

To concentrate solely on the literal sense or even the psychological content of any document to the sore neglect of the enveloping facts themselves circumstantiating it is just as hurtful to sound sense. . . . Who in his heart doubts either that the facts of feminine clothiering are there all the time or that the feminine fiction, stranger than the facts, is there also at the same time, only a little to the rere? Or that one may be separated from the other? Or that both may then be contemplated simultaneously? Or that each may be taken up and considered in turn apart from the other?

Finnegans Wake 109.12-36

The letter! The litter! And the soother the bither! Of eyebrow pencilled, by lipstipple penned.

Finnegans Wake 93.24-25

All conventional scholarly work ("original research") is written in the implied first person. Under the mask of objectivity, "I am interested in" becomes "The focus of this study is." The following chapters make no pretense at objectivity: they represent the residue of my self, my cultural condition, my passion (love and hate) for architecture. The non-neutrality of language and history (and architecture) are my concerns. To situate this work in an epistemological arena that relies upon the maintenance of belief in their transparencies would be an error of logic. It cannot be written otherwise. It is, therefore, written other-wise.

This text (in the territory beyond this prim[p]ing) consists of an introduction, which is an allegorical construction on allegory, a collection

of three-plus-one essays upon some etchings of Giambattista Piranesi, and an appendix that serves as a guide to variant readings. There is in the construction a double, slipping structure of the three-plus-one configuration: chapters 1, 2, and 3 constitute a threesome, with the fourth chapter—chapter 3-plus-one (the *Syllapsies*)—as the “plus-one”; and the three constructions within chapter 2 constitute a threesome, with chapter 3 (“The House That Jack Built”) as construction 3-plus-one. In both cases the “plus-one” is both excessive (an addition to that which might already be considered complete) and completing (an addition that points to the incompleteness of the three at hand). The number three, the number three-plus-one, and the sum of these two numbers form the dominant numerical armature of the book. The strategies for writing/constructing/reading this work are appropriated from strategies dissected out of the text of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*.

Piranesi was an eighteenth-century architect known primarily for his voluminous etchings, slightly less for his treatise on architecture, and much less for his built work. Nevertheless he was all that the above suggest: recorder, visionary, theoretician, and practitioner. His oeuvre in many respects is painfully out of synchronization with the conventions of his time and place, and some of the work has been interpreted as bizarre and delirium-produced. He has been called the first modern architect. To classify Piranesi is, of course, absurd. What is important is that in his portrait by Labruzzi, he is wearing a beautiful silk satin coat and a dark suede waistcoat over a shirt edged with sheer organdy ruffles freshly pressed. He sits in a pose appropriate to his position, displaying one of his drawings. But under his fingernails there is blackness.

James Joyce was a twentieth-century writer known primarily for a collection of short stories, a short novel, a masterpiece deemed obscene and banned in the United States, and a meta-masterpiece certainly much more obscene by such standards than its predecessor, but deemed unreadable and therefore not banned in the United States. His oeuvre is painfully out of synchronization with the conventions of his time and place, and some of the work has been interpreted as bizarre and delirium-produced. He has been called the greatest modern writer and the first postmodern writer. To classify Joyce is, of course, absurd. What is important is that in any of several photographs that have become our collective image of him, his eyes, magnified to

fantastic proportions behind thick lenses, are unfocused and slightly crossed, a hint that they are full of darkness and shadow.

The two images, the painting of Piranesi and the photograph of Joyce, that have just been described with words do not appear in this text. Most of the images that do appear—reproductions of the etchings of Piranesi and a drawing by Joyce—are illustrations of the etchings to which the text refers; but, more important, they are emblems, or maps, for reading the allegorical text. The legibility of the image qua illustration operates only at the most mundane and even simplistic level. Piranesi’s imagery should not be construed as an illustrative milieu for Joyce’s visionless, in-the-dark text, but a text in images that *corresponds* to the text of words.

A primary polemic here is directed at the dominance, indeed the domination, of the image—and of the visual—in architecture and in Western culture. Thus, at the same time that this book explores the territory of the visual-image polemic, it represents a suppression of image into text, calling into question the neutrality of the image, in a move parallel to the more currently accepted recognition of the non-neutrality (transparency) of language, which, of course, is itself characterizable by a dominance of the visual.

The reader by now will have perceived that a recognition of the conventions of historiography that demand a dependence upon primary and secondary documents, upon proof of hypothesis, upon bipolar logic and hierarchical, linear thinking—that is, the conventions of research founded in what is called “scientific method”—has been abandoned. But this, to a large degree, is not true. It is not the *recognition* of scientific-method-based research that has been forsaken but blind faith in it. Conventional method is called into question here. Thus, this is a work of critical analysis that began with a constellation of questions rather than a hypothesis: Is there further research to be done on the relation between architecture and writing, research that goes beyond the pitfalls and dead ends of the arguments made over the last twenty years that depend upon semantic and syntactic translations between languages (the early architectural research of Peter Eisenman and that of Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas, for example) and simple tropic analogies (the early work of Jorge Silvetti, Robert Venturi, and Michael Graves)? Where might be the sites of such relations, if not in causal correspondence? Are the configurations significant that describe the

relations among language, literature, writing, drawing, building, and architecture? How might a consideration of the connections between theory and practice inform and be informed by these configurations? The relations of space and time? Those of nature and culture? If we reconstrue history and historical research in terms of a suspension of belief in the mutual exclusivity, or bipolarity, of these pairs of concepts, how might this inform and be informed by those configurations?

These questions were posed as a generative epistemological milieu from which to operate upon a set of specific texts. I chose to operate on a literary text and an architectural text that approach each other: a written text (*Finnegans Wake*) in which the writing-language-meaning relation was not displayed as transparent and univocal, and a drawn text (a collection of Piranesi's etchings—the *Campo Marzio* plan, the *Collegio*, and the *Carceri*) in which the drawing-building-meaning connection was not displayed that way. Furthermore, the texts approach each other in another way: the narrative structure of *Finnegans Wake* is superimposed upon a geometric structure that resembles an architectonic, and the Piranesi etchings approach the literary in their ambiguity and invitation to a kind of narrative interpretation (a “What is going on here?”). Both texts are presented as white pages on which black marks have been made. Both are reproduced in repetition. Both break conventions that go far beyond those of their temporal and geographical contexts, while masquerading as “normal” texts (a bound volume with title and author's name printed on the cover, pages from books about architecture), and so immediately put into disarray attempts at classification, explanation, and searches for causality.

When I use the word *writing* in this text (and I use it a lot), I do not refer simply to that concept of writing as a mirror or documentation of speech, but to writing as a constructing, nonlinear enterprise that works across culture in networks of signification. This writing, although it makes use of language, is not limited by conventional concepts of language; that is, it does not exist in identity with language.

My operation upon the texts of Joyce and Piranesi, generally speaking, uses constructive strategies found in the text of Joyce to open up the texts of Piranesi to analysis. It is no coincidence that the Joycean strategies are, to a large extent, similar to the body of contemporary critical strategies known as deconstructive.¹ In turn, the strategies of deconstruction have persuasively

revealed the failures of conventional scientific method on the basis of its own logic. Therefore, a deconstructive approach seems to have an appropriate “fit” here.

The proper name most often associated with deconstructive criticism is that of Jacques Derrida, whose mode is a kind of radical empiricism. One of his most recognized signatures, the polysemous “There is nothing outside the text,” suggests this regardless of how it is construed. The present work follows the lines of such empiricism; it is a close analysis of texts that at the level of material to be analyzed are closed to context and at the level of the process of analysis are open to a boundless universe of potential connectivity. The etchings of Piranesi are construed as texts in many senses. They are isolatable entities stripped of conventional contextual supports of “truth,” such as biographical information about the author or relative chronological position vis à vis other texts of the author or his predecessors or contemporaries. They are readable. They are construed as “having been woven” (the word *text* emerges from the past participle of the Latin *texere*, “to weave.” A text is a woven thing).

In the space of the relation between text and weaving lies the generative structure that allows the logic of the construction to unfold before your eyes. This structure must be mapped across a constellation of concepts via a network of lines of ideas that, although they may be tied to various proper names, are not purely the property of those particular proper names but, instead, represent repetitious tracks of many movements across the same territory. The proper names that follow, in other words, are in one sense coding mechanisms for the general vicinities of certain tracks. In another sense, the proper names represent a certain acquiescence to conventions of scholarship: they provide jumping off points from this work to other works that constitute its context. The mapping of this generative structure itself operates in the space between text and weaving: it is what it is about. Samuel Beckett, protégé of Joyce, said the same of *Finnegans Wake*: “Here form is content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read—or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; it is *that something itself*” (“Dante . . .,” *Exagmination*, 14).

Before we enter the space between text and weaving, it will be useful to explore some preliminary (“before the threshold”) territory. The

world in which *objectivity* and its related concepts are inscribed is a world founded in logocentrism, that is, a world in which the Divine Word of God and Its related concepts—Truth as an absolute, the centered subject, the determination of the Being as presence based in the concept of power of an inner voice, heroic and boundlessly creative subjectivity (all reflecting a need for authorization, for centeredness and a clarity of order, for control)—are operative as controlling structures.

It is this longing for a center, an authorizing pressure, that spawns hierarchized oppositions. The superior term belongs to presence and the logos; the inferior serves to define its status and mark a fall. The oppositions between intelligible and sensible, soul and body seem to have lasted out “the history of Western philosophy,” bequeathing their burden to modern linguistics’ opposition between meaning and word. The opposition between writing and speech takes its place within this pattern. (Spivak, preface to Derrida, *Grammatology*, lxix).

Bipolar logic, which demands a superior and an inferior term, structures Western thought, demarcating binary categories in which one term is privileged over the other: light and darkness, male and female, theory and practice, culture and nature, creation and procreation, sacred and profane, mind and body, speech and writing.² In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida opens up to analysis the relation of speech and writing, exposing both the logical problems of and the motivation behind privileging speech over writing in Western culture. In *Dissemination* (and other texts), writing is set in motion; it is used as an instrument for exploring the territories of texts, marking the craters and fault lines and untrustworthy bridges that clutter texts.³

It has been commonly construed (especially in the architectural press) that Derrida’s operation on the privileging of speech over writing is one of simple reversal, that, in fact, Derrida’s “mission” is to privilege writing over speech. In architectural circles, this misconception has extended into a misinformed critique of Derridean architectural theorists, who are taken to task for privileging architectural writing over architectural practice. An attentive reading of Derrida will demonstrate the folly of such assumptions: simply to reverse the privileging flow, to privilege the previously inferior term over the previously superior term, is to remain within the same system of

privileging. Writing, then, can reveal this, but comes with its own pitfalls of logocentric construction. And this revelation upon revelation, emerging from reflexive critique—the thing at hand always throwing itself into question—constitutes the lesson of Derrida. Privileging, an ultimately static operation, gives way to oscillating (or shuttling), an operation that itself shuttles between stasis and flow.

In the translator’s preface to *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak notes this oscillation as a kind of topological move (slipping into one another), in approaching the relation of writing as conventionally construed (a kind of transparent medium through which speech [presence] expresses itself) to “writing” as a repressed structure that both precedes and organizes speech and as the instrument for the expression of its own repressions:

The repression of writing in the narrow sense is a pervasive symptom of centrism. . . . The usual notion of writing in the narrow sense does contain the elements of the structure of writing in general: the absence of the “author” and of the “subject-matter,” interpretability, the deployment of a space and a time that is not “its own.” We “recognize” all this in writing in the narrow sense and “repress” it; this allows us to ignore that everything else is also inhabited by the structure of writing in general, that “the thing itself always escapes.” . . . Derrida’s choice of the words “writing” or “arche-writing” is thus not fortuitous. Indeed, as Derrida repeatedly points out in the section on Lévi-Strauss, no rigorous distinction between writing in the narrow and the general senses can be made. One slips into the other, putting the distinction under erasure. Writing has had the negative privilege of being the scapegoat whose exclusion represents the definition of the metaphysical enclosure. (lxix)⁴

Weaving itself (a shuttling operation) is figured in its origins by expressions of repressions. Weaving is the invention and activity of the inferior term of the male-female pair; it is also a surrogate of speech. In providing an explanation for the anomaly of women making a contribution to culture, Sigmund Freud suggested that they originated the art of weaving by plaiting their pubic hair in order to mask the absence of the penis and what the penis represents in society: the phallus and the power to prescribe and inscribe

lines of legitimacy. Weaving for Freud therefore becomes a silent substitute for the power of speech. But, as Ann Bergren has demonstrated, there is a paradox (a shuttling) at work in the text of weaving:

Greek culture inherits from Indo-European a metaphor by which poets and prophets define themselves as "weaving" or "sewing" words. . . . They call their product, in effect, a "metaphorical web." But which, then, is the original and which the metaphorical process? Is weaving a figurative speech or is poetry a figurative web? The question cannot be decided. Weaving as the sign-making activity of women is both literal and metaphorical, both original and derived. It is, like the Muses' speech, ambiguously true speech and an imitation of true speech.

The myth of Tereus, Procne and Philomela provides a good example. It testifies to the regular limitation of women to tacit weaving, while exposing the magical power of a silent web to speak. When Tereus, the husband of Procne, rapes her sister Philomela, he cuts out the woman's tongue to keep her silent, but Philomela, according to Apollodorus (3.14.8), *huphenasa en peploi grammata* "wove pictures/writing (*grammata* can mean either) in a robe" which she sent to her sister. Philomela's trick reflects the "trickiness" of weaving, its uncanny ability to make meaning out of inarticulate matter, to make silent material speak [emphasis mine]. In this way, women's weaving is, as *grammata* implies, a "writing" or graphic art, a silent, material representation of audible, immaterial speech. ("Language and the Female," 71–73)

The woven thing, then, is more than a mere pathetic substitute for a lack. It bears the ability to enable a resurfacing of something that has lain hidden, that has been repressed. A text is more than writing in the narrow sense, much more than a transparent medium through which speech or truth is expressed. The word *grammata* is a significant joint, as it connects both back to Derrida and grammatology and over into another textual field generative of this work: the work of Walter Benjamin on allegory.

Benjamin's 1928 treatise on allegory, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*), a work contemporaneous to *Finnegans Wake*,⁵ was conceived as a tissue (*histos*) of quotations

whose logic derived from an emblematic armature (making the treatise itself allegorical, an example of that which it addresses). One of the predominant characteristics of Benjamin's construction of allegory is a slippage of the boundary between visual and verbal criteria. The hieroglyph, a form of picture writing, is the instrument he uses to demonstrate and elucidate his notion of allegory. (See my chapter 1, "Allegory and the Possibility of Architecture.") Hieroglyphic writing has come down to us preserved as engravings upon stone tablets, obelisks, or sarcophagi, which ties it to cutting and incising in its methods and to three-dimensional objects in its media,⁶ as well as in its cryptlike character (the voids in the stone that describe the "pictures" are themselves spatial). Modern scholars have imbued hieroglyphic writing with a quality of secretiveness that is due to its displacement in time of translatability and their attendant theories concerning its probable use only by certain initiated persons authorized to learn its secrets. Hieroglyphic writing is then cryptic as well as cryptlike, in the sense that it consists of voids carved into solid material. Hieroglyphic writing as thus construed becomes an instrument of communicating ideas that must be kept secret from some, a writing of that which cannot be spoken. In these senses, it is tied to weaving and poetry and *grammata*. In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Edgar Allan Poe provides a connection among spatiality, writing, and secretiveness in the cryptic caves discovered and described by the presumed narrator.

In its ambiguous emblematicity of "crypt," and its ambiguous position between picture and writing, the hieroglyph suggests a writing that is other than transparent, a writing that is illegible in the conventional sense, a writing in which repressions surface. This "writing" might be termed (*s*)*crypt*. It is the writing of Joyce and the writing (etching) of Piranesi, which give themselves up to other readings. At points this writing appears in the form of—merges with—conventional writing. In *Finnegans Wake*, this sort of intersection takes the shape, for example, of the letter "T," which both occupies proper places in the proper sequencing of letters of words and forms patterns (mosaiclike) in the text, suggesting in a third valence the post and beam of architectural trabeation, and in a fourth and fifth the watery connection of tea and micturition (tee-tee) as they are underlaid by the feminine signifier (water, the river) in the symbolic order of the text itself. In this construction, the intersection frequently takes the form of the letter "X,"

which signifies the chiasmic armature itself of this kind of ambiguity, as well as referring to its markings in the writings of Derrida (the *chiasmus*, the *pharmakon*, the *supplément*, *différance*), in addition to playing in the space between this text and the letter's conventional significations. A noteworthy chiasmus marked by the letter "X," and one that the present work foregrounds, is that of theory and practice. This may be seen not only as an intersection of two different "lines" but also (and importantly) as a mirrored image, two sides of the same thing. By swerving out of the conventional theoretical treatise both in form (the present text is situated ambiguously between a conventional scholarly work and an architectonic construction) and in methodology (it operates in the spaces among poststructuralism, Marxism, and feminism, all of which have points of attachment to the logocentric bonds of conventional scholarly research while remaining critical of such research), the text itself occupies this critical-cryptic chiasmic space.

The Construction of *Finnegans Wake*

On more than one occasion, James Joyce referred to himself as an architect. *Finnegans Wake* is a monumental construction, a quasi three-dimensional text, and in its interwoven and colliding geometries, its incorporation of familiar, old materials and entities and fragments, its various connections, and its ambiguous signification it contains an intricate architectonic that reinforces its identity with the city. It is an allegorical work, a multi-layered palimpsest, bits and pieces of previous and succeeding texts read through other texts.

At issue is the question of how *Finnegans Wake* might inform an architecture that is not theory-bound, or an architecture that is about displaying the fallacies of its theories. The ways in which Joyce's text divorces itself from the literary tradition are useful here.

The story, or narrative, of the book does not unroll along a line of time. Its units of narrative are assembled in space—in the space of the text. Thus the text pushes at a privileging of spatiality over temporality. (It is important to remember that post-Enlightenment Western architecture and architectural theory are founded in modes of thinking that are predominantly linear and rational—temporal, not spatial—regardless of the prevalence of the notion that architecture is a discourse on spatiality.) This foreground-

ing of spatiality allows Joyce's text to become peculiarly resonant with the poststructuralist exploration of the spaces of writing.

The narrative assemblage of bits and pieces that is *Finnegans Wake* forces an abandonment of the idea of reader as a passive receptor. The reader must engage, work on, rewrite this text. The reader must be a writer. She or he must be the kind of reader described by Julia Kristeva in *Semiotike*:

For the Ancients the verb "to read" had a meaning that is worth recalling and bringing out with a view to an understanding of literary practice. "To read" was also "to pick up," "to pluck," "to keep a watch on," "to recognize traces," "to take," "to steal." "To read" thus denotes an aggressive participation, an active appropriation of the other. "To write" would be "to read" become production, industry: writing-reading, paragrammatic activity, would be the aspiration towards a total aggressiveness and participation. (181)

This reader-writer is a producer, an appropriator, a maker, an assembler. This is also the kind of writer about whom Roland Barthes writes in an essay on Michel Butor's *Mobile*: "Michel Butor has conceived his novels as a single structural investigation whose principle might be this: it is by *tying* fragments of events together that meaning is generated; it is by tirelessly transforming these events into functions that the structure is erected: the writer (poet, novelist, chronicler) *sees* the meaning of the inert units in front of him only by *relating* them" (*Critical Essays*, 182–183). Michel Butor, *Mobile*:

Four o'clock in GREENEVILLE. My husband is sleeping beside me. Fairy Cave. TROY, county seat of Lincoln County. He doesn't know my dreams. Crystal Caverns, Marvel Cave. TROY. A shudder in the grass. Turns. TROY. Shudder in all these beds. Tracery. TROY. A shudder on the lake water. Loops. TROY, PA. On the river water. Meanders. TROY, N.Y. A shudder from the sea. Charms. At night right angles begin vibrating. The hissing of serpents echoing from square to square. (147–148)

Here is also an association with cinematic montage.⁷ In montage, the sense of temporal discontinuity created by the technique is superseded by the viewer-created synthesis of meaning among relations of images.

David Hayman writes: "Tales reveal their analogical freight before they spill their 'action.' Visual and verbal effects vie for our attention." And