

CONTENT

WITH ANNOTATIONS BY MICHAEL BLOWHARD

AUTHOR'S PREFACE	P. I
FOREWORD BY JAMES STEVENS CURL	P. 7
"SOME THOUGHTS ON CULPABILITY" BY JAMES KALB	P. II
INTRODUCTION BY MICHAEL BLOWHARD	P. 15

PART I THE CHESSBOARD MODEL OF ARCHITECTURAL STYLES P.23

One objection that inevitably arises to the Alexander-Salingaros approach is that it limits the artist's creativity. And aren't freedom and creativity always good, as well as signs of life? Shouldn't we always be looking to expand our sense of what's possible? Salingaros addresses these anxieties in a subtle but wide-ranging way. Why not conceive of architectural styles as a chessboard? A chessboard represents a very special kind of complexity: a variety of elements and rules that promote life. Beyond the chessboard is blankness, death — an infinity of combinations, via none of which life can come to fruition. In the name of creativity, Modernism and its descendents have steered us away from the chessboard and hurtled us out into cold wastelands where non-life is inevitably the result. Let's return then to what works. Constraints aren't deterministic; rules and patterns can enable creativity. Besides, the number of possible chess games — of life-giving moves and solutions — is infinite. Who should feel limited by this? And if we're to choose infinities, why shouldn't we opt for the one that confers life instead of death?

PART 2 THE DANGER OF DECONSTRUCTIVISM P. 37

What is the relationship between intellect and emotion in art and architecture? Here Salingaros establishes the primacy of emotional experience in architecture. In his discussion, he also demonstrates something fundamental: that the exploration of emotional experience does not itself have to become a histrionic scene, but can in fact be a rational, civilized exercise.

**PART 3 CHARLES JENCKS &
THE NEW PARADIGM IN ARCHITECTURE P. 45**

Charles Jencks is a perceptive phrase maker and style tracker. In this review of some recent Jencks writing and thinking, Salingaros takes note of Jencks' use of scientific concepts to justify his contention that Deconstructivist architecture is an exciting and significant development. A man of science himself, Salingaros gently hints that Jencks' understanding of these concepts is, to be kind, superficial. In fact, Deconstructivist architecture represents no deep engagement at all with these ideas. Here it is simply fashion, a "look" that has been glamorized by clouds of fancy rhetoric.

**PART 4 DECONSTRUCTING THE DECONS P. 61
(WITH MICHAEL MEHAFFY)**

In this short essay, Salingaros lets himself begin to ask the question: what might Deconstructivism really represent? He doesn't hesitate, however modestly, to introduce a positive alternative to it, one that truly is based in the new science.

**PART 5 DEATH, LIFE, AND LIBESKIND P. 67
(WITH BRIAN HANSON)**

Salingaros turns his attention to a single, prominent Decon project, Daniel Libeskind's proposal for the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site. How to interpret this proposal? For one thing, how does it feel? Once again, a return to our basic emotional experience. What Salingaros shows convincingly is that for all the rhetoric surrounding this style the emotional experience and creative process itself of Decon is a negative one. We aren't set free; instead, we're brought down. We're led down gloomy and deterministic hallways. A humane man of the world, Salingaros asks not just if this morgue-like feeling is appropriate but also, can it be said to represent any unfolding of the human spirit at all?

POSTSCRIPT: A FATE WORSE THAN DEATH? (WITH BRIAN HANSON) P. 79

POSTSCRIPT II: A LETTER FROM HILLEL SCHOCKEN P. 82

In this deceptively casual review of a book about Deconstructivism's treatment of space, Salingaros employs one of his most enjoyable strategies, which is to simply take them directly at their word, even to draw them out. We're left wondering: "What is this all about?" and "Who are those people talking to?" (Unstated but perfectly obvious answer: they're talking to each other, of course.)

PART 7 TWENTIETH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE AS A CULT P. 93

We have encountered Decon; we have opened our thinking to it. The time has come to tackle, as straightforwardly as possible, the question of what Deconstructivism as an architectural movement is, and what it represents. Some may find Salingaros' thesis shocking or facile; having had my own encounters with the Decon set I find it entirely convincing. A question stays with us after we've finished this essay: the leaders and stars of this movement — What are they getting out of it? And how is it serving them?

POSTSCRIPT: THE AUTHORITY OF THE GOSPELS

P. 100

PART 8 AGGRESSION IN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION:
 THE 'COUP' IN VISEU

P. 107

It's hard to believe but true: only a handful of architecture schools teach traditional architecture and urbanism — which means, in other words, that there are only a very few schools in the entire world that teach students how to create the built environments that most people find pleasing and rewarding. What a strange state of affairs, no? All the other schools are modernist enclaves, devoted to whatever's chic and hot: deconstruction, blobitecture... Once again, I find myself shaking my head over the bizarre and noxious schemes our elites are determined to put over on the rest of us. So it was heartbreaking to learn that one of the rare traditional architecture outposts was recently toppled.

Part of the strength and daring of the people in the alternative tradition I describe in my Introduction to this book lies in their willingness not just to raise some of the questions that art has dodged for over a hundred years now, but also to tackle these questions very directly. Perhaps the deepest of these questions is the relationship between art and religion. I can't begin to summarize Nikos' thinking here. But let me say that passages in this essay convey as much gravity and substance as any art criticism that I'm aware of. He writes at one point, "This indicates the transference of values from traditional symbols and rules (which could express religion) to an abstract ideal (which therefore competes with religion)" — that's saying an amazing lot.

PART 10 CONTEMPORARY CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND
SAINT AUGUSTINE'S 'THE CITY OF GOD'

Why do collaborations between the Church and up-to-date architects seem to express the global marketplace more than the sacred? Fearing irrelevancy, Church fathers choose to project an image of contemporaneity. Yet the new churches they commission are the antithesis of what satisfying religious buildings need to be. Worshipers too often don't feel exalted or deepened; instead they're left feeling bereft and alone. Faith in God is thwarted, and spiritual yearnings are displaced onto blank forms and modern materials — onto the activity of abstract (if striking) image making — instead. By setting modernist procedures head to head with the fundamentals of being human Salinger here brings the role of belief to the fore.

PART 11 THE DERRIDA VIRUS

It has to be admitted that Decon has a unique kind of power: the ability to consume and destroy perfectly good brains. It goes that even one better, because it also fills that brain with feverish excitement, a kind of exhilaration at the spectacle of its own self-destruction. Here, Salinger gives us an almost admiring appreciation of the distinctive power of Decon.

**PART 12 BACKGROUND MATERIAL FOR
"THE DERRIDA VIRUS" P. 155**
(INCLUDES SECTIONS CO-AUTHORED WITH TERRY M. MIKITEN)

Now that the elements of Salingaros' perceptions and arguments have been established, the view broadens. Stepping back, we take in the overall structure. Here we begin to see how the deconstruction of Deconstructivism can become an act of creation.

PART 13 THE NEW ARA PACIS MUSEUM P. 169

Salingaros zeroes in on a recent real-life example — perfect in its scale and ironies — to crystallize his arguments: the Ara Pacis Museum in Rome, designed by the American uber-modernist and geometricist Richard Meier to house the remains of a 13 BCE altar memorializing the stability of the Roman Empire. (The Museum, which opened in April 2006, is the first work of modernist architecture to be built in the Historic Center of Rome since the 1930s, and it has been and continues to be controversial). The contrast between life and death is complete. The angles, planes, voids, surfaces, and blinding light of Meier's work convey nothing more than the sterile chic of an expensive dentist's waiting room. Meanwhile, the exquisite small classical building it shelters and dwarfs is as vital as ever, and still radiates an intense life. Sadly, Meier's new Museum represents something all too emblematic of our time: an intrusion into the living soul of a great city by a jet-setting global elite peddling nothing more than their own conviction that they know best. When will the rest of us wake up to what is being done to us?

PART 14 THE NEW ACROPOLIS MUSEUM P. 177

What a test case: Decon in the person of Bernard Tschumi is invited to make his mark on the foundations of Western civilization — Athens, Greece. The generative past meets a destructive present.

POSTSCRIPT: ARCHITECTURAL CANNIBALISM IN ATHENS P. 182

PART 15 **ARCHITECTURAL THEORY &
THE WORK OF BERNARD TSCHUMI**

P. 193

What is meant by Theory anyway? While addressing this question in a sober, substantial way — one based in history and science — Salingaros displays his sly side as well. Numerous unasked (but perfectly apparent) questions float up as we read this essay; numerous unstated (but perfectly apparent) answers arise too. What are these people really up to? If they aren't trying to accomplish something worthwhile, what are they doing? Their version of architectural theory couldn't be; well, a cosmetic smokescreen for an anti-civilizational enterprise, could it? Are we to sacrifice our own well-being so their stars might burn brighter?

PART 16 **CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER &
THE NEW ARCHITECTURE**
(INCLUDES AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER)

P. 223

In arriving at the end, having made our way through thorny thickets, having dug them up by the roots, we arrive at the field's true starting gate. With this review of Christopher Alexander's magnum opus "The Nature of Order", and with a discussion with Alexander himself, we're given a substantial taste of the positive thing that architecture (as well as architectural theory) can be. Our wrestle with Decon leads us back to the thought that Decon is devoted to obscuring: that building and urbanism can be activities that contribute to human wellbeing.

1. REVIEW OF CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER'S 'THE NATURE OF ORDER'	P. 173
2. INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER	P. 175
ENDNOTE TO THE FIRST EDITION BY LUCIEN STEIL	P. 231
ENDNOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION BY MICHAEL MEHAFFY	P. 233
ENDNOTE TO THE THIRD EDITION BY JAMES KALB: "WHY DO WE HAVE HORRIBLE INHUMAN ARCHITECTURE?"	P. 237
REFERENCES	P. 243
INDEX	P. 249
EXTRACTS FROM REVIEWS	P. 253