

The Without

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Architecture and Design

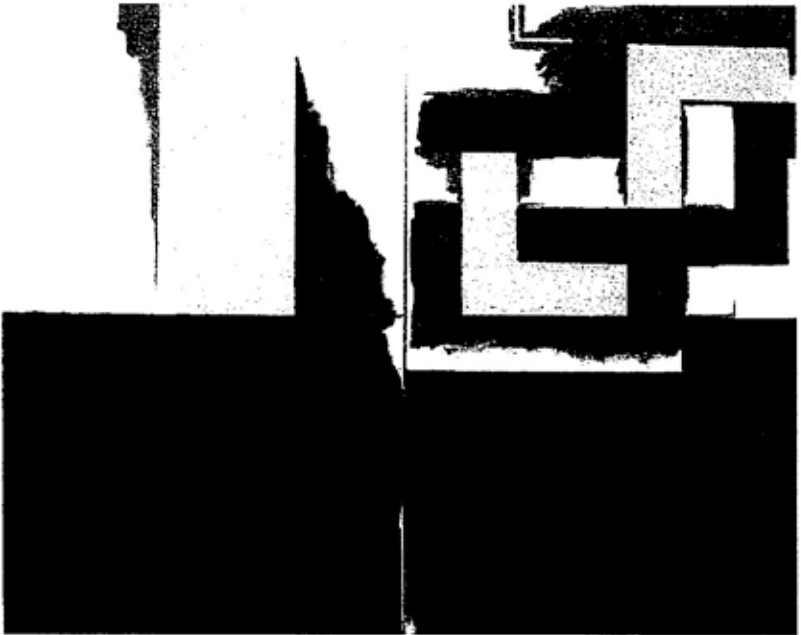


Fig. 1.

Marjorie Welsh, *The Without* (series), V, 36 x 48".

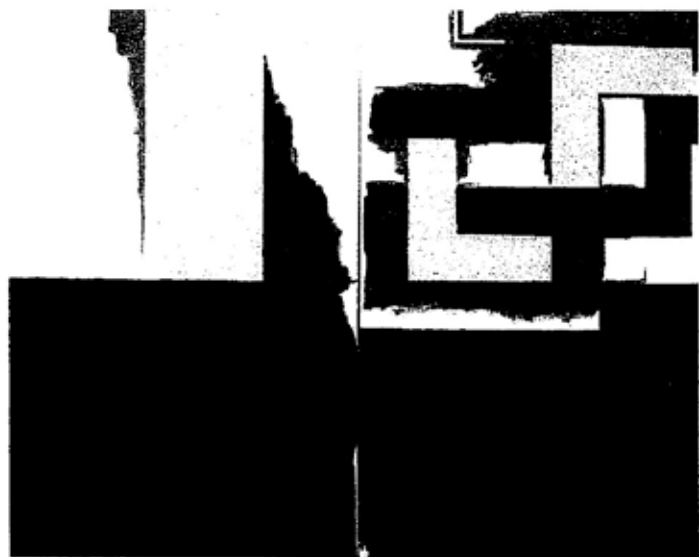


Fig. 1.
Marjorie Welsh, *The Without (series), V*, 36 x 48".

The diagrammatic aspects of *The Without* series (Fig. 1) entice us, as architects who by nature of our discipline cannot escape the diagram.

In architecture, diagram locates itself first and foremost within the idea of type and then within the nature of architectural representation itself.

Type comes from the Greek *typos*, meaning the striking (of the coin), and also the die (from which a coin is struck). As gerund, the striking of type is gestural, intentional. Within its Platonic framework, it is the motivating of the thing, the becoming of the thing only identified with the thing itself through causality. As noun, type is the generator, the die, the latent form for a multiplicity of objects, each of which is identifiable through any other, yet none of which is a repetition. Within the Platonic incommensurability of idea and thing, the impressed surface of the die is the positive, a presence, while the space of the coin itself is a negative, an absence brought to light only in the reproduction.

In this essay, we trace a chronology of ideas of type that we find present in the work of Marjorie Welsh.

Fig. 2.
Geometric constructions of A, a double square,
and B, a root 2 rectangle, from *De re Aedificatoria*,
Alberti, 1486.

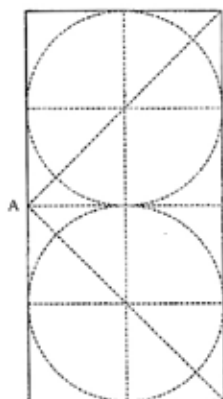
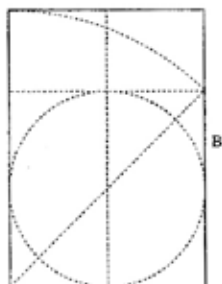


Fig. 3.
Diagram of *The Without*.

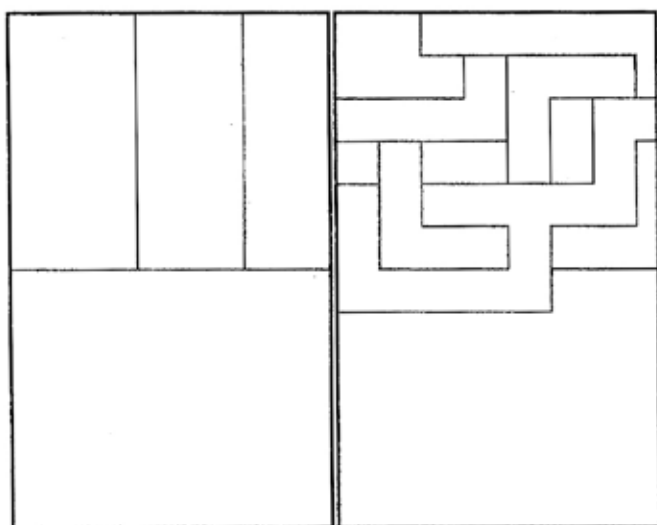


Diagram 1

In classical texts of architecture, namely Vitruvius, and its representation in Alberti, the architectural type is a die. It exists as latent sets of relationships that resist being undone by time or context. It contains more not less information than the type-object itself. It is not representable as such.

The *disegno* or act of drawing described by Alberti is like the striking of the die. The *lineamenta* (variously translated as form, idea, plan, schema, and line)¹ is the architectural ideal. (Fig. 2)

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*The diagram of the painting is, in its classical sense, understood as two coins struck from a single die. Right and left canvases reiterate sets of internal relationships—black below to tripartite tricolor above—and so intimate a latent typos. **With** an identity they establish through each other, the pair remains nonetheless **without** commensurability. The elusiveness of the shared armature rehearses the gap between typos and coin that in turn rehearses the break between idea and thing. (Fig. 3)*

Alternatively, the process of constructing The Without is imagined as a single, continuous striking, and a single continuous dialogue between left and right panels across the break of the die. The dialogue is recorded in the pentimento and in the relationships: between two blacks which are the same, two blues which are the same, two whites which are the same, two yellows.

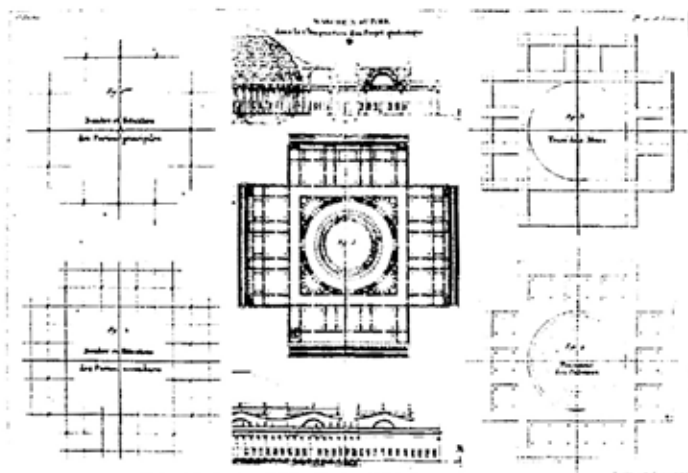


Fig. 4.
"Steps to Follow in a Project," from *Recueil et parallèle des édifices en tous genres*,
JNL Durand, 1799.

Fig. 5.
Diagram of *The Without*.

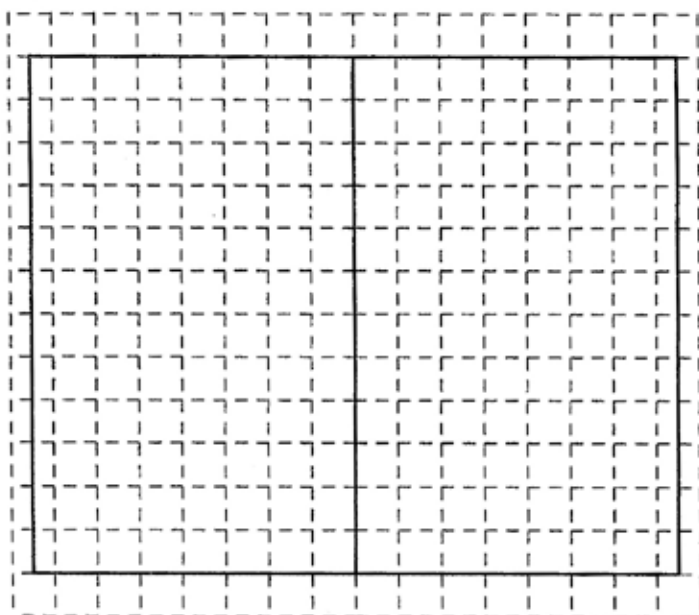


Diagram 2

The so-called neo-classical architect in search of a science of typology sought an equivalence of relationships in the Cartesian system of space. An infinite grid in three dimensions underlay and captured all of architecture and neutralized its other symbolic and figural capacities. Nine squares, formerly the trope of perfection and centrality, become nine squares within many. Durand renames the orders Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite with the numbers 1-5. (Fig. 4)

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*The painting begins **with** the grid. (Fig. 5) The grid does not distinguish difference between the two canvases but rather extends across both. The generator of the grid, meaning the point zero at the intersection of the x-y axes, falls between the two panels. The break line is **without** figural presence. It is an axis in absentia understood through the controlling geometry of the painting.*

There are other MW paintings, such as Small High Valley #20, in which the grid struggles to assert itself in a figural fashion, and ultimately fails to do so. The point of failure is the break between panels where the latent y-axis absorbs and erases the vertical line.

As a series of paintings, the encyclopaedic nature of The Without project is revealed. Pursued exhaustively and methodically, the artist could complete the catalogue.

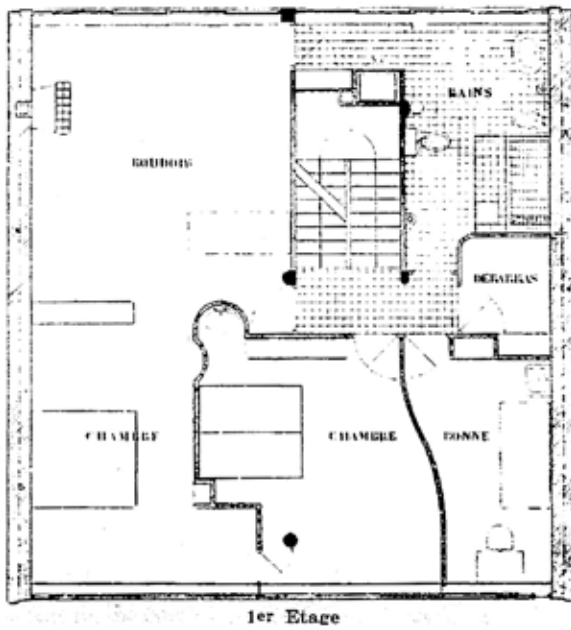


Fig. 6.
Plan of the first floor of Maison Cook from *The Complete Works*, vol.1, Le Corbusier, 1930.

Fig. 7.
Diagram of *The Without*.

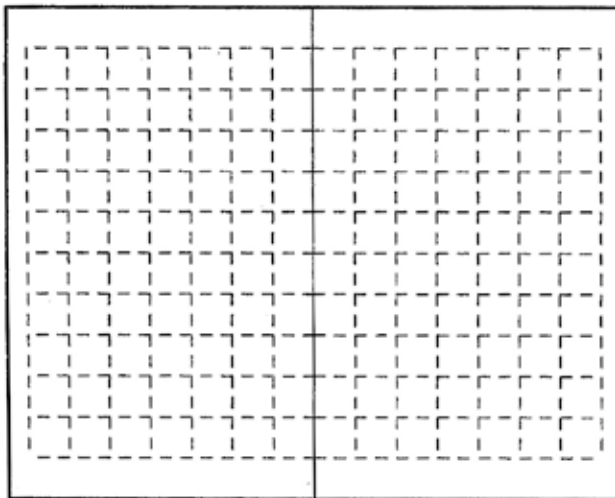


Diagram 3

High Modernism translates the Platonic dualism of idea and thing and its offspring, the Hegelian dialectic of form and content, into a binary structure implicit in the work itself. "The Plan is the generator," "a condensation of sensation" that both exceeds and fails the information of the built form.² (Le Corbusier, Fig. 6) Le Corbusier welds type and object into a single entity which he calls *objet-type* and illustrates with wine bottles as well as house plans and other refined products of mass production. The typological chore of the modern architect is to stabilize architecture through the relationship between form and function and through mass-production that establishes the *type's* (coin's) value.

This so called mass-production is actually an act of serialization, whose goal is not quantity but the perfection of the work lodged in a standard. The standard is the ideal, the *typos*. No two curtain walls of Mies are the same. For Le Corbusier, the Greek temple is a mass-produced object that achieved its unrepeatable perfection—its *typos*—in the Parthenon.

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The painting shares the dry notational system of a plan that encodes spatial and sensual experience. The brush stroke is the mechanistic carrier of pure sensation. The els of blue and yellow construct the spatial arabesque. The plan of the painting is a labyrinth (The labyrinth is the arch plan type conceived by Daedalos and traced by Ariadne's string.)

*This painting does not stand alone. It is one of a series in which the internal binary structure is a repeated feature. **With** repetition comes perfection.*

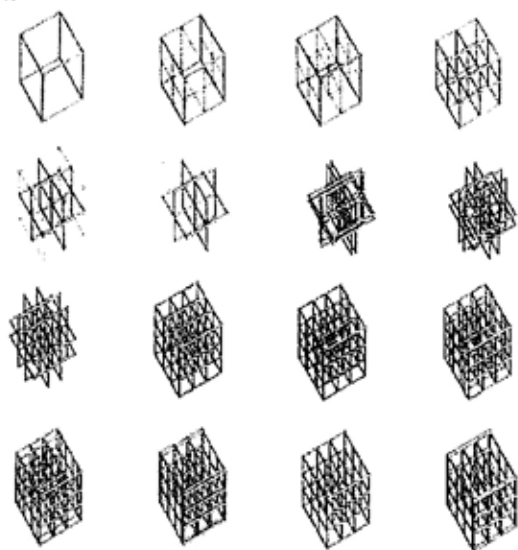


Fig. 8.
Drawing of House IV, *House of Cards*, Peter Eisenman, 1974.

Fig. 9.
The Duck and The Decorated Shed from *Learning from Las Vegas*,
Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, 1977.

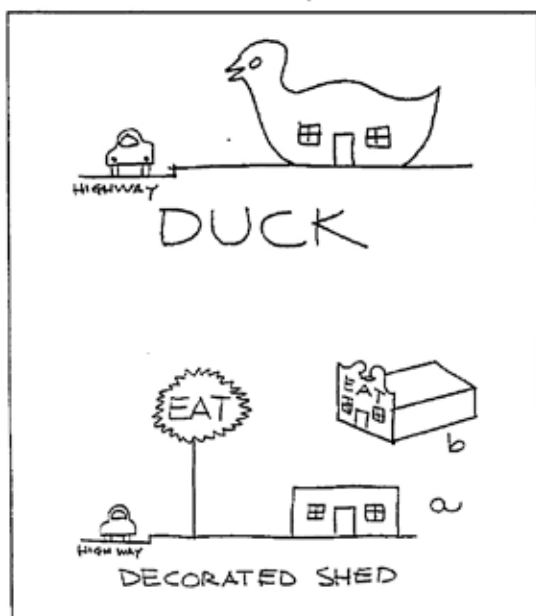


Diagram 4

Deeming the modern project a failure, and withdrawing from the fields of social and mass production, the Post-modernists explored binary conditions of architecture's own linguistic structure which they located either within Cartesian grids, co-ordinates and axes (Eisenman, Fig. 8) or figures taken as signs. (Venturi, Fig. 9) They called the drawing of these relationships the diagram. Subsequently, they re-established type as a code, describing it as a classical text with departures, some of which were "unprecedented" syntagem. ³

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Within the set of structural arguments made by the painting (the pre-linguistic penciled rules, the binaries, the relays) we choose to focus on the problem of sameness and difference. Is there an identity within the painting that has been deferred or is the painting constituted solely by its differences? (Barthes/Sassure) (Fig. 10)

*The diagram of the painting is a mirror. The two sides are trapped in mutual distortion. One panel does not exist **without** the other.*

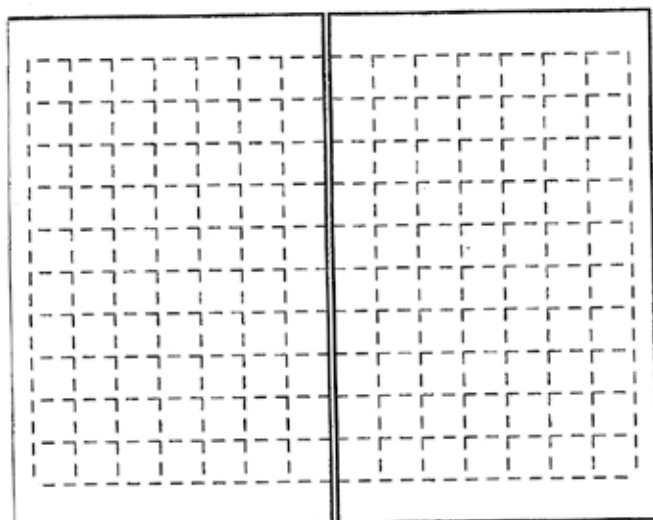


Fig. 10.
Diagram of *The Without*.

Fig. 11.
Drawing of the Paimio Chair, Alvar Aalto, 1933.

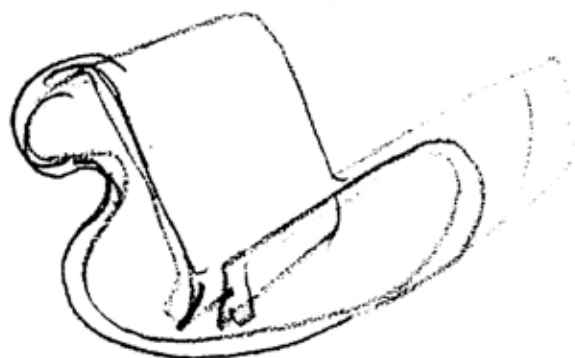


Diagram 5

The contemporary scene again takes up economically driven issues of reproduction and its value—of *typos as die*—this time including issues of the virtual and of simulation. Architects play out what they understand to be the inevitable forces of late capitalism in self-conscious commodification (Koolhaas' Prada) or the simulation of a new urbanism (Duany Plater-Zybeck's Seaside). They offer an uncertain kind of resistance through a new emphasis on process and gesture—the striking—taken from the general cultural paradigm of flow. If the value of the architecture is lodged in its design process rather than its objecthood, it is less easily commodified.

In search of the ultimate process, some give up control to the computer algorithm, others, like Gehry, maintain its gestural foundation. (Fig. 11) The goal is to approach pure gesture, such that even the underlay and all previous marks disappear without a trace, leaving the impression of a single continuous strike.

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The gesture recorded as the painterly stroke, the weak edge or the atmospheric space undoes the diagram even as it sets out binary relationships with the graphic, the hard and the flat. (Fig. 12)

The resistant gesture distinguishes The Without from other contemporary paintings of labyrinths, which, according to Hal Foster,⁴ simulate Modernist abstraction while in fact depicting networks of late capitalism, flows of information and the intrinsically abstract thing that is capital itself.

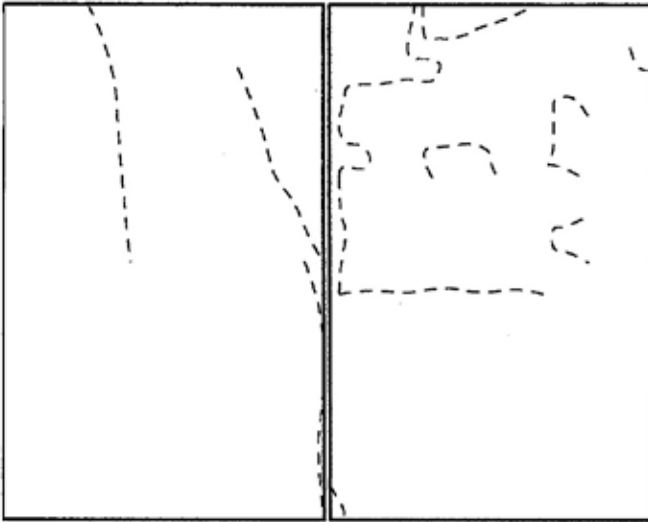


Fig. 12.
Diagram of The Without

Fig. 13.
Diagram of The Without

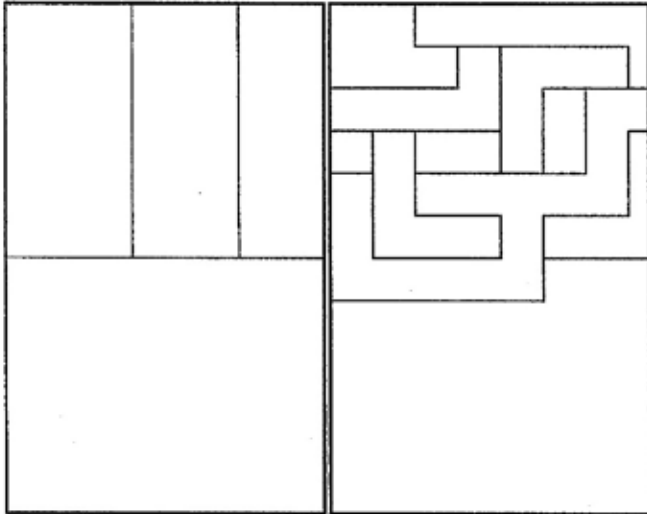


Diagram 6

There is perhaps a different kind of resistance possible, one that makes a contest of desires for flow (striking) and objecthood (die), flux and stability, where neither wins.

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The canvas is a single game board, its center break the boundary of each team's territory and the contested edge. The diptych form mandates two teams but not the number of plays and players. (Fig. 13)

The rules of the game are embedded in the board as the pencil "rules". These "ruled" lines are not to be confused with a Cartesian grid in extensio because they end within the border of the canvas. The pencil "rules" dictate the arena for decisions to be made and establish potential syntactical relationships, but do not constitute those relationships themselves. They are an a priori set of formal possibilities. They are the "typos" of the constructed canvas.

Paint is the chip or the coin that allows for syntactic exchange. Bids are made with elements (primary colors), binary systems (two yellows), graphic moves (center and edge), and painterly fields.

Within the syntactical field, there are many gambits. In one gambit, elements compete for our attention by position or identity. Yellow competes with yellow—endlessly. The "forgery" gambit asks us to determine which is the original/ first element and which the imposter. To identify a forgery would mean to discover a duplicity in the die and an inauthentic coin.

The game's theory, the modeling of competition for the purpose of equivalence, is a form of Game Theory, the mathematical modeling of conflict for optimization. According to such theory, the game has no winner.