

announcing matzine #07 the hourglass issue

the con·struct[ive] cri·tique

Mat.zine 006, *the con·struct[ive] cri·tique*, invited contributors to consider approaches to critical thought and comment, appealing to all thinkers and makers to construct, critique and collaborate. Submissions display a broad range of approaches to constructing a critical response and to the idea of thinking through making. The editor hopes that within the pages of this issue the reader might discover text and image which provoke interest, intrigue and inquiry.

Mat.zine is a conduit for collaborative practice, welcoming submissions from anyone who is interested. The editorship and theme change with each edition.

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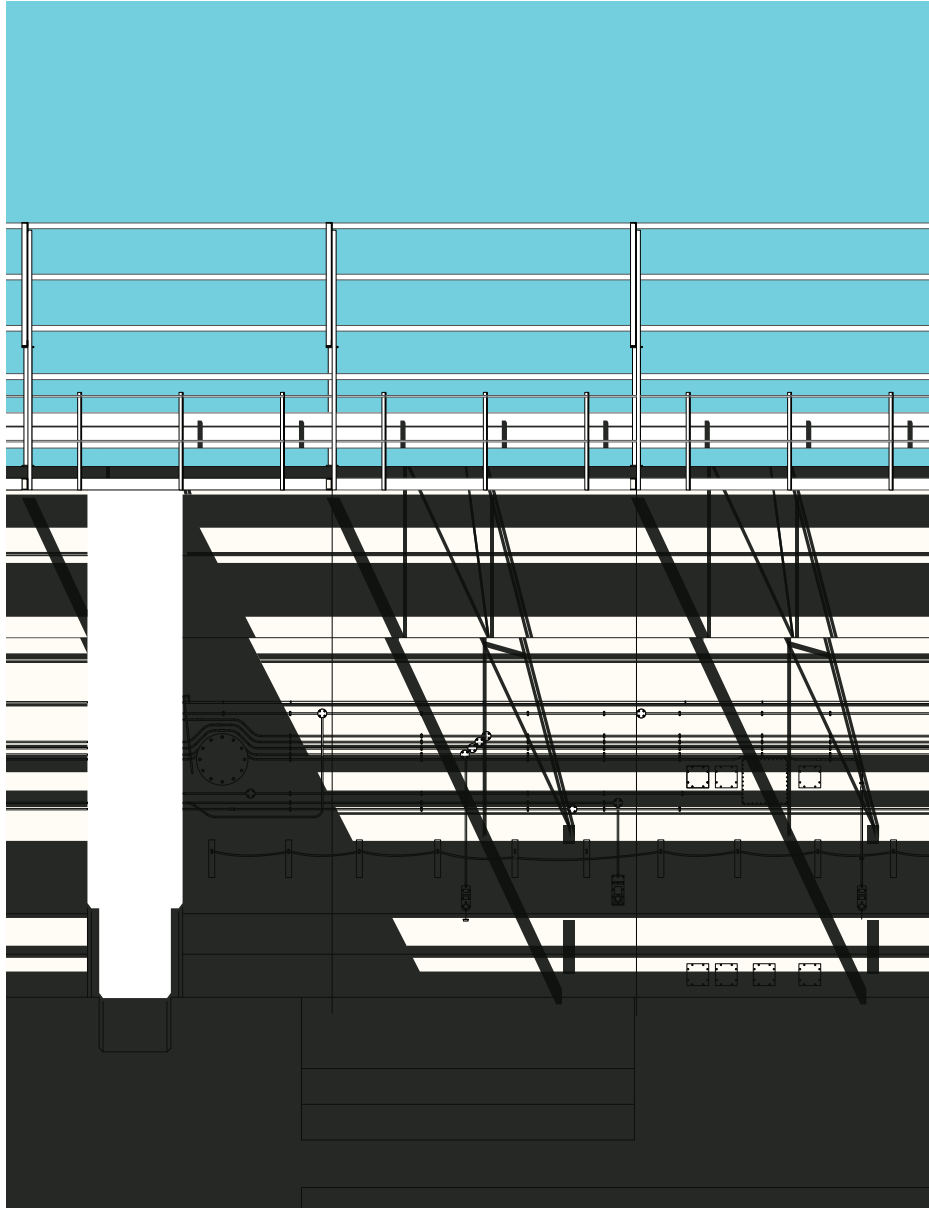


the hourglass, with its recessing sands is symbol apropos to our perception of time. the movement of the sands from bulb to vertex to bulb is a measured, allegorical representation; an animated diagram of parts, between subject and function.

the hourglass issue is about representation
[and][of] time

submission deadline 02 02 11

tick tock!



contributors

Gaps | Kirstin Norwood [4]

Ramblings | Tessa Fox [5]

Cad Fever | Stephen Mackie [6]

A note on the Architect as Critic | Ian Pollard [8]

undercomplicity | Rowan Mackinnon-Pryde [10]

Dissolution of Scale | Cameron Mcewan [12]

Critomatique | Sean McAlister , Nick Shurey [13]

1.2-03 Lab 1 Section 3 | Cris Pedrich [18]

editor | Rowan Mackinnon-Pryde

cover image | taken from *A note on the Architect as Critic*

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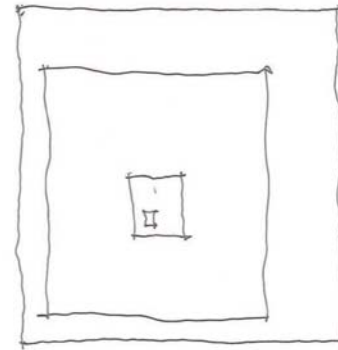


"Thirty spokes meet in a hub;
 But it is on the hole at the centre that
 the use of the wheel depends.
 Turn Clay in a pot;
 It is the space within that makes the
 pot useful.
 Build doorways and windows into a room;
 The spaces where there is nothing make
 The room useable.
 So although what we make is something,
 It is the nothing that makes it useful."

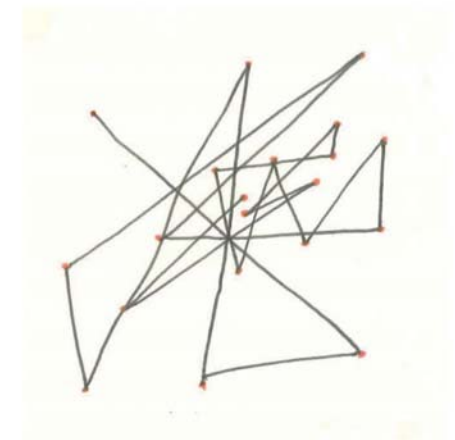
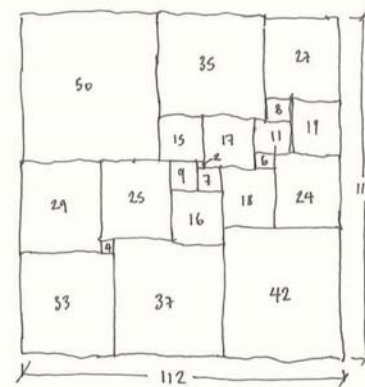
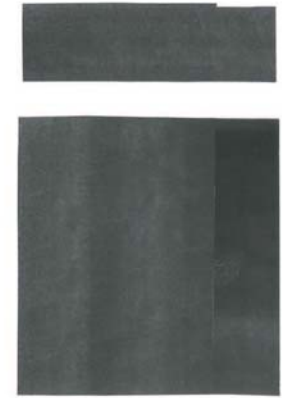
Lao Tzu in Tao Te Ching

image: sculpture | blade, magnet, nylon thread, space

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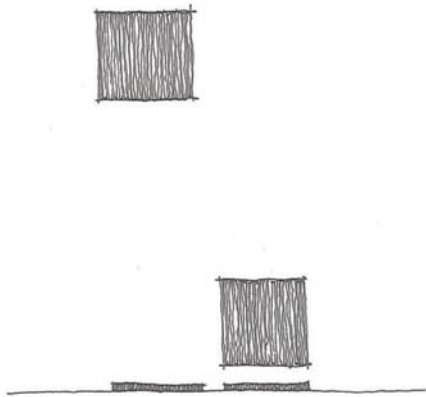


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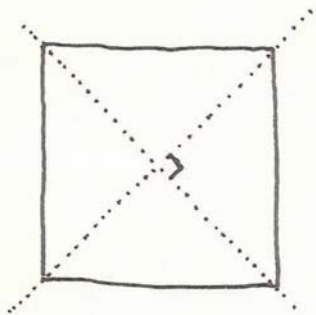


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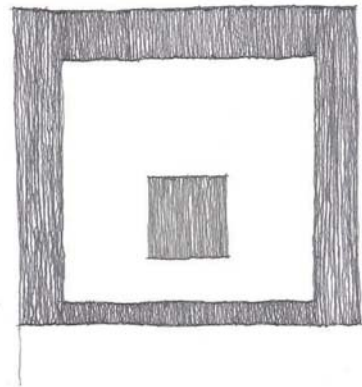
i.



ii.



19:20 23.11..2010



2. A MERE SQUARE.

What do you think?

How do you break apart the dark?

Pushing for greatness, continually striving.

What is the end goal?

Can something be analysed so much it becomes meaningless?

Construction collapses without substance. Failure?

If we keep rebuilding our foundation becomes weak.

Lose heart.

Should we all have the license to critique another?

Be in control of their development?

Should we be able to cut down trees to create space for our offices without consulting the animals for which the trees provide oxygen?

Stop building?

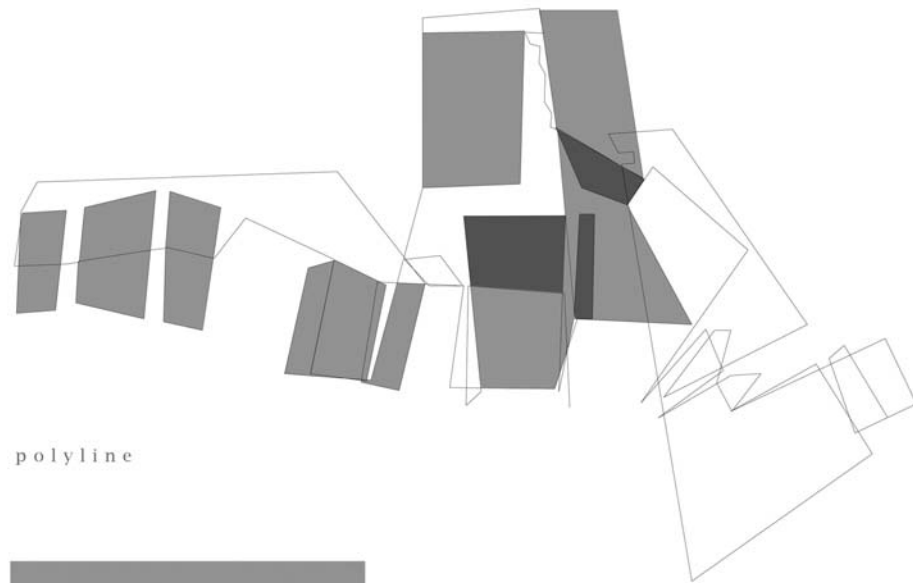
You'll never be let down.

Though that will depend on how well constructed the guard is around your heart.

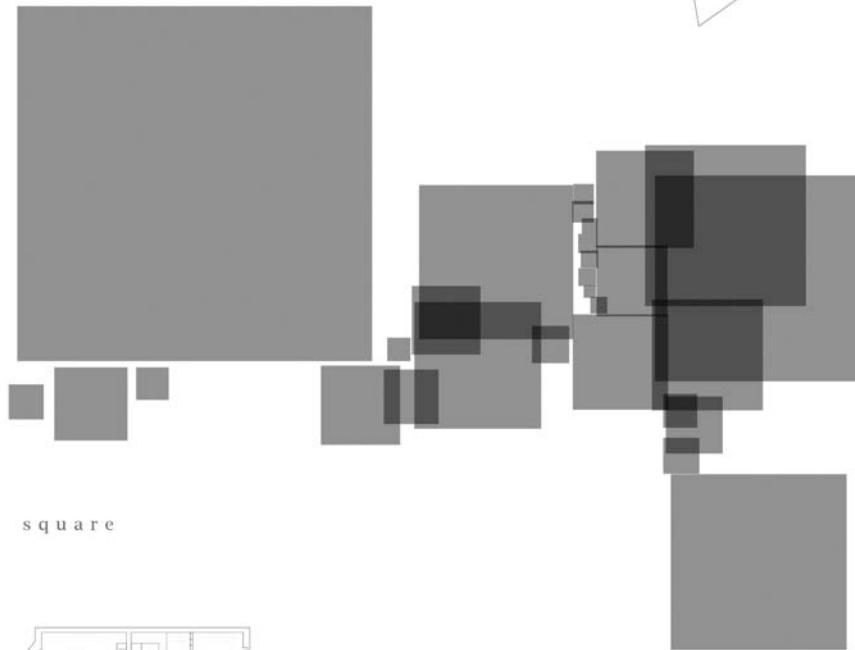
I'm just building on my thoughts, though it is up to you to break them down and make them your own.

Our world is a constant cycle.

Will we ever be content?



polyline



square



proposed

iteration three

i became a engrossed in trying to intuitively find the next iteration of this exercise, of 'what is this representation of depth i like'. i knew at this point it was either to do with, or entirely anti-, perspective and that it needed the viewer to fill in the lines [as opposed to read between them]. i spent the entire research time scribbling and going in circles. it was unsatisfactory to not produce a drawing i was immediately happy with. but this one has grown on me. i took the advice of mr critter and tried reducing the drawing. it was difficult to read at first

research into the perfect square revealed some very interesting mathematical theory, which also confirmed the problem of the need for infinitesimal resolution in ensuring perfection. both critic & student were fascinated by this hidden meaning that exists within every square & the ensuing dialogue proved to be the most rich.

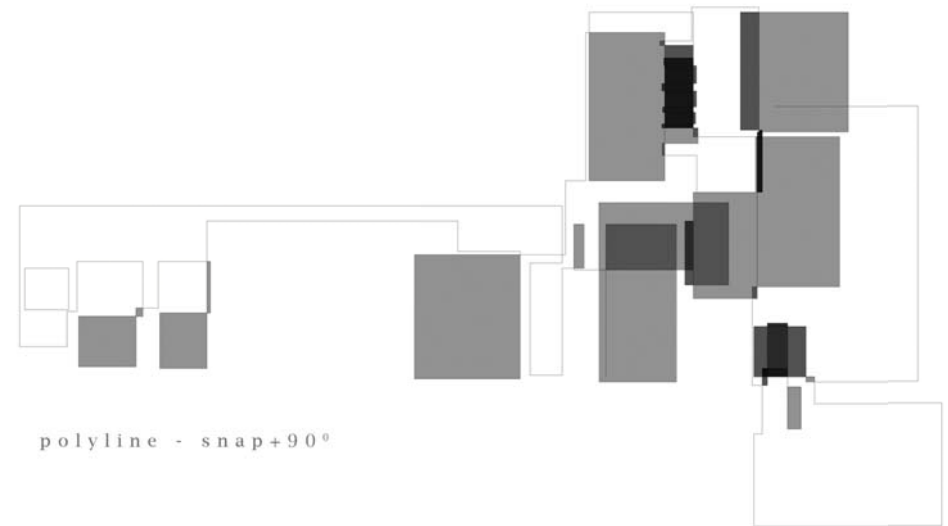
iteration four

someone in the office mentioned my drawings looked like josef albers'. he says 'the source of art... is the discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect.' nice connection. must read more of his stuff. referencing other established people gave ground to these ideas i'd been having. so did using a different medium - collaged laserjet blackness. i did a series of these and frankly wished this wasn't the last iteration of our crit machine. the success of this peer review experiment may lie in the participation of things

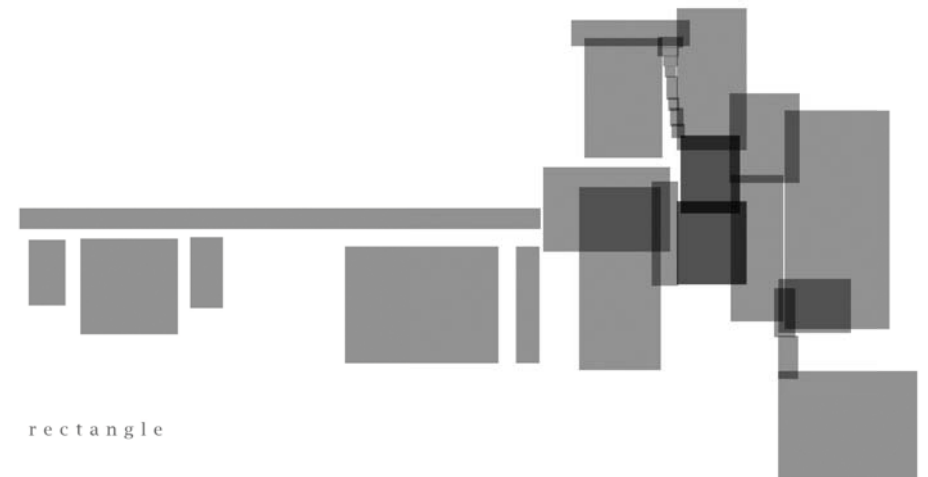
more a chance to reflect on our final iterations & trace our progress, this crit was defined by feelings of both satisfaction, for having stumbled upon a profound complexity within this simplest of shapes, as well as the desire to investigate further, which contrasted my earlier sense of confused paralysis.

i hadn't spend a lot of time researching this idea of 'representing depth'. not least because mr. brief setter only gave me the idea one half hour before the first crit. my immediate reaction was something like 'i don't want to draw a perspective to show depth'. instead i drew a plan and section, from which an inferred depth could be read/ placed by the viewer. i was shocked in the crit by how personal the criticisms were; the drawing was representing me! critter was concerned with the legibility of the diagram + i wasn't. the critter turned the page upside down and i liked how this simple move allowed a re-reading, an inversion?. it was this point i thought he engaged some idea

after how personal i thought the last crit was, i then spent a lot more time on thinking and testing this drawing. i used this quote "what if it were possible for things, when they get further away, to look further away as opposed to smaller?" - l. holm. i felt confident when the crit came, sure of my own progress. yet i was surprised again by how critter had a different way of seeing my drawing, literally seeing things that were not there: notably the 'inferred lines of projection across the white space'. this was exciting to me - the drawing seemed to communicate something relevant! what became apparent was the importance of dual engagement in a discourse



polyline - snap + 90°



rectangle

A note on the Architect as Critic

In contrast with its elder literary relation, architectural criticism remains an activity somewhat distanced from its subject. There have been, since the bombast of the modern movement, few examples of critics who have acted as both critical analyst and provocateur. The responsibility of the critic, after all, is to understand and communicate, but it is also to incite and to provoke. Fewer still have displayed a written flair and originality commensurate with their title, or with the greater degree of exposure they inevitably receive in what is a relatively small community. Notable exceptions have often been dismissed by those architects who build as being cavalier, as charlatans, or worse still, mere academics. It is certainly true that the practice of architecture is concerned with the construction of buildings. It is a great denial of architecture's role in human society, however, to draw such severe distinctions between the practitioner and the researcher.

It is a truism to state that little or no critical discourse of merit is evident in the contemporary architectural media. The recent rise of the blog format, when coupled with the general shortfall of quality critical exchange in schools of architecture has led to the emergence of a new phenomenon; that of the architectural graduate as default critical dilettante. And within the industry periodicals, it would appear that hagiography is the driving force, acting as an efficient conduit to the marketable aesthetic product of the architects they serve. This is particularly so in the United Kingdom and the United States, where pre beaux-arts conceptions of the architect as public figure persist, despite the institutionalisation of the education system for the profession. Developed by Universities, schools of architecture systematically place the direct knowledge of construction and craft, or *techne*, at a distinct remove from the detached analysis and study of architecture, the *episteme*.

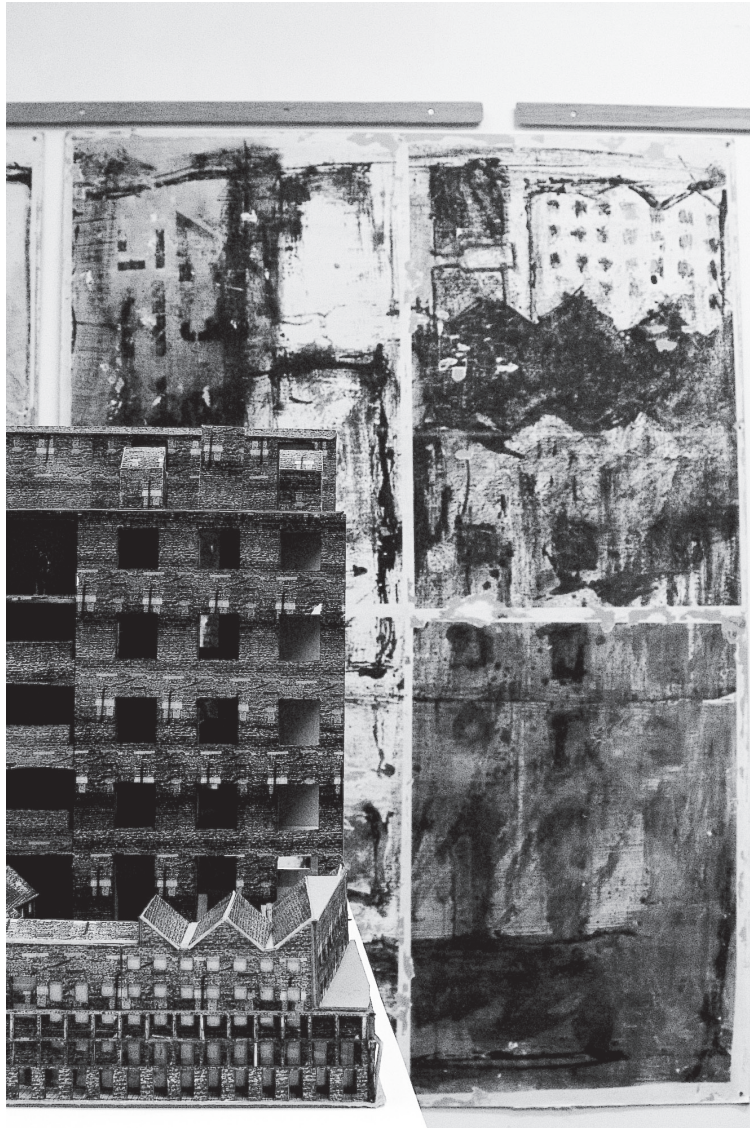
It could be argued [where more space might allow] that there has existed in continental Europe an alternative perception of the role of the architect, witnessed in the emergence there of architects successful as both critical thinkers and practicing architects. The La Tendenza group of 1960's Milan, to which Aldo Rossi and Vittorio Gregotti are connected is a suitable example here. Gregotti's own 1996 book *Inside Architecture* is an articulate exploration of this dual role; the architect as both 'thinker and maker', and their writings for Casabella have remained illuminating and influential.

In the context of architectural criticism, therefore, is it possible for a building itself to be a critical comment on, or reaction to a set of ideas? If architecture is analogous to an act of translation, in taking a set of ideas and beliefs, and creating from them a physically constructed environment embodied with meaning, then it is a translation made arduous by material's inherent resistance to becoming the carrier of that meaning. Architecture, however remains an pursuit fuelled by this very challenge. The architect Douglas Darden proposed that "if architecture provides anything at all, it is a platform

critomatique

herein follows two accounts of a design charrette, based on simply worded briefs. on one spread; a reactionary diary reveals all, on the other; the images offered for critique. in turns, both participants were critter and critted alike - a machine for peer review - a critomatique

- i. represent depth
- ii. draw the perfect square



Above: Two montage panels in which a number of strategies that use “scale” as subject matter are visualised. The two panels critique the initial studies by adjusting the proportion and displacing the same work, reconfigured into something else.

Original painted on lining paper approx 600 x 420 mm, a serial narrative is constructed through a process of scaling; four photocopies are mounted to painted hardboard panels, each measuring 1700 x 1200 mm.

very challenge. The architect Douglas Darden proposed that “if architecture provides anything at all, it is a platform for enquiry”, and perhaps it may be capable of enquiry beyond the initial concerns of shelter and protection.

It is a philosopher, and not an architect, who provides us with one of the clearest examples of architecture employed as a means of enquiry. In an intense and extended pursuit of architecture documented exquisitely in Jan Turnovsky’s *Poetics of a Wall Projection*, we read how Ludwig Wittgenstein laboured for three years in designing and constructing a house in Vienna for his Sister, Margaret Stonborough. It is a rare joy indeed to read Turnovsky’s acute critical insight into the design process of the philosopher, as he strives for complete symmetry through different scales in the plan of the house, and mechanical perfection in all components of the architecture manipulated by the human hand. In his analysis Turnovsky focuses a remarkably small area of the Stonborough house - a structurally unnecessary wall projection he entitles the *Mauervorsprung* - and through it we witness Wittgenstein struggle with what translator Kent Kleinmann describes as the “incompatible worlds” of material and concept.

In contrast to Wittgenstein’s intricate attention to the minutiae of construction, Le Corbusier’s *Villa Savoye* exists as the rhetoric of an architect over and above its modest function as a domestic dwelling. This proselytising is something profoundly distanced from the subtle confrontations of Wittgenstein’s architecture. In Margaret Stonborough’s house, the philosopher-architect was not aiming to express his ideas through architecture; rather he was attempting to investigate and test them. In *Villa Savoye*, Le Corbusier constructed a polemic previously arrived at in his five points. Sverre Fehn wrote that at Poissy “Corbu built a philosophy”, while in Vienna Wittgenstein attempted to challenge architecture itself; writing that “I am not interested in erecting a building, but in [...] presenting to myself the foundations of all possible buildings.” If architecture is indeed an act of heroic mediation between the conceptual and the material, as Kleinmann proposes, then Wittgenstein challenges its inevitable failure to the greatest degree.

How then, does any of this concern us, recent graduates and young architects, and what is the relevance, if any, of critical enquiry into the past and present? Manfredo Tafuri wrote that the “constant misunderstanding” of meanings and interpretations which have congealed around architecture in the course of history are not only “constant, but also the only available way to approach architectural reality”. It should be our ambition, therefore, to search for our own misunderstandings of architecture, through developing a rigorous, critical insight in the pursuit of new ways of seeing and making, as we observe our own ideas in new interactions with those before and after us.

