
MODERN
APPROACHES

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PYSCHOANALYSIS AND THE SUBJECT OF ARCHITECTURE

PAUL LAURENDEAU

THE SUBJECT

Architecture is not a product of applied conscious thought. Thought is a divisive experience, distorting the design process as self-consciousness hinders action. An architect designs a building without consciously knowing he is giving form to something greater than what he thinks and often lesser than what he imagines. For the architect, what cannot be consciously said is constructed in the form of an object. Buildings as objects become more than the materials that constitute them or the words that describe them. When successful, they become signifiers, substitutable with any other signifier, taken for something else. One always feels that a great building is the embodiment of a higher reality, of an idea, a concept. But why? To answer this from a psychoanalytical perspective, let us say that architecture is a production of the unconscious.

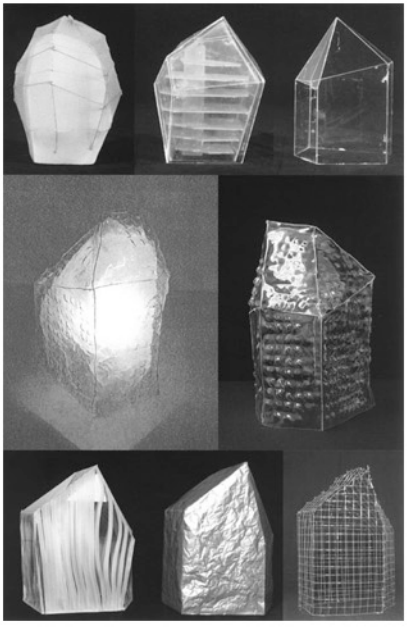
If we say that architecture is a production of the unconscious, where is its subject, its origin? How does this whole thing start and how does it come together? Where does architecture originate from? Answering too quickly may lead us to Jung, archetypes, the collective unconscious and other trivia.

Like architecture, psychoanalysis is a practice. Its theory could not stand had it not been uncovered from experience. Freud and Lacan helped define its specificity, differentiating it from psychology, psychiatry and science. Psychoanalysis plays on the equivocal relation between signifiers, allowing latent meaning to be heard and surprise the one who talks. In a session, the analyst holds the position of the "subject supposedly knowing" (sujet-supposé-savoir) allowing the analysand to grasp as knowledge what he hears himself saying. He who has a questioning, within the analytical process, fabricates a context, becomes a subject of what he says, a subject of the unconscious.

It may seem a contradiction to assert that an act unrelated to conscious intention can in fact be pure logic. What is consciously incoherent is more than likely to be unconsciously coherent. Conscious thought is mistakenly coherent for those unaccustomed with psychoanalysis. Contradictions, doubts, misunderstandings and art are a failure of repression, exposing what is latently continuous. If the architect is not thinking while he is designing, can his drawing make sense and become theory? To ask an architect what he thinks rather than to interpret what he does, prevents the subject from emerging and makes architecture closer to a revelation than an experience.

SUPEREGO

Jacques Herzog of the Swiss firm Herzog & de Meuron, during a public conference, explained the form of the Prada building he designed in Tokyo as a consequence of the city's zoning bylaws. The building's shape, respecting the constraints defined by the municipal authority, was not an impediment to its success according to him. Herzog's inference to a lack of responsibility as the master form giver is contradicted by the multiple studies he made to find the right expression, whose choice is no longer dependant on zoning. It would have been more truthful for Herzog to debate on the maximum allowable compromise between his aspirations and the context the zoning restrictions supplied him with.



figs. 1–2 Herzog & de Meuron, Prada, Tokyo.

In an attempt to explain sense in architecture, architects and critics commonly attribute its shaping on parameters that are imposed on them. Architecture is thought of as a conscious act, the act of negotiating problems. Under this logic, empirical research precedes creation, making it an object caused by predetermined objectives, leaving one to believe it is almost self-generative after the right premises are found. The subject, as the unifying vector, the one making sense out of random parameters, is assimilated with the conscious intention formulated as the design problem or objective.

Under the discourse of science, constraints are reversed into positive design objectives, guiding the formation of the architectural object. An objectifying discourse is thus set to frame the project within recognizable parameters, allowing anyone to talk about a project without interpreting the sense responsible for the unification of the parts. Let us insist here that the "subject" is not to be confused with the actual author of the work. To say there is a subject means that the form can be interpreted from experience. "This building makes sense, but I do not know what it means" is close to what we are trying to isolate. Constraints are asked to be resolved, but never for what effect. If there were no contingencies, against what would a project be evaluated? Design challenges are constructed against constraints that abstract the question of talent or know-how in favor of discourse. The ideal is replaced by a demand that imposes a set of laws perceived as coming, not from within, but from without.

Building volume is now explained as a response to external requirements coming, not from the architect, but from the material world, society: context, precedents, program, zoning, budget, materials, sustainability, aesthetics, software, etc. Architecture is defined as the task of problem solving. The role of these constraints, that act as the architect's superego, a higher figure of authority, is given priority, as Herzog's example shows so well. It seems almost unacceptable for an architect to take responsibility for his desire, preferring to justify his intervention as a response rather than an expression of a subject. To interrogate the cause of architecture and mask the subject of the unconscious by a set of contingencies reduces art to technique, to a user's manual based on statistical experience and cognitive psychology.

STRUCTURED LIKE A LANGUAGE

Architectural treatises of the past looked for meaning in the harmony of volumes. They explored issues of dimensions necessary to achieve this effect. It was suspected and even established that beauty and proportion were interrelated. Sebastiano Serlio, an Italian architect of the Renaissance, has shown how to reshape, rather than extrapolate, material contingencies to preserve geometric purity.

> "As I have said above, I have seen in a good number of cities in Italy, and also in other countries, many houses on a noble street all of which are off-square, and equally all the rooms are also off-square in the same manner, aligning with the principal wall on the street. This sort of thing is exceedingly ugly and intolerable. Let us imagine that by chance there is an old – or rather ruined – building site whose corners are A, B, C, D, E, F, G. If the judicious architect should then wish to make out of such a long and narrow site a house which is pleasant to the sight of onlookers, the first thing he will have to do is square everything up."[1]

Sense comes from order rather than emphasizing a distortion. The architects who wrote about and defined by this process architecture sought, throughout centuries, to rationalize, like a grammar, the rules of composition necessary so that a building be structured, structured like a language.

1 Sebastiano Serlio, *On Architecture, Book VI, Chapter LXVIIII* (On Situations, fourteenth proposition, on off-square sites) (1575).

"L'inconscient est structuré comme un langage."

Lacan (The unconscious is structured like a language)

This famous Lacanian adage is to be interpreted correctly. Lacan is not saying the unconscious is a language. The unconscious is *not* a language. It is structured *like* a language. A structure is an organization in which a displaced element forces the reorganization of the other elements. Such is how sentences work, more specifically metaphors and metonymies, where a misplaced or absent word destroys sense, meaning and the poetic effect. As a human production making sense, architecture must also be structured *like* a language. Architecture is a practice of ordering, punctuating and positioning, like any other practice that is structured *like* a language, being formalized in *a* language. We can talk about architecture in French or in English, but neither French nor English constitute architecture. We could say that French and English are structured *like* architecture if, and only if, architecture is structured *like* a language.

The structure of a language is most often overshadowed by the language itself and the artistic object. Emphasis is given to the material and visible aspects of the media. The perceivable, when effective, always symbolizes some sort of an ideal, a possible truth, a vision that comes through, something of a dream, a shared mystery that defies explanation. An architectural work succeeds when it materializes a phantasm.

PHANTASM

In order to situate the subject, in other words the structure that makes a work readable for another subject, let us consider architecture as being a phantasm.

As a phantasm, architecture is made an imaginary construction, not a real object (an object in the real) but a subjective object (an object in the subject, the subject's object). In *La logique du fantasme*, Lacan main-

tains that the phantasm is the only means by which a subject accesses the real.[2] What describes a neurosis is precisely the necessity to fabricate a phantasm to cope with the real. Human sexuality, from the neurotic standpoint, relies on scenarios to complement an experience that does not correspond with one's ideas. Architects are no less lured by their phantasms when debating their work.

Psychoanalysts know from case studies of patients that for the construction of a phantasm, the minutest detail has a function. If the object is not in the right place or of the right form, the imaginary scene looses all its titillating effect. An object with wrong proportions can seldom be used as hallucinatory material. Correct proportions are equated with truth and the search for the right object can take incommensurate extents. Architectural treatises are attempts to find the right form.

Architecture, as a phantasm, is socially realizable. It does not lift the veil over sexual repression. Sexuality is sublimated, transformed into an object, making inhibition disappear. Unlike an unconscious phantasm, art is not constructed around a narrative played by a few characters that involves a part of the body, nor is it used as potential material to trigger orgasmic pleasure, under the dictate of a verb that dominates the action. Its compulsive nature does not induce bodily tension. The plot does not feature a perverse scenario where the author is a proponent or a victim. Finally, it is not experienced as a humiliating practice that must be kept secret.

A phantasm, as a grasping mental image, in the context of architecture, is sublime because it is the product of sublimation. It is associated with pleasure, a release of bodily tension, rather than a stiffening or prickly numbing of the organs. Sexuality is thus veiled by an object, namely the architectural artifact, sparing the subject's moral integrity and appeasing desire by giving it a model figure for identification. An architectural hallucination is an ideal to be shared.

But in what way can a phantasm modify reality? It can be constructed or deconstructed (analyzed). Doing either can destroy or transform it into something else. Building and analyzing transform reality. If it were not for the great works of architecture and the treatises, would architecture have the same image?

People engage in psychoanalysis to be relieved of their troubling fantasies. Others fear they will loose their artistic drive. Has it not been said that the end of an analysis corresponds to the traversing of the phantasm (la traversée du phantasme).

2 Jacques Lacan, "La Logique du fantasme 1966–67", *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).

GEOMETRY AND GRAMMAR

If analysis is a process of uncovering sense and meaning, be it psychoanalytical or architectural, the question arises, how are sense and meaning initially created? Let us use geometry and grammar for their familiarity.

Geometry is an ensemble of forms that can be abstracted by a mental image. Forms taught to and understood by children can be played with. A square can be folded, cut, duplicated without resulting in dismemberment or lead to a formal dead end. Geometrical analysis isolates, extracts, from a set of forms, laws that govern their positioning. Lines without apparent structure become readable as imaginary forms when symbolized by an equation, by a rule that allows one to recreate the form from its application. Geometrical analysis does not modify or repair the form according to a standard or ideal. Their disclosure in a body allows the figure to be inscribed within a signifying chain and thus imagined. If forms cannot be symbolized, it is unlikely they can be imagined. That the undetermined becomes thinkable and writable in a language is an effect of geometrical analysis.

A recognizable form is quickly symbolized by a word. What limits the shape of the form is its capacity of being replaced by a unique or limited set of signifiers. The strongest geometrical impact is achieved with forms showing the least amount of exceptions and, incidentally, the greatest potential of combination without losing the form. The characteristic of any geometrical shape is its ability to be written as a law, to be symbolized by a set of rules that allows its reconstruction. Geometrical analysis is the rationalization of a form according to the inherent structures of geometrical description.

Likewise, grammatical analysis reveals the function of words in a sentence, their effect on each other according to their position. The position of a word modifies its definition. By understanding the role of a word, a structural apprehension, an underlying frame appears. Analysis brings forward the articulation of the parts that make consistent the whole. Part of a totality, words are no longer isolated fragments. As in geometry, grammatical analysis does not change the quality of the sentence. A user's manual for an appliance, after grammatical analysis, is still a user's manual, not a poetic verse. Knowledge of geometry is required to practice geometrical analysis, grammar for grammatical analysis and architecture for architectural analysis.

Architectural analysis should not be confused with architectural criticism (discourse of the hysteric) or architectural evaluation (discourse of science and university). To perform architectural analysis, we have to identify what differentiates an artistic discipline from the next. This is called an essential trait that thus becomes a differential trait. Finding the essential trait of an artistic discipline is essential to transmit it to others and make it a teaching. If the essential trait of architecture is not properly articulated, the analytical process will never engage, or its process will lead to a theory that is of another field of knowledge. For example, if we say that the essential trait of architecture is the calorimetric difference between exterior and interior walls, to analyze a building accordingly will produce a result that may not be recognized as architecture. If we say that wood is an essential trait of architecture, then wood could not be an essential trait of sculpture or any other art using wood. This could also mean that architecture could not emerge from a non-wood construction. Let us be more specific and affirm that the essential trait must be the *differential* trait.

Essential trait = Differential trait

The differential trait is the trait that creates the difference between architecture and any other form of creation, the trait that, when present, makes something architectural rather than sculptural, industrial, etc. Architecture must be structured like a language, with the traits that can only be associated with what constructs its definition.

META-ARCHITECTURE AND EXAMPLES

To account for the phenomena of language, Lacan resolves that there exists no meta-language, no language outside language that explains language, immune of its effect. Can we say the same about architecture? Can we conclude that there exists no meta-architecture, that the only writing of architecture is the artifact itself? Are laws by definition intrinsic to a media or can they be borrowed from another field. Are the words, the images, the models used to represent a building of its nature? Do words command, cause geometry, or are they strictly an effect? For the model of a building to preserve its interest requires a reworking as a new object, resulting in two separate works of art, the original and the representation, rendering null the idea of creating the same under a different form.

An essay on architecture in absence of architectural representation is highly questionable. Psychoanalysis, had it not been discovered by, constructed from and theorized against practice, would remain a conjecture. Architecture cannot be theorized before its making. The foundations of architecture cannot be written, discovered outside of its realization. Architectural treatises came after the fact as a reading of sense. Architecture is taught through its best examples, as a series of seminal buildings, the ones that, regardless of time, styles and cultures, supplement its definition. No example will ever cover and embody what architecture is in the signifying sense of the word no more than a uni-

versal theory. The need to build to find yet another piece that has been left uncovered is an ideal that challenges any true architect.

Repeated examples are demonstrative of architecture. Repetition and substitution do not produce the same effects. Repetition concerns similarity, the link between parts. Substitution has to first identify the recurring differential trait to replace an element within its logic. This trait is what we must isolate. Let us associate repetition with metonymy and substitution with metaphor, the former responsible for sense, the later for signification.

Lacan remarked, in *Seminar 3* (Les Psychoses), that a child, learning to speak, has to first assimilate the metonymical structure before the metaphorical one.[3] The laws of juxtaposition come before the games of substitution. Any metaphor is supported by a latent metonymy. What has not been placed cannot be replaced. Repetition in architecture produces infinite examples. Substitution in architecture is a signifier infinitely repeatable. Analysis of infinite examples tends towards the definition of architecture, or, put another way, analysis of repetition extracts the essential trait.

3 Lacan, *Les Psychoses*, Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1955-56) 260.

REPETITION

The Pantheon in Rome and the Seagram Building in New York, separated by centuries, continents, cultures, uses, materials, colors, forms, are recognized nonetheless as both works of architecture. What is common and consistent amidst the distinguishing characteristics that superficially draw them apart is what is repeated. To analyze a great number of examples would be too important of a task. This can be avoided by looking at how other disciplines define architecture to preserve their own integrity.

The judicial system and regulating architectural societies reduce architecture to a differential trait for management purposes. Non architects must be able to handle architecture at face value. Their conclusions localize a repeating trait making the Pantheon and the Seagram works of architecture. It should be noted that this trait does not distinguish between a work of architecture in its most vibrant sense and pure mechanistic construction. Nonetheless, it supplies a definition sufficiently precise to constitute material proof in a court of law of its practice while not too vague as to convict an engineer, a geometer or an art student of illegal practice.

> "§ 7301. The practice of the profession of architecture is defined as rendering or offering to render services which require the application of the art, science, and aesthetics of design and construction of buildings, groups of buildings, including their components and appurtenances and the spaces around them wherein the safeguarding of life, health, property, and public welfare is concerned. Such services include, but are not limited to consultation, evaluation, planning, the provision of preliminary studies, designs, construction documents, construction management, and the administration of construction contracts."[4]

The planning of a building is the most determining piece of evidence a judge can appraise to declare if architecture has been performed. Plans, sections and elevations described by dimensional relations to erect a building constitute the common denominator according to the legal system. By law, the differential trait is the set of graphic information determining the form, the geometry of a building.

If architecture is reduced to a drawing that serves as a set of instructions to make a building, this does not give any information on the shapes themselves. Volumes accommodate a use, but the use does not dictate the form. "Form follows function" comes short of explaining what form function engenders. To assert the contrary means a com-

4 Office of the Professions, New York State Education Department, Education Law (Article 147 – Architecture)

puter could generate a building based on pre-selected volumes associated with functions and surface areas. In "Form follows function", the word "follows" is of crucial importance. Who makes form follow function? The subject of the unconscious. What form does the subject of the unconscious want to follow? The object cause of desire. What is the form of the object cause of desire?

Let us not go ahead too quickly with this one. We notice that geometry and architecture have always been associated with form, a form governed by laws. This form man identifies with is not unrelated with the ideal form he unknowingly juggles with all his life. When this form is met in nature or in cultural objects, it is never without having a mirroring effect.

APPLIED GEOMETRY

It can be advanced at this point that a plausible essential trait of architecture, recognized by societal law and regulated by geometry, is the spatial projection, the material realization of an ideal form to dwell in.

The best architectural projects have some form of geometrical derivation or conversely, the most simple and basic geometric forms can be picked out of these architectural examples. If spaces are designed with proportions towards a spatial geometrical ideal, the analysis of architectural spaces will uncover those shapes. The dialectical process between creation and comprehension, between an object and its lecture

can be achieved. It is possible to plan a building with geometric form and analyze it against geometric figures. If a square root of five rectangle proportion is part of the shaping of a building, it should be uncovered through analysis.

Klaus-Peter Gast has published two relevant books applying geometrical analysis to most of Louis Kahn and Le Corbusier's projects. Plans analyzed against the Golden Section and the square root of two find these proportions embedded in the buildings' spatial organization.

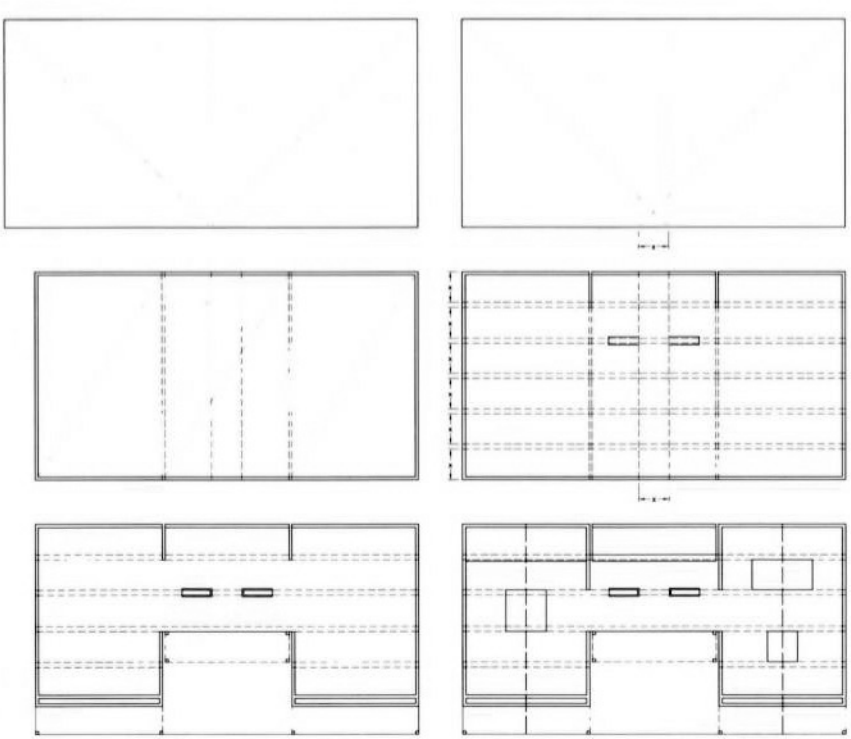


fig. 3 Plan of the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas USA, Louis Kahn. Analysis adapted from Klaus-Peter Geist, *Louis I. Kahn: The Idea of Order* (Birhäuser Verlag, 2001)

The apparent clarity derived from the analysis of the Kimbell Art Museum should not be taken as the path of the design process. Creativity, like a psychoanalytic cure, is constantly moving. Drive pulsates around the object it constructs and denies, far from the linearity of this representation. Started in 1966, the design of the Kimbell Art Museum took Kahn several years, going through many conceptual revisions. Design is a tortuous route, wavering and quavering between creation and anguish, between an evanescent ideal and its unattainable depiction. Only in its final moment, when a building and its spaces become, let us say unconscious, for the architect, can the volumes be harmonized at once: "Alain underlined the other day that one does not count the columns in his mental image of the Pantheon. To which I would have replied – except for the architect of the Pantheon." (Lacan, Seminar 1)[5]

CASE STUDY IN THREE DIMENSIONS

Let us study a specific project (Paul Laurendeau, *Espace 1*, Montreal, see fig. 10) to expose how dynamic proportions (square root proportions) combine in three dimensions. The third dimension has often been overlooked by architectural treatises, more specifically, the combination of two proportionate surfaces to create a third proportionate one.

In a building, each plane (floor, wall and ceiling) combines with the next. If two are geometrically determined (square, square root of two, of five...), will the third one be? What may seem like an obvious consequence has never been thoroughly studied before. Le Corbusier's Modulor applies the Golden Section to surfaces (plans and elevations) and Matila Ghyka's *Esthétique des proportions dans la nature et dans les arts* devotes only one chapter out of nine to volumes. Ghyka does not treat the subject from a practitioner's perspective.[6]

Historically, the third dimension has been derived or prescribed as either the mean or the square root of the length and breadth of a room. For example, a space measuring 20 by 40 units in plan could have a height of either 30 or 28.3.

$$(20 + 40) / 2 = 30$$
$$\sqrt{(20 \times 40)} = 28.3$$

This is a formula, a recipe that appears creatively repulsive nowadays. It nonetheless establishes a volume based on the plan's dimensions, maintaining a sense of centrality. Its height is related to its length and breadth. A modification in plan forces an adjustment in height. Let

5 Jacques Lacan, "Les Écrits Techniques de Freud, Seminar 1", *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1998 [1975]).

6 Matila Ghyka, Esthéthique des proportions dans la nature et dans les arts (Monaco: Le Rocher, 1987 [Paris: Gallimard, 1927]).

us recall the definition of a structure: an organization such that when an element is displaced, other elements have to be repositioned. The fallacy of this method is that the surfaces forming the plan and elevations need not correspond to any given proportion, as they are derived from algebra, not geometry. With the second formula, the double square in plan is lost in both elevations whose proportion is either 28.3/20 or 28.3/40.

It should be said that proportions are not about following rules, but about using them to create something that makes sense. To rephrase "Form follows function", let us say "The subject of the unconscious follows an object (in the creative process) made cause of his desire in a language (i.e. architecture) that is structured by laws (i.e. geometry)".

For a pavilion in a design show in Montreal for six exhibitioners, a volume measuring 20 by 40 feet in plan with a maximum height of 30 feet with an existing column is given as the site boundary.

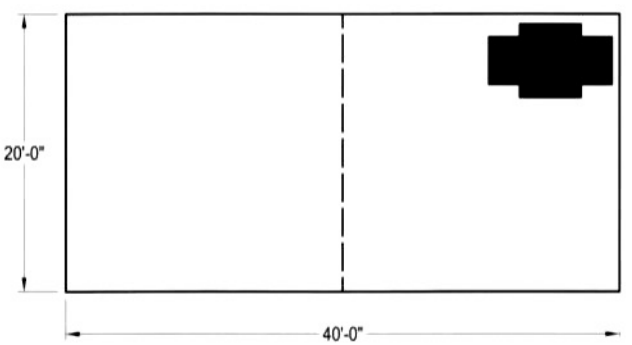


fig. 4

After several design drafts, the selected shape of the pavilion occupies the full 20 by 40 feet in plan. Its height is adjusted to fit within a single (on the short side) and double (on the log side) square root of two rectangle, measuring 14' 2".

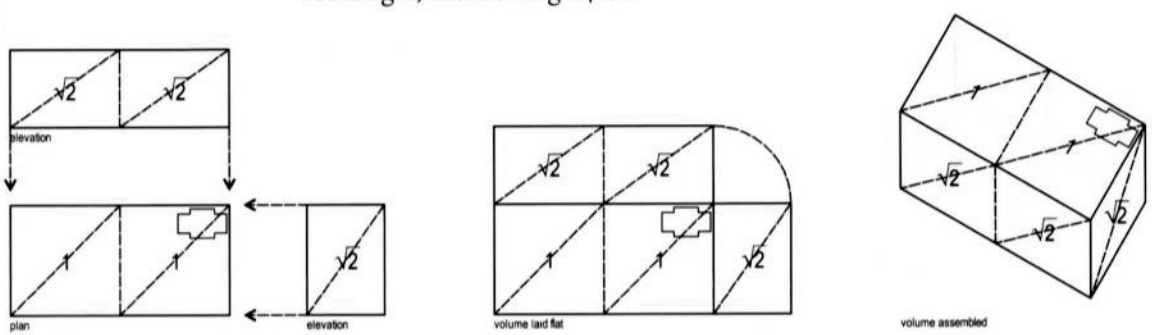


fig. 5

The square root of two rectangle is generated as follows:

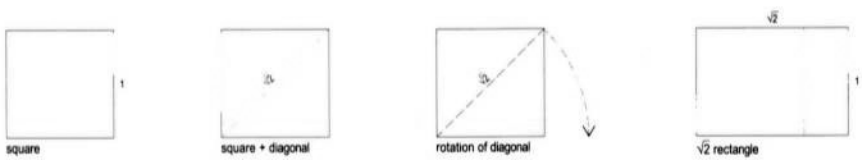


fig. 6

Why the square root of two proportion? Because if in plan the square is divided in half (generating four squares within the square of origin) the square root of two rectangles, divided in half gives two new square roots of two rectangles. We cannot divide the plan without projecting this cutting plane on the elevations if we want to extend the proportion in height. Cutting the squares in half allows us to geometrically come closer to the column element to box it in and make it part of the global composition of the pavilion, not leave it as an illegal element. To sustain the contrary is to drop a word in a sentence without treating it grammatically.

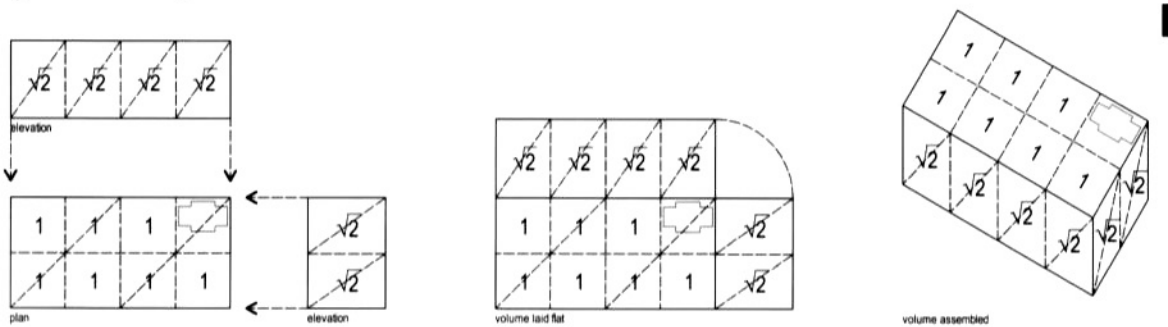


fig. 7

Dividing the squares a second time in plan provides a new set of geometrical lines that serve to anchor the position of the walls.

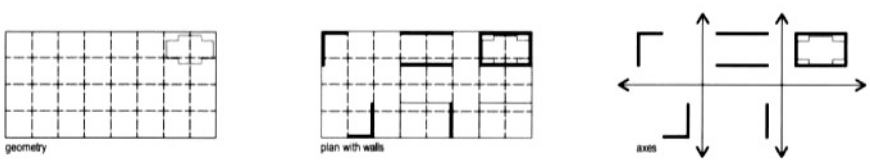


fig. 8

Walls are positioned to create cross axes, allowing one to see through the pavilion from every face. In elevation, the square root of two rectangles define the partitions.

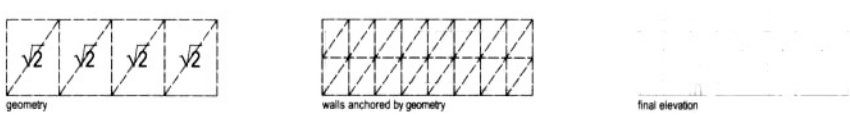
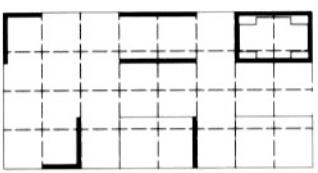


fig. 9

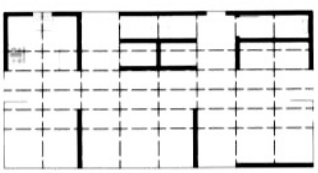
"This cutting of space makes sense, but I do not know what it means" is where we have arrived at. Meaning comes later. Proportions, such as the Golden Section or the square root of two, allow the three dimensional repetition of modules to frame space without projecting thought or theory, but certainly not repressing the subject of the unconscious. This is how sense is generated. The use of proportions removes thought from the creative process, granting freedom of action along a rhythmic structure. If a proportion does not work or is not appealing, another one is to be chosen, as a proportion means nothing without composition. A poet does not think about rules of grammar while he writes nor a musician about the notes when he plays. He assimilates them and becomes the words or the notes he plays with. Proportions allow an architect to design spaces without being self-conscious of his actions, while not blind to his depictions.

figs. 10–11 *Espace 1*, Paul Laurendeau, architect.

Further developed, the plan of the pavilion becomes the ground floor of a house. This house was exhibited in model form, offering the visitors of the design show a chance to experience its spaces at full scale. The square in plan is shifted half a module to geometrically anchor the inner walls to form the central longitudinal axis.



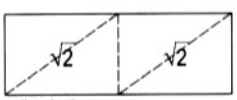
plan of pavilion



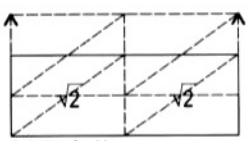
plan of house (ground floor)

fig. 12

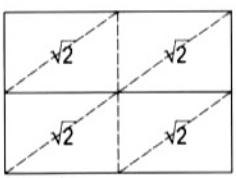
The house being two stories in height, the volume is vertically expanded from two, square root of two rectangles on the long elevation, to a full square root of two rectangle.



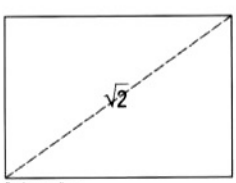
pavilion elevation



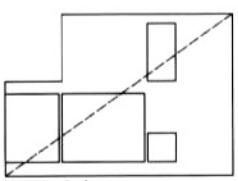
duplication of module



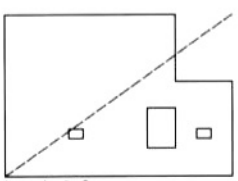
final proportion



final proportion



house elevation 1



house elevation 2

fig. 13

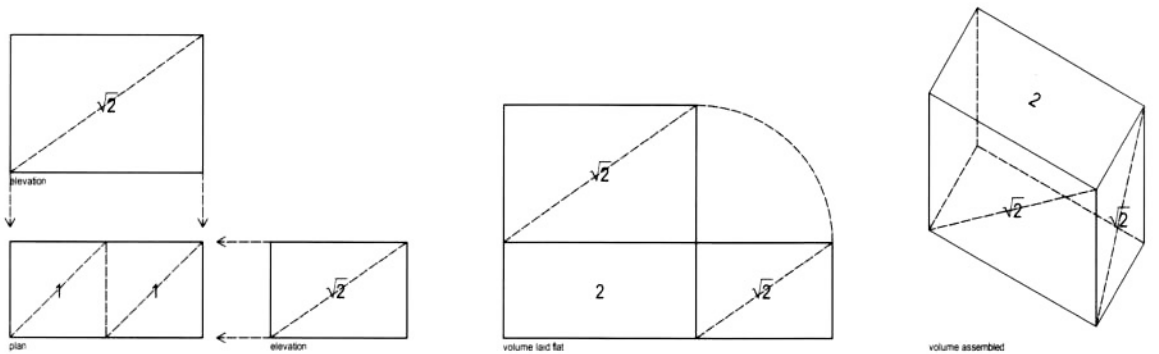


fig. 14

Geometrically derived, the house volume is double the pavilion height and uses full square root of two rectangles on all elevations.

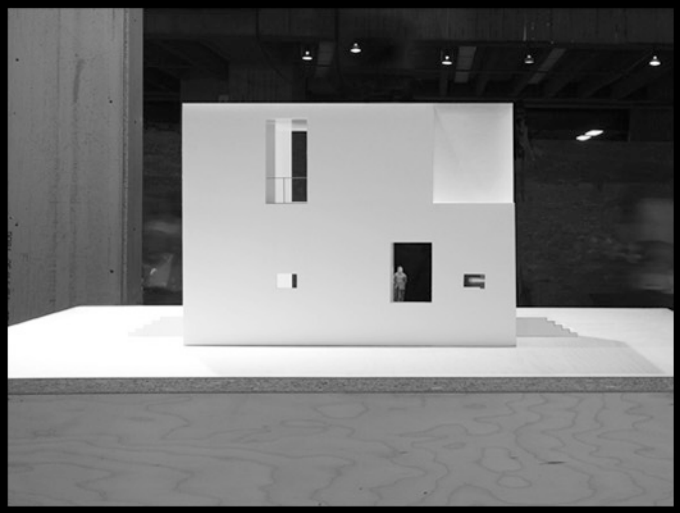
As in the pavilion, the axes remain, framed by either doors or windows, giving spatial orientation to the house.

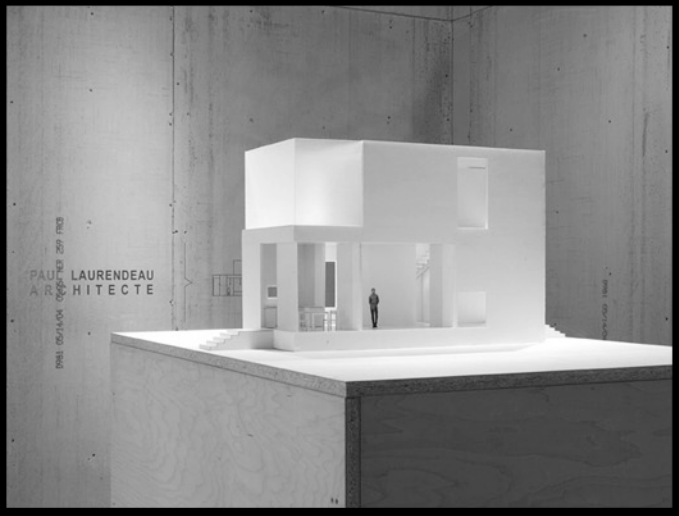
Geometry structures space, giving erection to form and providing sense, a sense of orientation. This orientation corresponds to – is a mirror of – the ideal image of the subject.

THE STAGE OF THE MIRROR

Equating architecture with spatial geometry is technically operative while incomplete. Architectural analysis as an exercise of geometrical analysis leaves a substance unanalyzed, unaccounted for. Architecture as an art is beyond geometry in its objective. Unlike geometry or grammar, architecture, like any other form of poetry, resists a systematic reduction to an essential trait, that is if this trait is objectified. Traits, alone, do not make sense. There is no sense for spaces to take a certain orientation. Who makes form follow function? And what function are we talking about? Is the function of architecture to create spatial orientation or simply use in a form? The most mediocre architecture most often accommodates a use, but spatial orientation and volumetric harmony are of another resort. Geometrical analysis does not reveal the relation of causality between geometry and the sense of orientation and vertigo. Orientation and vertigo do make sense for the subject of the unconscious inhabiting a body. Without assimilating vertigo, verticality, symmetry and equilibrium, how can a child learn to stand up and walk?

Sense in architecture counters fragmentation by form.





figs. 15–16

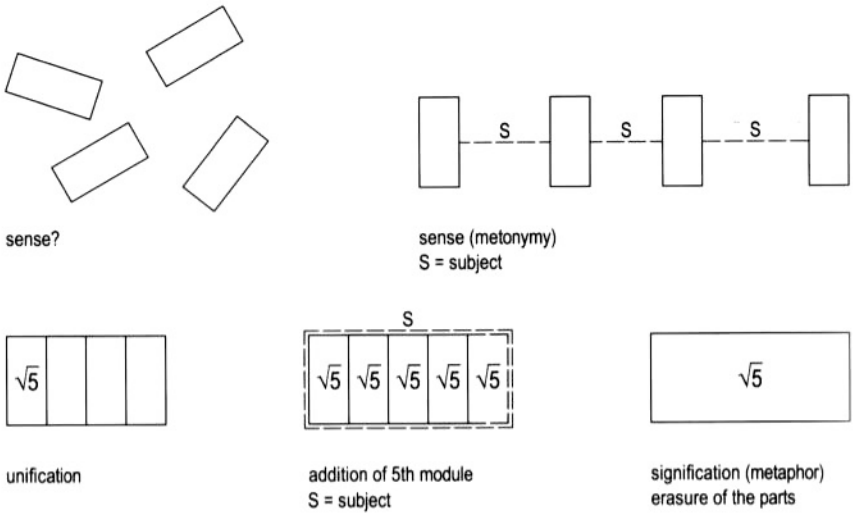


fig. 17

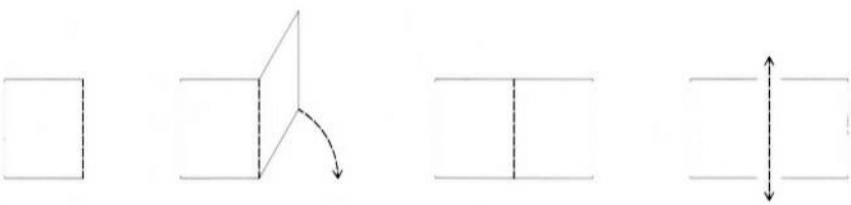
The first random disposition of four rectangles does not necessarily not make sense. As forms laid flat on a piece of paper, they are more coherent than if they were rooms of a building. As constructed architecture, the perception would be totally different. Non-parallel or perpendicular walls are hard to remember. The plan would almost be impossible to imagine. Introducing cross axes could reestablish metonymical links.

Architecture, in its most vibrating rendering, is a geometrical phantasm ordered by the subject of the unconscious. Sense given by the subject is intimately linked with the stage of the mirror. As exposed by Lacan in *Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu* (1938) and *Le Stade du Miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est revelée dans l'expérience psychanalytique* (1949), the human being's premature condition and disunity at birth is compensated by the integration of self-image reflected as unifying figure that is a substitute for instinct.[7]

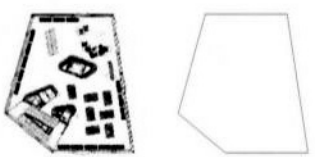
Geometry is structured like a language, as a set of forms, an ideal, and thus functions as an imaginary image of the body, transmutable and interchangeable. The architectural image functions as a substitute, a representation of the image of the body. A building is no more than an instance of the stage of this unifying, while alienating experience of being here and there at the same time. For an object to be mistaken or serve as support of a reflective unifying whole that counters dismemberment can only be understood as a reminiscence of the stage of the mirror.

7 Jacques Lacan, *Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu* (Paris: 1938); *Le Stade du Miroir comme formateur de la function du Je telle qu'elle est revelée dans l'expérience psychanalytique* (Paris, 1949)

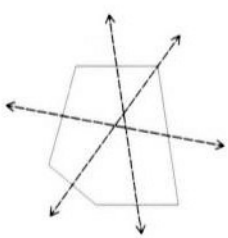
Subverting linguistics, Lacan formulated: "A signifier is what represents the subject for another signifier" or "The subject represents a signifier for another signifier." The subject links the signifiers, the geometric forms, together. There are as many ways of forming signifying chains or architectural bodies as there are subjects. However, to have a work of architecture, the use of geometrical figures that are imaginable cannot be refuted. A song and a poem are to speech what architecture is to geometry. The rhythm, the punctuation, the tempo, the momentum, the breath that place the parts to form a whole, in other words the absence, is the trait of the subject of the unconscious.



foldable / defoldable space



non foldable space
where do I stand to be equal to the form?



no cutting plane creates repetition

fig. 18

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS
figs. 1–2 courtesy Herzog & de Meuron
figs. 3–9, 12–14 Paul Laurendeau
figs. 10,11,15,16 Marie-Christine Abel