio* apartment block of 1939 in Como.⁵ It concerns a form of reading which is outside of the classical/modern canon. Initially, a modernist dialogue between implied and actual volume can be read, particularly on its north façade. Neither reading is dominant enough to be clearly taken as the primary reference; volume and plane coexist ambiguously in an unresolved fashion. While a volumetric reading predominates from a frontal viewpoint, where the building appears more massive (fig. 14.30), a planar reading predominates from the oblique viewpoint, where the open corners reveal a system of layered planes (fig. 14.31). Such a modernist reading focuses attention on a shift from the classical architectural datum or reference plane—which provided a structure for the interpretation of an object by the observer—to a datum which acts internally to structure the incongruencies of the object. However, it is not in the context of an internalized datum (one which is essentially modernist) that the apartment block becomes significant to this discussion, but rather when the building suggests an other form of reading, a condition exposed in the unresolved symmetries and asymmetries of the north façade. The asymmetric position of the projecting three-story volume first suggests a set of simple origins. In the front-back dimension, there is an alignment of the three-story volume with the forward edge of the bent frame. This suggests an original type with an axis of symmetry (fig. 14.32). However, in the side-to-side dimension these two elements are not aligned. To produce an alignment the top frame can be extended to the left edge of the façade (fig. 14.33). Now only the three-story volume is in an asymmetric position. A clue to its location can be found in the two anomalous B bays on the right. In one interpretation the three-story volume has been shifted one B bay to the left (fig. 14.34). This interpretation gains validity when reading the three horizontal slots in the second-from-the-right B bay (fig. 14.35), as the metaphorical tracks along which the three-story volume has been shifted one bay to the left. Obviously with a reverse movement, the three-story volume can be returned to a symmetrical position, thus covering up the slots and eliminating the anomalous B bay. This resolves the previous anomalies, but again suggests other anomalous readings in terms of classical interpretation. For example, the length of the horizontal windows at the base suggests another axis of symmetry as the order of a previous condition (fig. 14.36). Then by adding a single B bay to the left, moving the bent frame one bay to the left and projecting volume one bay to the right (fig. 14.37), a symmetrical and stable original condition is obtained (fig. 14.38), with an overall reading of BBABABABB (fig. 14.39). All parts in this juxtaposition have been derived from a simple, stable, symmetrical condition. Thus, a more complex and less obvious process of transformation temporarily resolves the asymmetric conditions as first presented on the façade. However, there is another, more disturbing oscillation which is not resolved by recourse to a formal polarity of symmetry/asymmetry or plane/volume. It is indicated by the eccentric or incomplete bay system.

14.38 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing symmetry produced by a shift of the bent frame one bay to the left and the projecting volume one bay to the right.

14.39 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing BBABABBB bay condition produced by the movement in fig. 14.38.

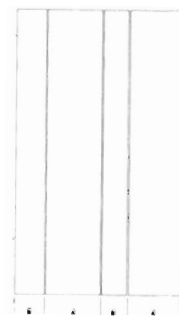


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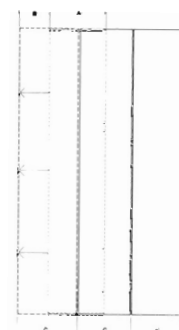


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14.40 Showing BABA bay condition resulting from a single transformation.



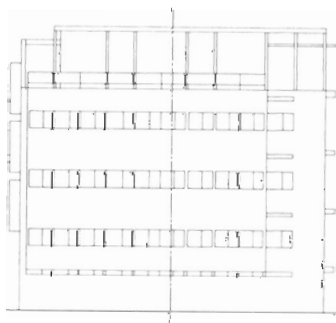
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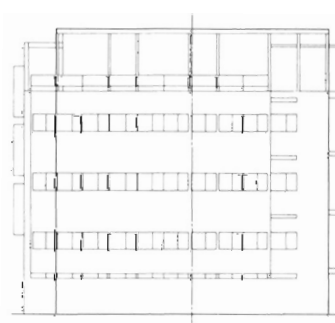
14.41 Showing CCC base condition.

14.42 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing the axis of symmetry through the real physical center.



42

14.43 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing alternative base condition as dominant proposed by a reading of the bent frame.



43

Reading from left to right across the top, there is a BABABABB reading, where an A bay is slightly narrower than two B bays. It is the extra B bay on the right which is the important signal for the other form of reading.

Usually it is assumed that when a bay system is asymmetrical or incomplete, it is the result of the transformation of one or more stable type-forms. For example, in the diagram (fig. 14.40), the BABA alternation can be assumed to have resulted from a single transformation. For if the process is reversed and a B bay is shifted an A distance to the left, it pro-

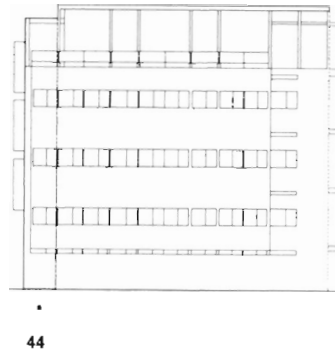
duces an unambiguous and symmetrical CCC ideal type (fig. 14.41). While it appears that the complex bay structure of the north façade of the Giuliani Frigerio apartment block can be explained in this way—as a composite of two overlapping systems which will disentangle to reveal a rather simple and stable original condition—this is not the case. First, the axis of symmetry (fig. 14.42) through the real physical center of the façade does not engage any of the actual column or mullion lines. Moreover, there are further suggestions in the incomplete outline of the bent frame at the top of the façade than there are other axes of symmetry which could define other original states. For example, if the bent frame is the initial definition of a former ideal state, then it suggests an array of readings. First, the axis of symmetry is not the same as in the previous example (fig. 14.43). Second, there is now an extra B bay, this time on the left (fig. 14.44), not contained within the bent frame. This extra bay must be mentally brought back into the frame or read as an unaccounted for addition to the original condition defined by the frame. Yet just under the horizontal part of the frame there is another asymmetry. It is now the rightmost or second B bay that becomes an anomaly in what would otherwise be an ABABAB alternation (fig. 14.45). Thus, instead of collapsing a bay on the left, the option would be to shift the bent frame one bay to the right (fig. 14.46). Now the frame is symmetrical in relationship to a regular BABABAB alternation below it, provided that the extra right B bay (fig. 14.47) also can be mentally incorporated back into the façade (fig. 14.48). This produces a symmetrically positioned bent frame at the top, yet a set of alternating bays across the façade immediately below it. Here, then, are two autonomous and incongruous readings; they are of a different order. One is classically symmetrical and defines composition; the other is linear and alternating and denies composition. The north façade of the Giuliani Frigerio apartment block is then the signal and the embodiment of an immanent object more complex and impure than its object presence; it opposes reduction or distillation into something simpler. The apartment block never reaches a neutral or “zero” condition.

The original condition is as inconsistent and shifting as quicksand, making the object appear to be in flux, transition, or instability on the one hand and tending to a condition of stasis and simple geometry on the other, refusing a single interpretation for a more complex condition. In the case of the north façade of the Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, there seems to be no stable or original condition from which such an internal history can either begin or be read. The object, as an initial state of complexity, and the process, as the will to simplify, are played out in the architecture; they endlessly celebrate a process which they cannot complete.

The ABABAB reading of the Palazzo Foscari had created the potential for a new system of reading, but in the context of a classical interpretation, it was an anomaly. The ABABABB reading of the façade of the Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, however, is not a mere anomaly of a modernist order suspended in time. It is already intentionally incomplete, even within a modernist system of reading. Whereas the modernist idea of dispersal, incongruity, and fragment is ultimately projected to return the system to closure, the Giuliani Frigerio apartment block is a set of fragments which is fundamentally incomplete. Each time a condition of origin is suggested visually, its resolution in the actual building is

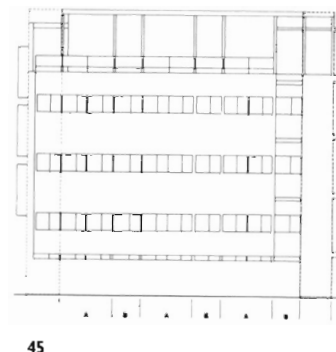
ENDLESSNESS

14.44 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing extra B bay on the left not contained within the bent frame.



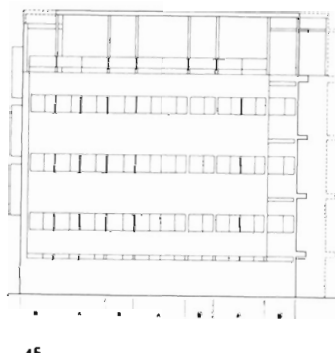
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14.45 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing asymmetry resulting from the second or rightmost B bay.



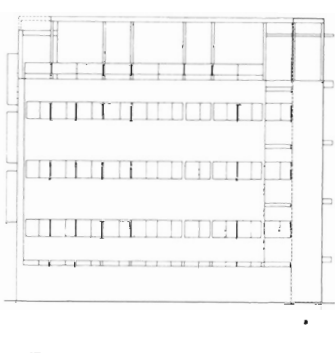
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14.46 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing another symmetry produced by a shift of the bent frame one bay to the right.



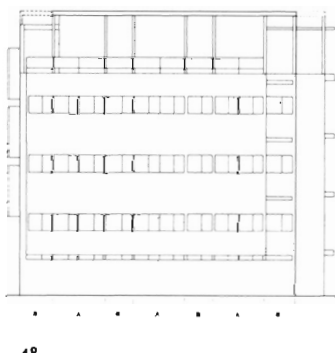
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14.47 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing anomalous B bay on the right produced after the shift of fig. 14.46.



47

14.48 Giuliani Frigerio apartment block, showing the anomalous B bay incorporated back into the façade.



48

refuted. It would seem that a shift of bay here or volume there would indicate a single axis of symmetry, but when the mental move is in fact made, something else becomes unstable and suggests another axis of symmetry. These congruent axes, in themselves, are a straightforward definition of the idea of difference; they signal the impossibility of a return to a type-form. They represent the division of an object from itself. No longer does the vertebrate object represent the vertebrate nature of man. If the modernist object is alienated from its social setting, now this other object suggests an alienation from itself—from the

former congruence of object and process. It is the ultimate negation of what in the classical and modern is a dialectical process concerning the relationship of a type-form to a physical object.

In the periods of historical continuity, prior to the rupture of 1945, the not-classical categories such as the ones proposed above are seen to be provisory and transitional; this is in the nature of historical processes. Yet they also contained relationships which seem to deviate from the accepted canon of a particular continuity. These deviations have appeared and could appear at any time in the course of history. This does not mean that they should or will appear. Yet now these peripheral or extra-compositional phenomena, which had previously been seen as deviant, have become fixed and mandatory. In the particular rupture of history today and the break with progressive time, what was formerly seen as aberrant now becomes symptomatic of this other sensibility.

It is possible now to look at these extracompositional aspects and see them as something else. It is here that the idea of decomposition suggests itself. If in the past architecture was classically conceived as beginning at ground zero—a type-form—then composition and transformation can be characterized as plus vectors from this zero point. In decomposition, there is no type form, there is no ground zero. If anything, the process of decomposition is a minus vector returning to a ground zero which is now in the object. This minus vector is, in one sense, the negative of the classical ideal of composition. But it is also something more than a mere negativity in the sense of its reserved time of process. Since it is no longer possible to return the object back to an acceptable canon or press it forward to an impossible future, there is no past or future time. Thus the negativity is now within the object as an immanent positivity; the object and the process now occupy the same time and space. It is not immediately understandable how the object has been derived, nor can there be any projection into the future as to what its ultimate destiny might be. Rather, the process of decomposition sets in motion its own historical judgement, this time as a fiction, as opposed to a real history, because in an irretrievable past and a futureless present, the object has no past or future history, only a present condition as a suspension of past and future. Decomposition manifests the preserved traces of a process which has no direct relationship to an ideal past but only a memory of that past, and a future that is only in the present. In a futureless present—an "imminent" immanence—there is a removal of the extrinsic, conventional identity and significance from the object.

In the classical object, significance was possible at the most fundamental level of formal integers, precisely because of a relationship to type form. In decomposition, since there is no type-form, there is no relationship between the object and this something else which formerly allowed for the significance to accrue. In this sense decomposition now requires a suspension of our previous modes of deciphering.

In the past, objects in their passive duration have held significance precisely because there was a future which could endure linear temporal analysis. Without such a future the object no longer holds significance in the traditional sense. Since the capacity of meaning to be inherent in an object is fundamental to the idea of the classical, when such a possibility is denied, it becomes the ultimate negation of the classical.

*
COLLAPSE OF
OBJECT & PROCESS
SPACE & TIME

UNDIVIDABILITY

The idea of *decomposition* as the negative of the classical now instead of being an extreme, peripheral, or "extra" category of the classical/modernist canon; it is now the exception which becomes the departure for this *other* order. The process of decomposition is something far less easy to discern than composition but is, in fact, of potentially greater significance to the present condition of man. Decomposition becomes clear when one considers that it cannot be read as a linear sequence in time. There is no order to its views. They are atemporal; they do not add up; they are not simply the sum of a recognizable series of geometric or spatial conditions. While classical architecture is understood as one moves through space and through an accumulation of a number of perceptions initially ordered by an architect, the process of decomposition reveals itself in the act of passing out and around a building in a random, unconscious way, each time recording the information unconsciously in a memory that is totalizing. As the architecture is no longer complete, but rather a series of fragments—objective differences—the role of the individual is no longer merely discursive. He is no longer called upon to explain, as was the case from the time of Alberti, the actual experience of architecture. Instead, the architecture exists outside his experience. It explains itself. But this alone would define a modernist object.

Decomposition goes further in that it proposes a radically altered process of making from either modernism or classicism. Decomposition presumes that origins, ends and the process itself are elusive and complex rather than stable, simple or pure, i.e., classical or natural. However, decomposition is not merely the manifestation of the arbitrary, the intuitive, or the irrational, or the making of something simple from something complex. By proposing a process which at root is the negative of classical composition, the process uncovers (or deconstructs) relationships inherent in a specific object and its structure, which were previously hidden by a classical sensibility. Rather than working from an original type toward a predictable end, decomposition starts with a heuristic approximation of end, an end which is immanent within the new object/process. The result is another kind of object, one which contains a non-existent future, as opposed to an irretrievable past. In one sense it is making by analysis, but not the traditional classical or formal analysis.

Whereas an analysis of composition and transformation tends to cement objective relationships between parts, analysis in decomposition suspends these relationships. Now it is no longer useful to analyze the bay and the order of bays—the main elements in a classical typology. The bay now becomes merely a counter in an approximation of its negative—a process of absences and differences. The order or nature of the object resides in that process which constitutes its differences—the implied absences between bays. It is a nature now grounded in process, not in being; it is no longer based on the substance of the object. In decomposition the object is no longer identical to a substance. It now resides in how the elements are made and kept, that is, in their processes. It is a form of autonomous making, different from that of modernism, or, for that matter, classicism.

If in the past nature was summoned to suggest continuity, now the products of nature have begun to create conditions where this continuity is coming to an end. What was previously autonomous and consistent is now no less autonomous and no less consistent. Decomposition proposes an autonomy that is as universal as the classical or the modern. It is just a part of a different universe. It is a new naturalness now in an unnatural state.

The removal of the identity and significance from objects signals a uselessness—a futility in terms of its former conditions of being. If the nature of objects has changed, then typical propositions which formerly were a manifestation of the nature can no longer be represented in the object, but only replicated by it. The futile object and the process of decomposition are no longer arbitrary objects and anomalous processes, nor a mutation of classicism. In this new time they may have become, albeit accidentally, the destiny of architecture today.

Notes

1. This should be compared to Franco Rella's opening sentence in the introduction to *Il Dispositivo Foucault* (Cluva Libreria Editrice, 1977), 7. He uses history as discontinuous (*la storia è discontinuità*). The difference between the negative discontinuous and the not-something is important to the following discussion.
2. Leoni Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 67–85. It should be noted that the particular aspects of Alberti's definition being invoked here concern circumscription, that is, the nature of the units or the place an object occupies, and composition, or the rule or order by which the parts fit together, and last, the requirement that members ought to have certain things in common such as size, function, kind, and color.
3. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage), 344–48.
4. Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style* (New York: Norton, 1972), 171.
5. Transformation as a modernist process has been characterized by Francesco Dal Co: "It's design gathering the traces of a now private order of its own original perfection." See Francesco Dal Co, "Notes Concerning the Phenomenology of the Limit in Architecture," *Oppositions* 23 (1981).
6. This differs from Robert Jay Lifton's idea that "unlike earlier imagery—even that associated with such catastrophes of the Middle Ages—danger comes from our own hand, from man and his technology. The source is not God or nature." See "The Psychic Toll of the Nuclear Age," *New York Times Magazine*, 26 September 1982, 52–66.
7. The term immanence is used here in the Kantian sense of immanence as opposed to transcendence. The term immanence as it is used here speaks of a latent but present reality, of an object in its presence without concern for its future or its past.
8. As presently understood in architecture, the term *post-modern* (usually with a capital P and a capital M) is a kind of one-on-one reaction to modernism. If modernism was seen to be abstract, then post-modern is literal; if modernism was elitist, then post-modern is popular. The term as it is used here is not so much a style as it is a fact of time, a period that defines another sensibility outside the condition of modernism. Its use here is both polemical and tentative. It is polemically intended to open up and free a term that has been until now occupied by the reaction to modernism. It is a tentative term in that it may not adequately define the rupture that separates the present sensibility from modernism. However, since this sensibility will be seen to be also active from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, it can be argued for the moment that any temporal prefix, such as post-anything, is not useful for this discussion.
9. The negative aspect of post-modernism, as used here, is more closely related to the discussion in Hal Foster, "Re:Post," *Parachute* 26 (Spring 1982): 11–15. This negative is fundamentally different from Francesco Dal Co's use of the term. Dal Co says the term classical has become "the negative backbone of contemporary developments in architecture." For him it is not the classical that has changed but rather its relationship to contemporary architecture. What is being proposed here is that it is the compositional processes (and not the relationship of the classical to contemporary architecture) that have been changed and, in a sense, inverted to model an idea of the contrapositive. Francesco Dal Co, op. cit.

10. Herbert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 19.
11. The idea of the negative proposed here, while similar to that of Manfredo Tafuri (see *Heterotopia and Piranesi: The Sphere and Labyrinth* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984]), contains another idea. It is more of a heuristic approximation of a contrapositive that will be argued is immanent within any object. Thus it is outside of the traditional metaphysical dialectical use of the term negative. It is not either inversion or against something, but rather it is something other within a something without being the something; the idea here being that something other has been covered up by our need to read positivity as a dominant order.
12. Decomposition as a term may only be a heuristic approximation of what is actually intended. In the first case it must be distinguished from the literal use of the term in the sense of something actually decomposing. Second, decomposition is meant to suggest the contrapositive of composition in the sense that it is cited above. That is, it is something latent or immanent within the process of composition (thus it is not composition). It is used in the non-metaphysical dialectical sense that Derrida uses in his idea of difference. The idea of composition presented here differs substantially from that proposed in my article in *Architecture and Urbanism* (January 1980) or in my book *House X* (New York: Rizzoli, 1982). For a more detailed analysis of an aspect of the decompositional process in a synthetic, as opposed to an analytic, context, see my book *House X*, op. cit.
13. This is a title of a three-volume collection of drawings by Antonio Visentini. The Visentini drawings used here are from Elena Bassi's *Palazzi di Venezia* (Venice: La Stamperia di Venezia Editrice, 1976).
14. What is interesting about the Visentini drawings is that their reductive quality does not always mean that there is something taken away, that there is something less than the actual construction. For example, see the Palazzo Labia, in *ibid.*, 245. In each case, through addition or subtraction, the actual is made to conform to something that more closely resembles a classical or ideal type.
15. It should be noted that this discussion of the north façade of Giuliani Frigerio apartment block differs substantially from my text in *Perspecta* 13/14 (1978). For more complete discussion of this building, which has been passed over by current historians of the period, see my book *Giuseppe Terragni: Transformations, Decompositions, and Critiques* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2003).

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