Retracing the Expanded Field

Encounters between Art and Architecture

edited by Spyros Papapetros and Julian Rose

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Contents

Sarah Oppenheimer

> And we will measure everything from this horizontal at the top and only meet the ground at the moment we touch it.
>
> —Le Corbusier, 1953

Imagine drawing a section through the Klein diagram that describes Rosalind Krauss's expanded field. Confronting one method of representation and analysis—the structuralist diagram—with another—the architectural drawing—provides a radical shift in perspective. A laterally extending map is transformed into a line. One could see this line as a horizon. Alternatively, one could see the ground plane. In either case, assuming one cares to build upon it or dig beneath it, the line could serve as a datum against which to plot new forms of practice.

This simple transposition of a field into a datum invokes the process of reducing the complexity of a site to a set of discrete and recognizable terms, a method common to both architecture and many of the expanded modes of sculptural practice mapped by Krauss (particularly those she terms "marked sites" and "site construction"). When encountering a site, one is presented with innumerable variables: the material manifestations of the environment, the flows through these material contours, the fuzzy boundaries of a

site's edges, the structural forces binding mass, the optical and aural properties of deflection, the social and economic forces that shaped the place and continue to animate the space once built, and so on. Architectural representation simultaneously erases some qualities of site while bringing others into sharp relief.

Drawings such as plans and sections are long-established strategies for working within and around the complexity of site. Though such strategies are often equally important in sculpture, they lack a parallel tradition. The sharing of representational techniques suggests a relationship between these two fields that ranges beyond the strict opposition diagrammed in the "Expanded Field" essay. In my recent work, for example, architectural drawings are a starting point for the analysis of a built environment.

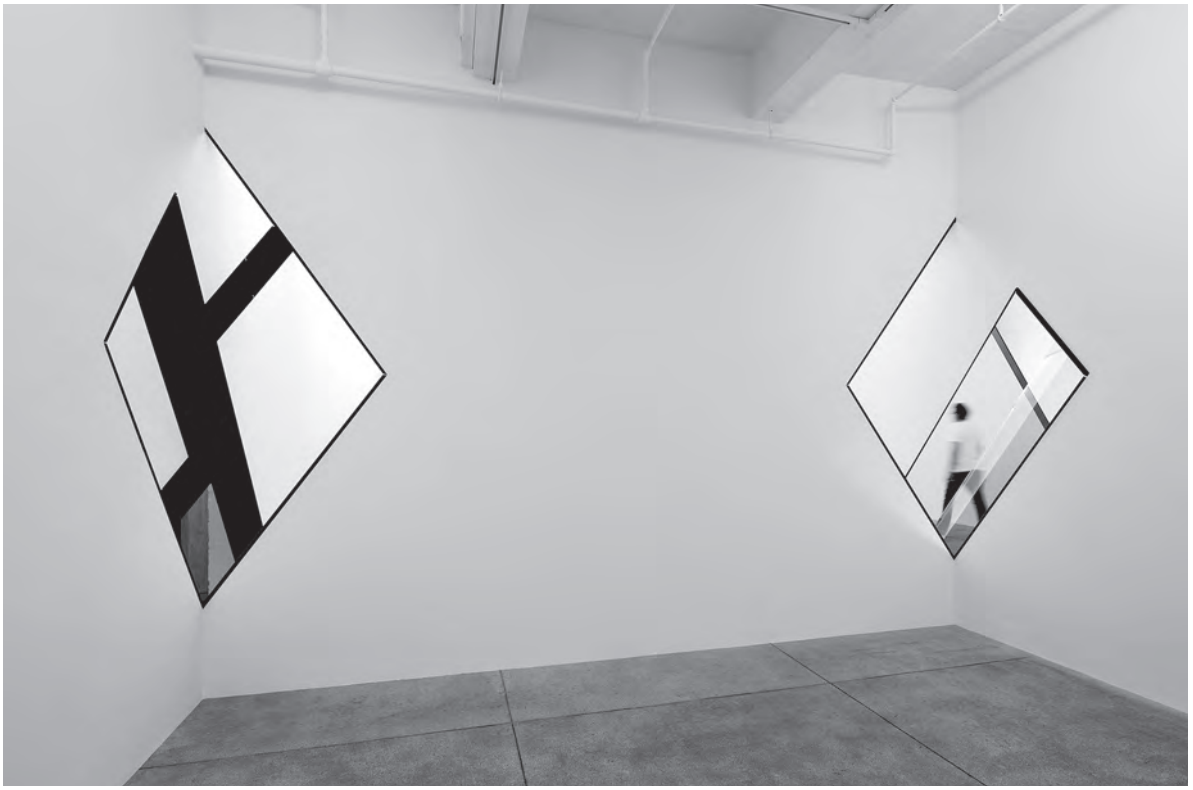
Importantly, such drawings also share some fundamental characteristics with the Klein diagram: architectural plans and sections are also atemporal maps of an organizational logic. These drawings represent the spatial organization of a building in a manner that is at odds with the sequential reality of inhabitation. Adjacencies, sight lines, and circulation are temporally collapsed into a simultaneous present, just as Krauss's diagram momentarily arrested and clarified the chaotic field of contemporary artistic practice.

Today, drawing's atemporality is magnified by the unified materiality of the digital interface. Analog architectural representation is dated by the methods of its own production and revision. Paper drawings and physical models bear a material trace of design changes; when a partition is moved in a paper drawing, for example, its motion can be traced through evidence of erasure or through the accumulation of drafts. In contrast, in a digital model, multiple iterations of a space's subdivision can coexist simultaneously. Virtual partitions occupy overlapping positions within the coordinates of the model. Changes in design are associated with neither spatial nor temporal erasure.

This doubled simultaneity of digital representation enlarges the scope of iterative design. Time-based variables such as daylight and procession can be studied as recursively generative, both determined by and determinant of the digital model. A multiplicity of moments is viewed simultaneously. Manifold futures can thus be projected *a priori* into the present tense of a digital architectural drawing.

In developing my recent work *D-33*, 2012, for example, parametric code iteratively modeled the visual array of a moving viewer through different possible architectural layouts. The resulting geometry was embedded within the preexisting architectural drawings, determining the final position of the interior walls and their relationship to the slope of intersecting aluminum apertures.

In a sense, these generative possibilities of the atemporal model were already operative in the "Expanded Field." Krauss's diagrammatic schema represented a multiplicity of positions simultaneously, within which architecture and landscape implied the specificity of site. And yet architecture is only partially composed of the specificity of the built environment. Architecture is also the unrooted, hovering field of



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Sarah Oppenheimer, *D-33*, 2012. Aluminum, glass, and existing architecture, dimensions variable. Installation view, PPOW Gallery, New York.

diagrammatic representation. Embedding this field within the productive processes of sculpture blurs the assumed site-specificity of architectural practice. Simultaneously, the richness of architectural representation pulls at the edges of sculpture, contaminating it with the qualities of those sites in which it operates.