

# Reflections on Architecture in an Age of Simultaneous Representation

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*“What Can Be More Modern than the Archaic?”*--Sanford Kwinter

**D**URING my past three decades as a professor of architecture in Texas and Virginia, I have kept an eye from afar on Princeton's leadership role as seminal for this deep discipline and evolving profession. I trace these observations back to my undergraduate days there through the mnemonic device of *One Good Window, Please*. These are windows where Orientation and Gravity, approximating Stonehenge, serve as connective tissues to frame the flows of so-called currencies, perhaps an offering of architecture as a Covenant with the World, Again. I see the evolution of Architecture at Princeton, now fifty years out, as a kaleidoscopic mirror and raucous echo of national and international debates on the social, political, and economic relevancies of ethics and epistemologies. Where do we belong, and for what purpose? Here and now we are fortunate indeed to be back at Princeton, self-critically mature yet still wondrously engaged with the Sun and the Moon. It is healthy to reflect on our vital situation.

## *The First Window: Antioch Court, Sunrise, September 10, 1961*

I remember walking from Brown Hall toward Marquand Art Museum, when on the way I stumbled upon Ralph Adams Cram's McCormick Hall, where a modest door was labeled *School of Architecture*. That small stair entry led immediately to a large U-shaped gallery surrounding Antioch Court, where a glass prism framed one towering, massive, south-facing wall full of excavated *scavi*, mosaic panels, and acanthus leaves germinated from ancient Assyrian seeds recovered from still ongoing archeological expeditions. Current masters thesis projects filled the other surrounding white walls, where watercolors bathed precise pen-and-ink draftsmanship of contemporary cultural institutions of sleek planes and layered transparencies reflecting upon Arcadian landscapes of crew-cut fields and iridescent waterscapes. Lithe sailboats were rendered as a parting token of affection by Billy Shellman and would glide by, announcing that all was right in this world at the transition from the Eisenhower onto the Kennedy eras in America.

This singular atrium, both a source of dynamic light and re-orientation to an ancient world, was a generous window connecting us to the ever-presence of the past while appreciating the vitality of the here and now. Glistening above the lush greenery were fragments of ancient mosaics inaugurating us to be in dialogue as youthful citizens with distant strangers. We were told again and again mid-century that we were contributors to a Modern Age, while every stair leading from the Antioch Court Gallery up to the lofty

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*This essay was written in the autumn of 2014 and sent to Michael Graves, in gratitude, at the time of his symposium marking the 50th anniversary of his Princeton practice. He was full of life's vitality and feisty wit even then. He will be deeply missed by all of his students, our class being his first at Princeton.*—P.D.W.



*Graves, in Rome, 1961*

common drafting room had a landing that opened onto yet another main gallery of the Art Museum, first the Ancient World, then Medieval, up to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and finally the birth of the Modern, which connected to the drafting studio. No ambiguity there: we were above it all, without limitations, seeing far and wide. At mid-century we were clearly Modern, making the future out of the Lessons of the Past. We realized step-by-step at the pace of our heartbeats that we were a part of a past, which made the Modern possible.

We first read *Vers une Architecture*, erroneously translated as *Towards a (New) Architecture*, and felt part of an *Architecture of Continuity* along with James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Einstein's appetite for *Relativity*, and Picasso's *Guernica*. This was a moment of pause, place, and provocation. Antioch Court framed a connection to the past and literally gave light to the massive walls of contemporary youthful work contributing to an era of American optimism coincidental with Kennedy's Camelot. That first Good Window was one of cultural continuities with recurrent dualities, and framed the start of our education and subsequently our profession fifty years ago. Our School of Architecture was attached from the start as chapter house to the larger Art Museum in a style understood as Venetian Gothic (1925), clearly not the later branding of Collegiate Gothic of Oxbridge set in motion also by Cram a decade later with our Chapel.

Princeton had been following a Beaux Arts curriculum of spatial typologies under Jean Labatut since the 1930s, with a heavy curriculum of architectural history for eight semesters. For several of us (David Jones, Peter Waldman, John Williams, Tod Williams, Bill Wolfe continuing on as MFA students) we formed Labatut's last thesis class in 1967 in then a radically changed school with the coming of Michael Graves, Peter Eisenman, backed up by the English invasion of Kenneth Frampton, Anthony Vidler, Colin Rowe, and Alan Colquhoun. We were in transition along with the generational shift of faculty and were the last class to have Beaux Arts training with Frannie Comstock, where we learned the magic that can be gleaned with dexterous and precise handling of drawing instruments: straight-edge, adjustable triangle, and compass.

*Picasso, Guernica*



On alternate days William Faye Shellman III exposed us to what might be referred to as freehand exercises, in contrast to mechanical drawing, and lessons offered from his well-massaged leather-bound book of lecture notes. We started with a photograph of the Cheops Pyramid at Giza and were to learn that architecture is profoundly accountable; each incremental side of this equilateral pyramid was exactly the same length as well as the four-square base. I made *my first mis-take*, asking what the other object was in front of the pyramid. He said, “Not to worry, it was not architecture.” Not confrontational at the time, I let my curiosity about the Sphinx subside, though the same culture seemed to construct them side-by-side simultaneously.



*Cheops Pyramid and Sphinx, Giza*

The next week, our lessons emerged from Greece, the Athenian Acropolis, when Mr. Shellman showed us the Parthenon (8 columns across the front, 16 logically across the flanks). We were being *trained* that architecture was accountable. But being one of Thomas Pynchon’s *Slow Learners*, I made the same error, *my second mis-take*, and asked Mr. Shellman what was the object to the left of the Parthenon. He responded impatiently, “Not to worry, it was not architecture.” The ungainly Erechtheum, with four different fronts and flanks, even female caryatids with a hybrid of distinctly scaled Ionic columns, was certainly not as authoritatively Doric as the masculine Parthenon and clearly not under control. It seemed curious, if not profoundly amusing, that architecture has always been *accountable and speculative* since 2500 BC in Egypt, and now apparent in 500 BC in Greece. Fifteen hundred years later, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) by another Princeton Graduate, Robert Venturi ’47 \*50, rocked architectural pedagogy and practice, where ambiguity, recurrent dualities, and the invention of a spatial middle ground were essential characteristics of mid-century cultural history.

*Parthenon and Erechtheum, Athens*



*A Window onto Rome:  
Noon, September 11, 1962*

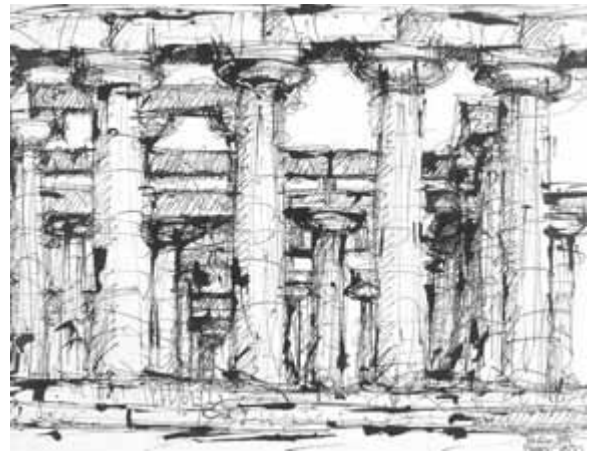
Michael Graves, with a soft voice, arrived fresh from the American Academy in Rome, and exhibited bold gestural brush and ink washes of massive weighty cavernous fragments of ruins echoing the fleshiness of the Baroque once again covering the gallery walls illuminated by Antioch Court. The setting was now a Window to the City, a reminder of the *Necessity for Ruins* as *A Field Guide for Getting Lost* (Rebecca Solnit) and found. This initial offering of Graves reinforced our second vital connection to the past, moving now from Assyria to Rome serving the Education of the Architect. We learned the very next semester, from the same master of the massiveness of Rome, an “other” capacity to abstract three-dimensional connective tissues out of points, lines, and planes, yielding an architecture of lightness in a Bauhaus-based foundation course eclipsing the spatial typologies of our Beaux Arts beginnings. Graves brought in Richard Meier as his teaching assistant and we were sent off to the Museum of Modern Art bookstore to buy the pamphlet *Discovery of the Square*. I made *my third mis-take* and also bought adjacent publications: *The Discovery of the Circle* and *The Discovery of the Triangle*. Returning to class and holding up all three, I was told to trash the latter two and focus on the Square. My inclusive bias for “the other” fed an appetite for the speculative Sphinx, the hybridized Erectheum, and the forbidden forms of the Circle and the Triangle.

*Windows Along McCosh Walk:*

*Accountable Modularity / Layered Transparencies, Sunset, September 12, 1963*

We moved into the New Architecture Building along McCosh Walk, leaving behind the museum and its art/architecture and archeology libraries, into a modular exercise of brick and glass panels. Now this new building was *accountable*, systematically clear and certainly resolved -- even the mechanical systems were exposed. No frictional speculation or fictional figures could be found. The only library we had was of planning policy reports of postwar America.

Peter Eisenman joined us from Cambridge by way of Cornell and the Eisenman-Graves catalyst thrust us into the 20th-century Modernism of Le Corbusier/Terragni and an architecture of evolutionary thought



*Graves, On the Right Hand of Antiquity, 1962*

*Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye*



*Terragni, Casa del Fascio*



articulated by Colin Rowe. It was a time of leanness and restraint, the abstractions of white museum board and layered transparencies. We had arrived in 1961 at a school where as architects we were prepared for a career designing country clubs and Episcopal chapels for residential prep schools, and emerged in 1965 projecting museums and town halls. On rare occasions we practiced infill buildings in small towns respecting the scale of the street, guided by Health Licklider and Henry Jandl. We learned to draw not only with 2B-6H pencil leads, but mastered ink on mylar line drawings with Rapidograph pens inverting plans into sections and resultant elevations; there were no longer Beaux Arts facades and flanks as we now resided in a Cubist middle ground. No longer would we render Arcadian landscapes with watercolors or specify material palettes of masonry below and wood framing above as Victor Olgyay approximated Stonehenge when he introduced us to the science of the celestial soffit, now re-discovered in the name of renewable energy sources. Our palette was to be that of abstract form and, if pressed, to call out concrete, steel, and tight skins of stucco and plaster as if inside and outside were the same.

***Windows onto the World: On Politics and the Forest Edge  
Midnight, Under a Full Moon, September 13, 1965***

Robert Geddes arrived as our new Dean from the University of Pennsylvania and challenged both program and site options for this now more socially and politically relevant school. Shelters for drug addicts and homeless families, daycare centers, inner-city schools for students at risk, and police and fire stations were the new tasks for pedagogy and then practice for this small college town school in central New Jersey. We visited Trenton and Philadelphia, Camden and New York and projected linear cities from Boston to Washington; we rode public transportation and imagined affordable housing. These were the years of civil rights and civil disobedience for the discipline and the profession. The city became the subject and social justice became the program. Architecture was introduced as a political force, and Geddes linked a university elective to his foundation course, *Architecture 101: Cities, Buildings, and Landscapes*, and suggested a connection to American cultural history through his essay *The Forest Edge: Thomas Coles' Course of the Empire*. By then, Princeton had abandoned the Marquand libraries and museum and had never identified a landscape architecture program. Geddes's emphasis on polis, the art of the city, required the introduction of planning under Chester Rapkin and Julian Wolpert, and we learned to collaborate with urban geographers and aid in the deinstitutionalization of asylums for the mentally and physically disabled. The profession evolved in the role of activist citizenship as the civil rights movement at the time and the Vietnam War

*Cole, On the  
Course of the Empire*



split the nation. Some of our generation served overseas in the military, and others learned of a larger world through the Peace Corps. We emerged a decade later from the start of our privileged education from the cocoon of Antioch Court to the visceral presence of catalytic crisis evolving from the calm resonance of Matisse's *Window* onto Picasso's *Guernica*. The poetics and pragmatics of the city now framed our graduate education, as first Colin Rowe directed us toward a new museum for natural sciences in Philadelphia, followed by Alan Colquhoun, who challenged us with the bare bones and explicit requirements of a plasma physics laboratory for a research corridor along the New Jersey Turnpike, where we were accountable now for every costly construction sequence and every cubic yard of non-requisite space.

***Windows of Excess: The Post-Modern Project***

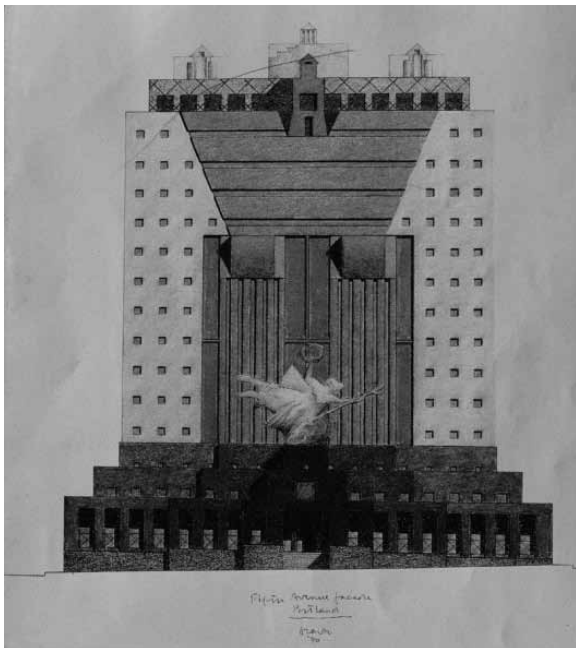
***Time Flies: The Second Decade after Graduation, 1975-85***

The Vietnam War ended, and some of us lingered to teach for the next decade at Princeton, Cincinnati, Rice, Cooper Union, and Yale, where the benign postwar economies produced a profession newly engaged with *housing the bourgeoisie* (Helene Lipstadt) as aspirational capitalist investment, no longer a retreat or a shelter. House size grew, as appreciation allowed an attitude of flipping investments on both the residential and institutional scale. Museums began to grow as venues of recreation. Post-Modernism under Graves, Leon Krier, and Aldo Rossi envisioned no longer projects of endless space but rather well-articulated rooms at residential and civic scales. The international competition *Roma Interrotta* engaged a wide range of Princeton faculty and alumni as an urban agenda to



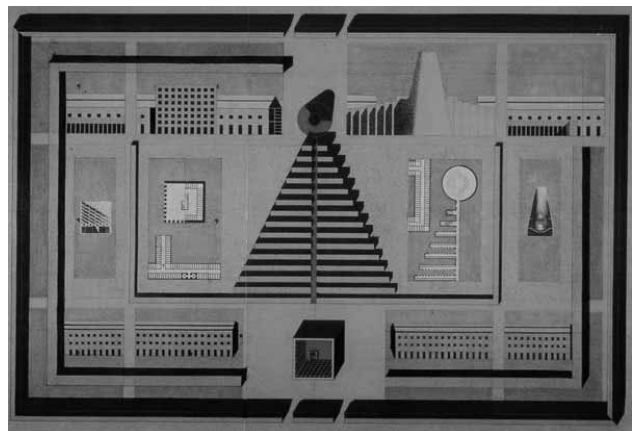
Matisse, *Window*

***Graves, Federal Building, Portland 1982***

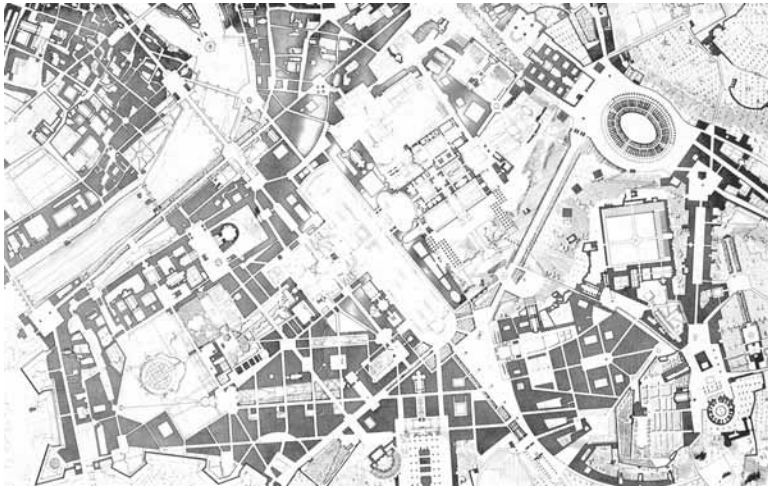


reinhabit the city, to celebrate craft along with Hannah Arendt's *Work and Labor*, and Rossi's call for *Enduring Permanences*. The clock turned back to the memory of Antioch Court, demolished 1964, to Proust's *Souvenirs of a Lost Past*. The Pope's Balcony, always Aldobrandini, the Belvedere, Ledoux,

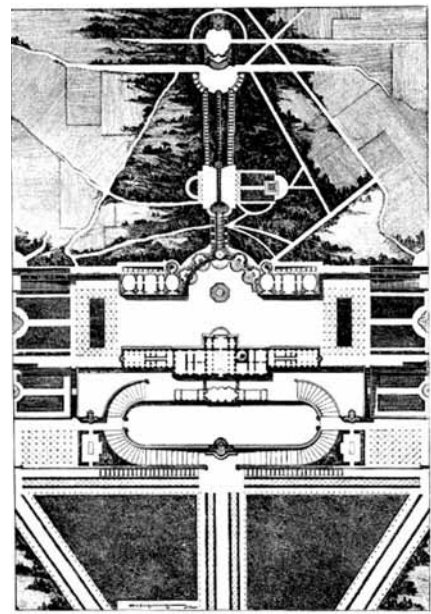
***Rossi, Cemetery, Modena***







*Roma Interrotta, Competition, 1978*



*Villa Aldobrandini*

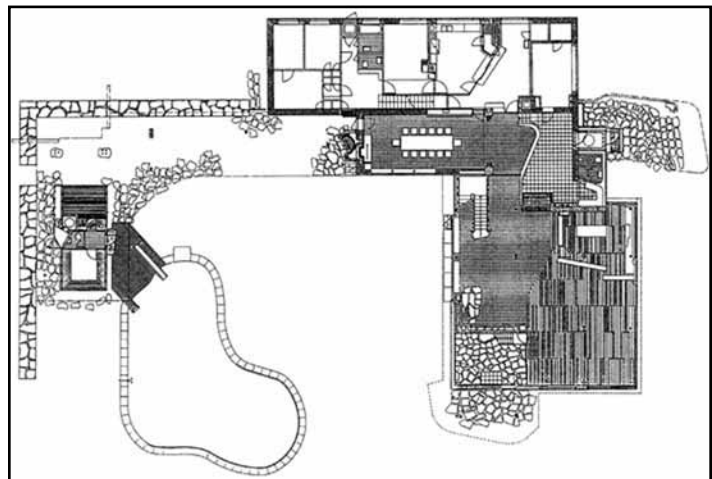
and persistently Roman leitmotifs produced exquisite renderings on *Arches* paper, prisma-color, pastel, watercolor, while the free hand returned and inserted cypress trees framed our pastoral imaginations. Graves always had landscape as part of his palette. Often asked, “What was the origin of his figural delineations?” he would answer: “One day you will understand.” Time was on his side as he made it possible for dozens of his students to pass through the gates of the American Academy in Rome as Fellows and reframe their understanding through the figural void in the ancient boxwood hedge overlooking the City of Rome. Some Window, some archaic Void, some enduring City revealed in the nick of time for so many students over the past fifty years. Mille Grazie.

*Graves, Benacerraf Pavilion, 1970*



Simultaneously, in this context of Excess, Frampton’s treatise on the reconsideration of Modernism and the Avant-Garde, *Critical Regionalism* (1983), stirred the epistemological imagination. Where ideas originate and the lessons of long, long ago and far, far away, of the primitive as the primal, were revealed in the prescient haunted work of Alvaro Siza, Alvar Aalto, and Peter Zumthor, architects considered

*Aalto, Villa Mairea, Finland, 1937*





*Gehry, Santa Monica House, 1988*



*Coop Himmelblau, Vienna Office Chord, 1990*

idiosyncratic two decades earlier. As the Vietnam War took an Euro-centrally educated generation to far-away places, we would be moved by Tanazaki's *In Praise of Shadows* and Sanyo's *Mirrors for the Moon*, as some in the Academy resonated with Sanford Kwinter's essay on *African Genesis: What Could Be More Modern than the Archaic?* Some were looking deep into the radical nature of roots, into the role of geology and the language of embedded meaning and signs, semiotics, and into the ethical and epistemological responsibilities of architecture as a discipline and a profession to make a better world.

### ***The Deconstructivist Window as the Prosthetic Lens***

#### ***The Third Decade, 1985-95***

Princeton's faculty (Eisenman, Graves; later Meier, Charles Gwathmey, and Cooper Union's John Heyduk) generated the professional national debate between the East Coast Whites and the West Coast Silvers (Gehry/Morphosis/SCI-Arc) through the publication of *Five Architects* and Mario Gandelsonas' *Progressive Architecture* essay on *Semiotics & Architecture*. That door opened up the dialogue with European linguistic thinkers and deconstructivist philosophers at the same time pop culture's Post-Modernism extended across the American cultural landscape, now centered in pervasive shopping centers with the scenographic commodification of Disneyland, Las Vegas, and Prince Charles's Canary Wharf Docklands.

Wood, *Spring-time Plowing*, 1934





While the Whites initially rendered abstracted spaces without a visceral constructional agenda, the Silvers began to appreciate the grittiness of joints, prosthetic supports, and flashing. Frank Gehry's Santa Monica house and, a decade later, his Bilbao Guggenheim, Coop Himmelblau's Vienna Office Chard, and the emergence of the digital wireframe permitted what seemed a vast break, or mirror image, from the wall of a collaged past through the reflections on the present. A more patient second look at these new original projects of innovation reminds me of the role of Antioch Court, reflecting the theses of currencies with Shellman's sails of flows so skillfully framed in 1961. Spatial tales of origin are more primal, more architectural as an enduring civic discourse imagining common ground instead of the rhetoric of invention, innovation with a disdain for his or her stories of *then and there* in a world of *now here* or regrettably *nowhere*.

***Windows onto Field Operations, Landscape Urbanism in the Face of BIG DATA  
Four Decades Later, 1995-2005***

After Michael Graves started a major pedagogic re-orientation at Princeton beginning in 1962, he became a major hero of the Post-Modern movement nationally and internationally for the next three decades, not only as a star architect but also as a profound educator for generations of professionals and leaders of the discipline. Graves won the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture's Topaz Award in 2009, the highest honor of the profession and the academy, and he served as trustee of the American Academy of Rome. We used to refer to him in his early years as Michelangelo for his amazing sensibilities and profoundly human sensitivities.

Graves was a teacher's teacher, an architect who inspired generations to the still vital lessons of Antioch Court, whose light revealed the power of in-site to young minds nourished by this Master and Friend. From the start, when Michael drew the portrait of a Modest Window from his Bank Street office, he drew, in addition, both the tree beyond and the bird nest within. Throughout his work, land form and the three natures of Wilderness, Landscape, and Garden graced this son of Indianapolis, the land of extensive Midwest farmsteads with a Jeffersonian grid imposed upon a restive topographic imagination, which he recorded again in the *Roman Campagna* and reconstructed in his public civic theaters and private retreats around the world.

One might critically say that the preconditions of the site have not been at the explicit core of the Princeton program, but I believe they have *always* been there, though not celebrated now as "new thinking," the result of BIG DATA. Long ago Labatut taught how to make steps longer and shallower outside

Wood, *Fall Plowing*, 1935



Graves, *Roman Campagna*, 2012

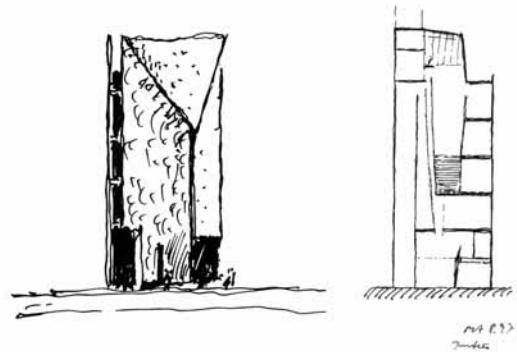


than those inside with a delight in the pause of the landing; Graves made architectural promenades from outside to inside: up to roof-top terraces and down to grottoes, only to meander the length of a thousand-foot-long garden.

In recent years, Princeton Dean Stan Allen has initiated the study of *Field Operations* to lead a curriculum at the scale of landscape urbanism or the new nature of infrastructure in response to the scale of climate change and the currency of BIG DATA as the new capacity of evidence-based design. Princeton students take on a Brooklyn site of 6 billion square feet, a new master plan for Shanghai to assure it will always be the BIGGEST city in the world. Assigned as Yellow Master Plan Guidelines by the same Gandelonnas of *Semiotics* (1972), he has led this cynical project on semantic inference for the past two decades for a school looking East as well as West.

Equally for the past two decades, faculty members Liz Diller and Richard Scofidio have branded Princeton's pedagogy as current and disconnected from Antioch Court. Since Graves' retirement they have served the profession as star architects with *Windowless Un-Private Houses* (MOMA exhibit 2006), where virtual reality is accessible on a blank screen instead of a wet canvas. The big, blank, yet self-imprinted glazing walls looking in on the choreography of spectacle haunt these planes of voided panels for their projects at Alice Tully Hall and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Boston. These voided expansions, an architecture of almost nothing, are projected for the latest MOMA expansion of New York over the dead body of Williams-Tsien's Folk Art Museum.

Students now study extreme climates, extreme sports, and extreme catastrophes, such as proposals for post-Hurricane Sandy. BIG DATA may be a substitute for the archaeological imagination now at Princeton and some of the stars of the profession. Outstanding professional leaders such as Princeton alumnus Adam Yarinski \*87 of the Architecture Research Office have the inherited genes of studying with both Graves and Allen. Our own classmate Tod Williams, with Billie Tsien, received the 2014 Presidential Medal of Honor for their exemplary work across all scales and continents.



Williams Tsien, *Folk Art Museum Sketch*



Williams Tsien, *Folk Art Museum*

*Windows of Restraint: In the Face of Excess, a Call for the Rarefied  
The Past Decade, 2005-15*

This Final Window framing salient developments for our discipline and profession takes me full circle back to the precious seeds of antiquity, which flourished in the now demolished yet not erased Antioch Court, which is today a loading dock for an often expanded museum. A century and a half earlier than this, our 50th Reunion, Gottfried Semper (1865) reminded us that *the first architectural act is to break the ground*, to plant a seed perhaps, to prepare solid foundations for a culture to flourish. Princeton's School of Architecture is seminal to the profession, as we have become stewards of the rare resources of this world.

Alejandro Zara-Polo, who served a short term as Dean in 2012-14, is yet another refugee from the Crisis in Spain, along with Harvard GSD's new departmental chair, Inaki Albalos and University of Virginia's new fearless leader, Inaki Alday, collectively identified as the "Spanish Armada." Zara-Polo initiated a new debate through a stunning lecture series at Princeton in the spring of 2014 titled *Rarefied*, asking "what is the architecture that grows in a resource-depleted environment" after a decade of excess. It was a clarion call to the discipline and to the profession that we must build with what we have on hand; 5,000 years of exploitative quarrying of the earth's resources have resulted in a cornucopia of salvageable materials for building the new city from the nutritive processes, eco-tones of the ancient and yet enduring. The lush vital acanthus leaves and J.B. Jackson's *Necessity for Ruins* may be mirrored in the future of the profession, as revealed in Raphael's *School of Athens* (1520) where Plato and Aristotle are in dialogue with Michelangelo and Pope Sixtus V, ancient seeds of wisdom flourishing as catalysts for contemporary citizens and strangers.

Raphael, *School of Athens*, Vatican, 1520

