via the relation between the two components of the sign: the signifier (such as a word) and the signified (the object denoted). In contrast, communication theory deals with the use and effects of signs, with their function and reception by people involved in the transmission of a *message.* Agrest and Gandelsonas note that confusion regarding this distinction has led to some questionable applications of semiotic theory by architects and critics.

The authors see semiotics as a way to deepen the understanding of the production of meaning in architecture. They suggest that semiotics be conceived as part of a larger project, and not simply as an unmediated importation of concepts from an outside discipline. Thus, semiotics might be useful as a weapon against ideology, or "adaptive [architectural] theory," which allows the perpetuation of the economic and political status quo. Agrest and Gandelsonas hope that *critical* theory, devoted to the production of knowledge on architecture and to the critique of ideology, will replace this adaptive norm. (The critique of ideology reappears in Manfredo Tafuri's essay in chapter seven.)

DIANA AGREST AND MARIO GANDELSONAS

SEMIOTICS AND ARCHITECTURE

IDEOLOGICAL CONSUMPTION OR THEORETICAL WORK

Theories of architecture and design have largely been oriented towards the perpetuation of the fundamental structure of Western society, while seeking at the same time to maintain design as a valid operation within this established order. The authors challenge this adaptive role of architectural theory through their analysis of the absorption of semiotics as a "theoretical blockade," and argue that theory can only be considered a production of knowledge when its ideological basis is totally transformed.

In the last twenty years the production of "theories" of architecture and design has dramatically accelerated in a way that emphasizes the particular role of architectural theory as it has been continuously developed over five centuries. The function of these "theories," now as always, has been to adapt architecture to the needs of Western social formations,[1] serving as the connection between the overall structure of a society and its architecture.[2] In this way architecture has been modified to respond to *changing* social demands; architecture thereby *becoming* assimilated to society through "theoretical" operations. The corresponding changes introduced by "theory" into architectural practice serve to perpetuate the basic structure of the society and at the same time maintain architecture itself as an institution within Western social formations.[3]

In a previous article[4] we established the process of production of knowledge as a theoretical project which is aimed neither at adapting architecture to the "needs" of the social formations nor to maintaining the architectural institution as we know it. At this juncture one is concerned with *theory* in a strict sense, as opposed to the adaptive "theory," which we call *ideology*.

Ideology can be seen as a certain set of representations and beliefs—religious, moral, political, aesthetic—which refer to nature, to society, and to the life and activities of men

in relation to nature and society. Ideology has the social function of maintaining the overall structure of society by inducing men to accept in their consciousness the place and role assigned to them by this structure. At the same time it works as an *obstacle* to real knowledge by preventing both the constitution of theory and its development.

Its function is not to produce knowledge but to actively set itself against such production. Ideology in a way alludes to reality, but it only offers an illusion of this reality.[5] The constitution of Western architectural "knowledge" in its entire range, from common sense notions to sophisticated "theories" and histories of architecture, is to be recognized as ideology rather than as theory. This ideology has explicitly claimed to serve functional needs of society, by ordering and controlling the built environment. Nonetheless, we hold that the underlying function of this ideology is in fact the pragmatic one of both serving and preserving the overall structure of society in Western social formations. It serves to perpetuate the capitalist mode of production, and architectural production is part of it. Thus, even if ideology affords knowledge of the world, it is a *certain knowledge*, which is limited and distorted by this overriding function.

We propose that there is a need for a theory, which should be clearly distinguished from the adaptive "theory" or, what we call here architectural ideology. In these terms architectural theory is the process of production of knowledge which is built upon a particular relationship with architectural ideology; that is, it grows out of this ideology and at the same time is in radical opposition to it. It is this dialectical relationship which comprehends and separates theory from ideology.

In opposition to ideology, we propose a *theory* of architecture, which is necessarily placed outside ideology. This theory describes and explains the relationships between men and the built environments of different cultures and modes of production.[6] The theoretical work uses as its raw material no real or concrete things but beliefs, notions and concepts regarding these things. These notions are transformed by means of certain conceptual tools, the consequent product being knowledge of things.[7] Architectural ideology, considered as part of a bourgeois society and culture, provides part of the raw material on which the conceptual tools must be brought to work.

The relationships between theory and ideology might be viewed as a continuous struggle where ideology defends a type of knowledge whose major effect is the preservation of existing social systems and their institutions, rather than the explanation of reality. There have been many examples in history of this relationship. Ptolemy's theory of the universe, which corroborated Biblical texts, was supported by the Church for centuries against any other models which could explain more accurately the same reality. In opposition, Copernicus's theory was the result of a conceptual mutation within such an ideology. He literally destroyed Ptolemy's notion of geocentrism, and he separated his theory from this ideology by "projecting the earth into the skies."[8] In return, the condemnation of Copernicus by the Church through its attempt to suppress a new concept of the world where man was no longer the center of the world, and where the Cosmos no longer ordered around him, shows another aspect of this struggle. The theoretical ideology, which originally opposed the Copernican conception, finally *absorbed* it to accommodate the theoretical structure. In this process of dialectical relationship between theory and ideology two different stages must be distinguished: the first is that of *productive transformation*, when the ideology is initially transformed to provide a

other. That is, one can *exchange* five dollars for bread, soap or a cinema ticket, but on[e] can also compare this five dollars with ten or fifty dollars, etc.; in the same way, a '*wor[d]* can be 'exchanged' for an idea (that is, for something dissimilar); *but it can also be com[-] pared with other words* (that is, something similar). In English the word mutton deriv[es] its value only from its co-existence with *sheep*; the meaning is truly fixed only at the en[d] of this double determination: signification and value."[23] Value, therefore, comes "fro[m] the reciprocal situation of the pieces of the language." It is even more important than sig[-] nification. "What quantity of idea or phonic matter a sign contains is of less importanc[e] than what there is around it..."[24]

Is it possible to construct a system in the domain of objects using this semiotic pro[-] cedure? We think it is. However, we think the definition of that system requires a serie[s] of methodological precautions.

First it is necessary to define the specific characteristics of the "architecture" with which we are going to deal. In other words, which "architecture" are we going to dea[l] with in terms of its situation? Is it Western architecture or Indian architecture? Or are w[e] going to define architecture by a time sequence, such as Renaissance or Modern? A com[-] parative analysis of the concept of value within Western architecture, with the concept of value within other systems of the same culture (the natural language, for example) might be helpful in determining some specific characteristics of architecture. What should be avoided in this analysis is the mechanical application of the model of language to architecture—an operation which has occurred in several semiotic studies. The mechanical application of this model, which was specifically developed for language, to other semiotic systems, such as architecture, only acknowledges the recognition of what is similar to language on the ideological level but does not define the *differences* in inner structure between language and the other semiotic systems. Even if it is possible to see the langue as a complex system of underlying rules, and therefore to compare it with the explicit and implicit systems of rules in architecture, architectural rules are determined by a certain sect belonging to a determined social class, while the langue is the property of everyone in general and no one in particular. These architectural systems of rules do not show any of the properties of those of the langue—they are not finite, they are not organized in a simple way, nor do they determine the manifestation of the system. Moreover, architectural rules are in a constant state of flux and change radically.

The mechanical application of the model langue/speech to Western architecture reinforces architectural ideology by denying the differences between architecture and language and by ignoring the place of natural language in architecture.[25] Moreover, and perhaps more important, it denies that "something" which defines a major difference between architecture and language—that is, the creative aspect of architecture. In lan- guage the individual can *use* but not *modify* the system of language (langue). In contrast to language, the architect can and does modify the system, which is fabricated on a sys- tem of conventions. The result of applying in a mechanical way the concept of langue to architecture is that the fabricated, conventional character of the system is hidden, appearing instead as if it were natural, as in language. The model langue/speech does not explain but overlooks creativity in architecture. Creativity in architecture is a complex play of conservation and variation of shapes and ideological notions within certain deter- mined limits.[26] In our opinion an analysis of creativity could more properly be based on

notion of value. It must begin by using as raw material the ideological systems of rule[s] which assign and maintain certain value relationships between shapes and mean[-] ings for their design, use or interpretation. The description of the structure of these rules is a first necessary step of semiotic analysis, where the concepts and the adequate tools capable of overcoming specific ideological obstacles must be produced. This preliminary work of description, which is our immediate concern, must be distinguished, however from the *explanation* of the underlying system of rules which produce the ideological notions, a task which is our ultimate objective.[27]

The discussion of ideological notions by means of semiotic conceptual tools com- prises another problem which also must be faced. Ideology works as an obstacle to the production of theory, not only by virtue of the fact that it perpetuates ideological notions such as function or inherent meaning, but also by virtue of the fact that it per- petuates traditional boundaries defining the various fields—ideological regions—such as interior, urban design, and architecture, where those notions function.[28] Ideological notions always imply an ideological region to which they belong, and conversely, an ideological region is built upon an apparently more or less systematized set of ideo- logical notions.

What we call theoretical blockade is related not only to the misuse of semiotic con- cepts but also to a more general problem—a confusion between an ideological region and an object of study. The application of semiotic concepts to architecture, as we have indicated, supposes a semiotic theory and method being applied to architecture. In our view it makes little sense to build a semiotics of architecture, which presupposes a theo- ry divided according to the existing divisions of painting, literature, cinema, urban design, architecture, etc. An ideological approach which identifies a semiotics of archi- tecture implies the acceptance of the existing division of the above practices and denies the fact that such divisions have an institutional and conventional character. Consequently, the theoretical system or object of study is confused with real, concrete, and singular objects. This difference between theoretical and real object can be seen in world sciences such as linguistics or historic materialism. For example, the theoretical object of structural linguistics is not speech but the concept of *langue*, which is devel- oped through the study of real objects—i.e different languages. The theoretical object of historic materialism is not a given social formation such as France or England but the concept of *history*, which is developed through the study of different modes of produc- tion in real social formations. In a similar way the theoretical object of a semiotics of the built environment must be the development of an abstract conceptual structure which explains the production of signification in the configuration of the built environment, which in turn will produce knowledge of concrete objects such as Western architecture. The production of this conceptual structure requires conceptual tools which in the pre- sent initial stage do not exist and which must be elaborated according to *demands* of the theoretical work. This elaboration will be made on the basis of semiotic abstract concepts and semiotic theoretical strategies employed as heuristic devices. In our conception of theory, its ultimate *raison d'être* is the knowledge of concrete objects, in this case of the built environment in a certain time and place. But this knowledge is only a result of a process of transformation of notions belonging to an architectural ideology. A theory of production of knowledge, as we have indicated, is only to be developed through a

constant struggle with ideology. The production of knowledge can only be done [by] assembling not only ideological notions but also through methodically [crossing] boundaries separating different practices within a culture and through looking [to] other cultures and situated at other points in time. Theoretical work cannot be [done] from inside architectural ideology, but from a theoretical "outside" separated [from] against that ideology. This must be the first step in the construction of a [material] dialectic theory of architecture as part of a more general theory of ideology.

1   Social formation (*formation sociale*) is a Marxist concept denoting "society." "Social formation is the concrete complex whole comprising economic practice, political pra[ctice] and ideological practice at a certain place and stage of development." Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York: First Vintage Books, 1970), 251.

2   There are other functions of architecture and design theories to which we do not refer [in] this article, i.e., the theory that has the function of establishing a certain ordering of [the] operations within architectural practice.

3   Transformations in society introduce reforms that allow the existing system to survive. However, these are never real changes—since the structural relationships are not being touched—but are merely transformations of that system. For example, the development [of] the capitalist mode of production through various different stages—mercantilism, indu[strial] capitalism, imperialism, etc.—has been based on a series of transformations achieved in different domains which did not in any way modify the fundamental class structure.

4   Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas, "arquitectura/Arquitectura," *Materia, Cuaderno [de] Trabajo* (Buenos Aires: 1972).

5   To be more precise we should say ideologies (plural) even if in this article we refer to a particular ideology, bourgeois ideology.

6   This is only a partial definition related to the specific subject of this article: the relation[ship] between theory and architectural ideology. This partial character stems from the fact that the important theoretical problem of the relation existing between architectural practice [and] the "unconscious" (Freud) has not been considered in this article.

7   We try to follow here the chapter "Methodology" in Karl Marx, *Introduction to Political Economics* recently elaborated upon by Althusser in *For Marx*. We consider these works a fundamental basis for any dialectic materialist approach to theory as opposed to any form of idealistic conception of theory. See Althusser's qualification of idealistic theory under [the] categories of "empiricism" and "formalism." We use the term theory, however, in such a w[ay] as to contrast it with what must now be considered only the Western conception of theory and to emphasize its present provisory character as only a stage in the development of a more general theory of ideologies.

8   Alexander Koyre, *La Révolution Astronomique* (Paris: Hermann, 1961), 16.

9   Diana Agrest, "Epistemological Remarks on Urban Planning Models," lecture, IAUS, New York, 1972.

10 Charles Jencks and George Baird, *Meaning in Architecture* (New York: Braziller, 1970).

11 Ibid., 82.

12 Ibid., 87.

13 Julia Kristeva, "Le Lieu Semiotique," in J. Kristeva, J. Rey-Devove, and J. K. Umiker, eds., *Essays in Semiotics* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971). See also Eliseo Veron, "Condiciones de produccion modelos generativos y manifestacion ideologica," in *El Proceso Ideologico* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Tiempo Contemporaneo, 1971).

14 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

15 Ibid., 16.

16 Paolo Valesio, "Toward a Study of the Nature of Signs," *Semiotica* III, 2 (1971): 160.

17 John Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 404.