FROM METAPHOR TO ALLEGORY
FREDRIC JAMESON
In a famous passage from The Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye affirms that all interpretation is allegorical, insofar as it substitutes for the text something else which purports to be the meaning of that text:

It is not often realized that all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery. The instant that any critic permits himself to make a genuine comment about a poem (e.g., “in Hamlet Shakespeare appears to be portraying the tragedy of irresolution”) he has begun to allegorize. Commentary that looks at literature as, in its formal phase, a potential allegory of events and ideas.

This presupposes the meaning or interpretation to be another text (alas), and in this way operates to severely limit the general validity of that meaning (and also to add to it the “bad infinite” of other endless interpretations on its basis, since each new text of meaning must now be interpreted in its turn). In any case, we probably all feel today that although Frye strikes a powerful blow here for allegory, in a period in which it was still much despised and maligned, his argument makes it so unlimited a matter that if he wins, he loses, and the word ceases to mean very much because it now means everything.

One would want indeed to start out from these limits and boundaries in order to find something both universal and particular that allegory might usefully be. Principal among these boundaries must necessarily be the nonallegorical: unless there are texts that cannot under any circumstances be considered to be nonallegorical (by which I do not necessarily mean “literal” in the traditional sense), no theory of allegory will amount to very much, nothing much will be achieved in the way of separating allegory off, both as a specific kind of textual structure and a specific kind of interpretive process. On the other hand, it does not seem very hopeful to ask for some general theory of the nonallegorical in order to construct a theory of allegory itself.

But then there are specific kinds of texts which are so closely related to allegories that one feels it might be useful to begin by saying why they are not then simply allegorical: for example, parables or fables. This kind of clarification would provide a much more productive gloss on Frye’s claim by foregrounding precisely those texts in which meaning or interpretation is very precisely another text, the moral of the first one. It would then offer the example of a specific textual structure of a binary type—narrative plus moral or commentary—which is so strong that it can continue to exist in the absence of one of its components: the parable is thus presumably a fable whose commentary or moral has been omitted, or can be omitted, while the maxim or proverb gives us the example of a moral or commentary that can go on existing in the absence of its narrative exemplum.

The fable is therefore essentially a binary structure: picture and caption, narrative and moral. I want to distinguish it from allegory by positing the latter as a ternary structure: there is still the narrative on the one hand, and its meaning, interpretation, or reading on the other. But now the movement from the first to the second is mediated by some third component, which I will call Peirce’s interpretant, or the allegorical code or system; this can be embedded in the text somehow, or can be found to float outside it in the form of cultural knowledge or ideas and ideologies in the public sphere. But it is always a kind of system in terms of which the text or the narrative demands to be translated. To this, I also want to add the allegorical instrument of coding, which is the ethical opposition between good and evil, between the valorized or idealized and the taboed—a fundamental mechanism in the very construction of subjectivity itself.

But now I also need to delimit allegory in two other directions, and to oppose it to two other phenomena: first of all, to the symbol, whose valorization in the Romantic period was historically very much at one with the degradation of allegory and its repudiation as a structure. We then also need to differentiate allegory from that other related trope with which it is so often associated, namely, the metaphor, with which traditionally and classically Quintilian identified it, defining allegory as an extended metaphor: “Allegory, which is translated in Latin by inversion, either presents one thing in words and another in meaning, or else something absolutely opposed to the meaning of the words. The first type is generally produced by a series of metaphors.”

His observation is useful, insofar as it makes us aware of what changes when you “extend” a metaphor into the allegorical: the metaphorical starting point becomes narrativized, and so we have some first feature, namely that allegories are somehow always matters of narrative. As for the difference with the symbol, here one would rather want to speak of unification and division, whether in the psyche, the world, or anything else. The symbol is a centered, unified phenomenon whose meaning is intrinsic and immanent. If the allegorical is attractive for the present day and age it is because it models a relationship of breaks, gaps, discontinuities, and inner distances and incommensurabilities of all kinds. It can therefore better serve as a figure for the incommensurabilities of the world today than the ideal of the symbol, which seems to designate some impossible unity. Thus, these first two opposites of the allegorical circumscribe the latter as narrative and as discontinuous.
At this point, I want to turn to some recent work on painting, where I think the problem of the metaphorical is rather dramatically set forth. T. J. Clark's recent (and monumental) *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* offers seven remarkable probes of modern painting, from David's *Death of Marat* (1793) to Jackson Pollock, touching in passing on Pissarro and Cézanne, on El Lissitzky and Picasso. It does not offer any monolithic definition, let alone explanations, of modernism, although it carefully limits its work to painting, as though the experiments in that medium offered a kind of sealed laboratory of the most specialized kind. Indeed, painting already confronts us with that kind of inexplicability: people tell stories in language, sing songs, build dwellings to live in; why they should learn to stare at various pieces of painted canvas is perhaps less obvious or less natural. Is it an activity that is fully satisfying in itself? Many people say so; but perhaps the Pierre Bourdieu-style inversion of the question is the better place to begin—namely, how they justify to themselves this satisfying activity, how they make it have a meaning. Theodor Adorno once said that in order for the experience of an art object to be fully aesthetic, it has to be more than aesthetic; it has also to be trans- or extra-aesthetic; in order to be art, then, art must be something more than art. Something like this seems also to be Clark's position. "In order to represent at all, as I see it, marks in pictures have to be understood as standing for something besides themselves; they have to be construed metaphorically... Metaphor is inescapable in the case of markmaking, and what at any rate would an escape from it be like?" (Clark 1988, 31, 23).

What, then, would the nonmetaphorical in art be like? Housepainting, perhaps? The colors of a house or wall generally respond to some conventional color scheme that is culturally meaningful even if it does not exactly mean something. Would it be like random marks on a surface? But we are talking about a "picture," that is, art, and we will therefore not be able to avoid trying to make the marks mean something, even if that something is "sheer randomness," the aleatory, or chaos, or meaninglessness itself. Perhaps we need to inflect the question somewhat: maybe the escape from metaphor can take place, not in the painting but in the viewer. In that case, we have to imagine the ascetic reductions of empiricism if not of positivism as such: the reduction not even to pure perception but to the atomic constituents of pure perception itself, namely, sense-data. Can we have an experience of the marks which are that of an as yet nonconceptual, nonmeaningful sense-datum? The idea of sense-data is a positivist myth (passionately adopted, to be sure, by a certain number of late-19th-century painters). There can be no "pure" or meaninglessness experience of sense-data. Does this not condemn us forever to be metaphoric, in Clark's sense? Of course one understands that he has rigged the whole discussion in advance by calling brushstrokes "marks" (Zeichen), which is to say one version of the more general notion of the sign. But the sign always means something else by definition: and so must marks. So why call that operation metaphorical?

Clark's comments on the *mark* and metaphor come from the Pollock chapter, in which he goes on to identify the "two broad metaphorical poles" of Pollock's work in the period from 1948 to 1950: they are "figures of totality" on the one hand, and "figures of dissonance" on the other. Clark has, in other words, ranged a certain number of visual experiences on both sides under larger formal categories which in fact correspond to conceptual abstractions or universals: totality then corresponds to the one, while what he ("a bit warily") calls dissonance no doubt corresponds generally to what is today called heterogeneity or the absolutely specific. Perhaps this philosophical identification of the more properly visual poles is already itself metaphorical; and perhaps we also need to ask, what becomes of that more formal philosophical category that is the tension or contradiction between the two poles? To see a picture as staging this particular philosophical content is surely already to translate it into something else, something else which can then itself receive further metaphorical content. My quarrel, however, is not with that discussion or with the new levels of meaning found in Pollock's work, but rather with the terms metaphor and metaphorical, which one finds used equally significantly throughout Clark's other writings.

Let me offer another, perhaps fundamental, example for modern painting: it is the discussion of flatness in Clark's earlier book on impressionism, *The Painting of Modern Life* (1985). The rising to the surface of painting is, of course, one of the basic features of the latter's modernism, and this is how Clark sets about dealing with it:

*I think that the question we should be asking... is why that literal presence of surface went on being interesting for art. How could a matter of effect or procedure seemingly stand in for value in this way? What was it that made it vivid?... The answer must take approximately this form. If the fact of flatness was compelling for art... that must have been because it was made to stand for something; some particular and substantial set of qualities which took their place in a picture of the world. So that the richness of the avant-garde... might best be described in terms of its ability to give flatness such complex and compatible values — values which necessarily derived from elsewhere than art.*

Clark then specifies some of these values, along with their
elsewhere, in four different ways. In other words, flatness can mean at least one of the following: the popular, "le peuple," as in workmanlike surfaces and manual labor. Or it can mean modernity and the media — posters, prints, photographs, and the like. Or it can mean art itself as an autonomous quasi-sacred activity. Or, it can mean, as for Cézanne, "the evenness of seeing itself, the actual form of our knowledge of things." Presumably it could also mean several of these things at once, or several in tension with one another. Following Kenneth Burke, painterly flatness is therefore understood here as a "symbolic act": it is a meaningful procedure whose ordinary meaning is then augmented by several others, which find symbolic expression through it and in addition to it. However, are these additional meanings metaphors?

What I want to argue here has to do with the relative merits of the terms metaphor and allegory. As I have said, classically allegory was often described as little more than an extended metaphor. Meanwhile, in the more modern literary tradition, allegory has typically been opposed to the symbol in an opposition openly articulated in the Romantic period; and the concept of the symbol has remained the dominant one throughout what we call modernism. At the waning of high modernism, the repressed and stigmatized notion of allegory began to reappear in all kinds of unrelated places, most obviously in the reappearance of Walter Benjamin’s works in Germany in the 1950s, and in the United States with a famous early essay of Paul de Man. This is the context which perhaps allows us to reinterpret the pages we have quoted from Clark in order to see where they stand with respect to the symbol. Are we to understand, for example, that the immense and nonrepresentational wall of paint above David's corpse of Marat is a symbol of le peuple? Surely not; and we could think of any number of personified characters and emblems which, in contrast, do offer just such symbols. Clark's point was that "the people" is no doubt real enough, since the revolution somehow took place; but that this word is incoherent sociologically and politically and is also profoundly ideological — which is to say that "the people" as a concept can have no stable meaning, and that therefore you can have no symbol of it, a symbol being constituted by a fullness of meaning David's wall background rather expresses a crisis of meaning and thereby a crisis of representation, and it is through this crisis that the wall becomes a metaphor. A crisis of this kind cannot be symbolized but it can be designated.

This is where the notion of allegory comes in, for in my view, allegory always arises from a crisis in representation (a historical and specific crisis, it should be understood, and not some timeless and eternal one). Allegory is a structure that designates difficulties, if not outright impossibilities, in meaning and representation, and also designates its own peculiar structure as a failure to mean and to represent in the conventional way. You will now more readily understand why I would have preferred to call David's wall an allegory rather than a metaphor (to do Clark justice, he does say that the wall is "metaphorical" of the crisis in representing the people, which is an altogether more prudent and satisfactory way of putting it). I believe that in his discussion of flatness and the predominance of the surface in modernist painting, the meanings he attributes to that crucial feature are also in one way or another allegorical of their objects, for those objects are all more or less unrepresentable ideas: work, modernity, art, perception.

I want now to complicate matters a little by adding a new problem and a new concern not yet registered in the notions of meaning or representation, and this is narrative. What Quintilian calls an "extension" of metaphor is in fact a narrativeization of it, and I would argue that the whole nature and implications of the figure are utterly transformed in the process. The same holds for the symbol, which like metaphor is an essentially nonnarrative matter (and by the same token, although one might imagine a construction of a symbol by way of narrative — as in Emile Zola, for example, or in Albert Camus's The Plague — surely any undue "extension" of it, causing one to search for point-by-point parallels and allusions, is bound to also transform the former symbol into a structure more likely to be described as allegorical by its readers).

Now apparently we have two distinct characterizations of allegory (as opposed to symbol or metaphor): it is the expression and the result of a crisis in representation on the one hand, and of narrative on the other. (By the same token, in presupposing a stable meaning that can be conveyed, a symbol is essentially nonnarrative.) What then is the relationship between these two constitutive features, each of which could presumably exist without the other? We are, I assume, willing to admit the existence of nonallegorical narratives; while problems or difficulties in representation and meaning can no doubt be conveyed in ways that are not allegorical, for example, as in philosophical discourse.

I want to suggest that in fact these two features of allegory are one and the same. Allegory is a narrative process precisely because it needs to tell the narrative of the solution to its representational dilemma. Or, if you prefer, in allegory the crisis of representation and of meaning is conceived precisely as a dramatic situation that the allegorist is called upon to resolve in some way. The narrative here is thus very often a dialectical one: the crisis embodies a contradiction, which is articulated as a binary opposition, and the allegorical narrative will consist in the attempt to overcome this opposition...
in one way or another, which obviously does not always have to involve a synthesis between the two allegedly irreconcilable terms. (I do, however, want to strengthen this constitutive or structural relationship between allegory and opposition by quoting, In passing, from Jean de Meun: "Thus things go by contrary: one is the gloss of the other. If one wants to define one of the pair, he must remember the other; or he will never, by any intention, assign a definition to it; for he who has no understanding of the two will never understand the difference between them, and without this difference no definition that one can make can come to anything."6 De Lorris Guillaume and Jean de Meun, The Romance of the Rose, trans. Charles Dalmberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 157.

Rather than continue in this abstract vein, I think we need to see the process in action concretely. And while I think one could very well rewrite Clark's interpretations in terms of allegorical narratives, I would like now to turn to architectural materials, and in particular to the great history of modern architecture, Architectura contemporanea, written in 1976 by Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, where the term allegory is used openly and explicitly (or may I even say, shamelessly). This is all the more arresting, since the term metaphor has also scarcely been absent from architectural theory. Although Charles Jencks's pathbreaking introduction of "semiotics" (rhetoric, really) into architectural discourse with The Language of Post-modern Architecture in 1977 obviously made for an enlarged use of the term metaphor, the practice of metaphor largely antedates his examples. For instance: "concrete grills, now the sign of the parking garage," are no doubt derived from the metaphor of grills on the hood of the car; or Kisho Kurokawa's Nagakin Capsule Tower, in which the "stacking" of the rooms or hotel compartments evokes a variety of speaker systems, tape decks, and the like (which the rooms in fact contain). These are, then, already metonyms which have been metaphorized.7 Charles Jencks, The Language of Post-modern Architecture (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 40-41.

Before that, Le Corbusier's dramatic inflection of his building shapes in the direction of those modern machines he admired, such as the ocean liner and the airplane, are clearly enough metaphors (a word perhaps too weak to designate Ledoux's notorious Enlightenment brothel project). But here too there are complications, for Le Corbusier's metaphors also operate on a second level of connotation as allegories of modernity itself, and of the intention of the building to be "absolutely moderne." The building is then the metaphor of an ocean liner, which is itself an allegory of modernity in general.

There does seem to be some point in retaining the term metaphor for certain local, one-to-one, meanings. Thus, in Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, a number of irregular and often broken slits and openings are revealed, seemingly at random, in the walls, from floor level up to heights through which no viewer could be expected to see. We are told that the invisible relationships between these slits (as those that traverse the void inside the building, criss-crossing space like the grid of an infrared alarm system) model a map of Berlin on which lines have been drawn to connect the historic dwellings of the most important Jewish writers, composers, artists, and poets of the city. Like the twelve-tone system itself (Arnold Schoenberg, with his stay in Berlin, was also an interest for the architect), it cannot be supposed that the casual viewer perceives the detail and content of this scheme, although he may intuit it allegorically as a sheer network of relationships. But it certainly overflows the architectural form and function itself, as a figure overflows the literal meaning of its support term.

Clearly enough, as the previous paragraph suggests, a mode of speech in which a metaphor is characterized as being "allegorical" of something will not be terribly helpful in the clarification process we are undertaking here. Thus, for example, "Glass, extolled by Scheerbart and Taut, is in itself highly symbolic: transparent, it is the allegory of a new collective purity; produced by the rarefaction of its material, it symbolizes the passage from the real to the unreal, from weight to weightlessness; in that sense, it is also allegorical of cosmic liberation."8 Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, Modern Architecture, trans. Robert Erlich Wolf (New York: Abrams, 1979), 129. This passage, from the Tafuri and Dal Co history, and taken as exemplary of the rigorous application of the term allegory, does seem to offer an excessive, aberrant use. The fact that an element or material (think of Gaston Bachelard's "psychoanalysis" of the various elements) is in question, rather than the specific placement of that material within a construction, may suffice to explain the lapse, and in this case the term metaphorical certainly seems preferable.

Tafuri and Dal Co's Modern Architecture in fact presents a twofold interest: it is an allegorical structure, but it also has the generic interest of offering a successful history of one of the arts that is not a mere handbook or manual, a list of dates or a reference work, but a narrative in its own right. In this sense, there are very few works which invent distinctive solutions to the form problems inherent in writing a history of literature or of painting or of architecture. The writing of such histories, indeed, intensifies the dialectic between continuity and discontinuity present in all historiography to the point where it is well-nigh insuperable. For the works themselves (literary, musical, pictorial, architectural) are radically individualized — they have their closure; they are neither events that take their place in a meaningful series nor are they organic or natural phenomena that fold into
each other and evolve. How, then, do we tell a story about such discontinuous artifacts? The recourse to styles and movements on the one hand (Impressionism, expressionism, realism, surrealism), and to genres on the other (the introspective novel, the epic, the confessional lyric), are both spurious solutions insofar as they presume a solution in advance of the fundamental philosophical problem of style or genre — namely, the relationship of the individual text to the universal classifying system it is supposed to participate in. Thus the Tafuri and Dal Co volume has a supplementary interest insofar as it offers a unique solution to this dilemma: a solution, however, that I suspect unfortunately cannot be exemplary, since in this area of a history of artistic works, the only real successes are ad hoc constructions that are not repeatable. Still, they all articulate and dramatize the problem, which is the essential thing.

The narrative has two beginnings: a false start and a seemingly extraneous digression. The false start is given with art nouveau, judged to be a regressive style and ideology which is class-bound and solves none of the architectural dilemmas of modernity. I take this opening salvo to be part and parcel of the authors’ generalized attack on style as such. (We may recall Le Corbusier’s similar position: “The styles are a lie”; “architecture has nothing to do with the various ‘styles”’; etc.) Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, trans. Frederick Richells (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 87, 37. What is meant by this, I think, is the purely aesthetic solution: that the concept of style is seen as a reduction of the complex problems an individual building tries to resolve to a matter of purely artistic or aesthetic invention — one which could be undertaken, in other words, by the various avant-gardes. The attack on the avant-garde is then another basic leitmotiv of the “narrative” and suggests that the category of style need not be limited to criterias of beauty, as in the historical case of art nouveau.

After this opening gambit, however, we suddenly pass to a discussion of the emergence of city planning in the United States in the late-19th century, and in particular to the work of the great landscape artists such as Frederick Law Olmsted. This would not seem to be an auspicious beginning for a study of an essentially European modernist architecture, and we need to grasp the logic of the new departure. The point is that it is around issues of parks and open spaces that the struggle for political power in the North American cities crystallizes:

Within a few decades the battle for parks became synonymous with an overall process of urban reform that had a great deal to do with the problem of political and institutional reforms in an era dominated by political bosses and by the most unbridled competitive free market. Similarly, the battle for the defense of nature ended up in a project aiming to ensure to the state and collectivity the control over the exploitation of natural resources on the territorial level. By the end of the century a reform of the institutional apparatus of the American system became the key to all progress. 13 Tafuri and Dal Co, op. cit., 37.

The Progressive movement emerges from this struggle and produces the reality of city planning, dramatizing its necessary relationship to political power as well as the limitations imposed on it by social class. Nothing of the sort can happen with the already ancient and fully formed European city, which can at best — and this is no mean achievement — produce the utopian visions of the garden city and the like. Thus this American chapter allows Tafuri and Dal Co to lay in place the city as one pole of the examination of architectural history, whose other pole is clearly that of the individual buildings themselves. Theirs must therefore be what they call “a binocular vision of history: seeing the great change in the approach to planning and also the response of architecture as such. Particular attention must be devoted to where those separate spheres have interlocked (if they have) and where they have gone their separate ways.” 14 Ibid., 39.

Perhaps this is to put the matter somewhat too statically: for we do not simply confront here two parallel themes and traditions, which sometimes intersect and sometimes do not. On the contrary, the two poles of the city and the building form an inescapable binary opposition that is a contradiction in its own right. The history of architecture is then the story of successive attempts to resolve this fundamental contradiction; its telos will be not exactly the place of the solution but the search for the right way to grasp its inevitable failure. This at once gives the book its narrative form: once the reader knows what to look for, this immense compendium reads like an exciting novel (and in the process, as I suggested above, also offers a remarkable, distinctive, and no doubt unrepeatable solution to the permanent problem of artistic historiography).

From the outset, we must be careful to see the flexibility of the scheme, for any proper contradiction can be articulated in a variety of ways. This means that the content of each pole is variable, and the new stage sets the fundamental contradiction (of capitalist modernity) in a variety of ways, each of which permits the individuality of a distinct new attempt at solution or synthesis. We have defined the contradiction at its outset as the opposition between the city and the building; but we have also already said enough to indicate that the city can mean planning, so that its more purely architectural opposite would then be the anarchy of the individual commission, or even the fluctuations in the value of land or site. At the same time, the city sets in place the question of political power, in which case its opposite is surely the pure
becomes more thorough going active response to the contradiction itself. and always fail, but now we will be able to see the reasons. We begin to see this in the next chapters, where the Werkbund begins to address problems of the city and its realities, as do, in different ways, Tony Garnier and his successors in France. Meanwhile, Loos and theorists like Karl Krauss and the young Ludwig Wittgenstein begin to give a name to this crisis, while the new avant-gardes greet their dilemma with an immense yet doomed explosion of creativity. Not surprisingly, this section returns us to painting, which becomes something like the abstract thought of which architecture should be the act and realization, always assuming that such an act is possible in the first place (remember that Le Corbusier always spent an hour or so painting in the early morning, before turning to his architectural work). Along with painting, the avant-garde raises once again the question of the Intellectual:

Between intellectuals and metropoli yawned a gulf that could be bridged only by accepting dissent. The intellectual, in substance, discovered that his own singularity no longer had its aestheticism of architecture as style, or paper architecture. In the light of other canonical descriptions — for Tafuri and Dal Co, as for many of us, the central text is still Georg Simmel’s Die Großstadt und das Geisterleben — the city is also chaos and anxiety, in which case its aesthetic opposite is one or another form of order, or at least of allaying or coming to terms with that anxiety. Yet if the new industrial city is a more standardized form of chaos or alienation, its opposite number might just as plausibly be the regional or the national, as in Holland, Scandinavia, and Catalonia. But if the city is degeneracy and a flood of degraded messages and images, including now dead architectural styles — remember that for Adolf Loos, the riot of ornament and ornamentation in Vienna made it a “tattooed city” — then its opposite could be the purism and the purity of a Loos or even of Le Corbusier. But perhaps the city is also sheerly industry and engineering, and in that case — as for the very history of the emergent Bauhaus itself — its opposite can be not only mysticism but also other forms of a mystique of the art. For Tafuri and Dal Co the contradiction is concretized in social life and even more specifically in the role of intellectuals: so we have engineers versus artists, and eventually, as the artistic pole gathers momentum and begins to fight back, we have the emergence of avant-gardes, as opposed to politicians and planners, or to engineers. This is properly the place of architectural and urban utopias, and it is fair to say that not the least of the originalities of Tafuri and Dal Co is to have taken familiar and stereotypical Marxisit positions — Marx’s and Engels’ dismissal of utopias, the later Stalinist dismissal of the avant-garde or the experimental in art — and to have transformed both into vital and contemporarily meaningful stances, implacably negative judgments which are not demoralizing or paralyzing but rather energizing and productive of future praxis.

The variety of solutions to the multiple articulations of this contradiction (totality versus the individual work) also allows them inventively to transform the fundamental and even dogmatic value of high modernist theory — the valorization of innovation or the new, the Novum in Ernst Bloch’s sense. Here the Novum is not the more conventional stylistic innovation, although I dare say that stylistic invention is always its by-product and its aftereffect. Rather, it is simply a creative response to the contradiction itself, a more thoroughgoing attempt to resolve it, even as the contradiction becomes more thoroughgoing throughout historical time, and deepens and reveals itself more and more as a desperate crisis. So as architectural innovation grows ever more desperate, its attempts become grander and more impressive, its failures become more conclusive. These attempts must always fail, but now we will be able to see the reasons.

After significant sections on Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan — the skyscraper as an isolated event within the city, and which cannot be integrated into it (unless, as at present, the city simply becomes a forest of skyscrapers and the originality of the form is lost); Wright’s construction of his own alternative utopian terms in the building, in nature and the transfigured and democratic American countryside — the authors turn to regionalist architecture and significantly conclude their discussion as follows:

After (Gaudi), the utopia that looked to a return to origins, national or otherwise, was burned out, reduced to ashes. In any event, a romantic fable has chiefly one task: to organize the dream, to define it as a metaphorical model of archetypal verity. The Neo-Romanesque of Berlage, Saarinen, or Moser, like the obsessive eclecticism of Catalan Modernism, aspired to organize what can be called a collective dream, to give substance to a symbolic code capable of welding the solidarity — urban or national — of communities fragmented by inner conflicts. Here the private and crepuscular dream of Art Nouveau ceded its place to the image of an arduous process of constructing a new world. But image it was and image it remained, nostalgically suspended between past and present: the real innovatory processes were scarcely touching European architectural thinking.

I do not want to exaggerate the importance of the word metaphorical in this summation, nevertheless, I think it is significant. To call these wonderful buildings in their ensemble “a metaphorical model of archetypal verity” is not only to deny them the narrative dynamism of the allegorical: it is also to suggest that the attempt is focused uniquely on the single pole of the building and its plan and shape, and not on the tension between that pole and the city. To address that tension would be to transform this metaphorical model into an allegorical act. We begin to see this in the next chapters, where the Werkbund begins to address problems of the city and its realities, as do, in different ways, Tony Garnier and his successors in France. Meanwhile, Loos and theorists like Karl Krauss and the young Ludwig Wittgenstein begin to give a name to this crisis, while the new avant-gardes greet their dilemma with an immense yet doomed explosion of creativity. Not surprisingly, this section returns us to painting, which becomes something like the abstract thought of which architecture should be the act and realization, always assuming that such an act is possible in the first place (remember that Le Corbusier always spent an hour or so painting in the early morning, before turning to his architectural work). Along with painting, the avant-garde raises once again the question of the Intellectual:

Between intellectuals and metropoli yawned a gulf that could be bridged only by accepting dissent. The intellectual, in substance, discovered that his own singularity no longer had its...
place in the massified metropolis dominated by a technical capacity for infinite duplication... the metropolis became the very sickness to which the intellectual felt himself condemned.

...Faced with the "disease" represented by the metropolis, the intellectuals have attempted to define a new role for themselves by appealing to original purity, to the infancy of humanity, the mythical season in which man and nature were not yet enemies, to, in short, the mythical moment in which the communion of man with cosmos was permitted by the precapitalist relationships of production... Yet every project of conciliation was constrained to reveal itself as merely utopian. Anxiety as the condition of metropolitan existence was to become the guiding idea for the Expressionist poets and painters. 14 Ibid., 98-99.

It is not merely shadows of the artistic avant-garde that hover across these passages but also those of the intellectual and philosophical avant-garde: Friedrich Nietzsche and Charles Baudelaire, Benjamin and the Viennese. Perhaps we need to reinforce these anti-avant-garde positions by recalling Tafuri's similar pessimism about the great negative, critical, or deconstructive intellectual forces of modernity. They level everything, he argues, thinking of Sigmund Freud, Nietzsche, and other critics of modernity, in order to liquidate the vestiges of the past: "All the work of demolition served to prepare a clean-swept platform from which to depart in discovery of the new 'historic tasks' of intellectual work." 15 Manfredo Tafuri, Architecture and Utopia, trans. Barbara L. Lapienna (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1979), 70. The result is a situation in which a completely fungible reality is made available for late capitalism to use and manipulate for its own ends.

We are not quite as far as that, however, in our reading of the history, where we have indeed arrived at the moment of the masters - the moment of Le Corbusier, whose greatness is to have omitted the anxiety of the avant-garde: "In the face of the machine, Le Corbusier experienced the same intoxication as the avant-garde, but without the bewilderment and disorientation." 16 Tafuri and Dal Co., op. cit., 136. (In fact, according to this account, all of the modern "masters" are as hostile to the avant-gardes as their interpreter Tafuri, or indeed, to Tafuri's philosophical master, Adorno.)

Le Corbusier does not, of course, resolve our basic contradiction either, but he invents a new way of dealing with it: [In the idea of the Ville Radieuse] the dialectic between norm and exception explicit in the grands travaux remained unresolved. Unlike the projects of the 1920s, those for community buildings in the next decade used allegory in a new way. Where the earlier ones alluded to the completeness of a compositional system based on syntheses imposing a different category of order on the fragmented objects, the latter one made clear just how ineffectual that aim was if confined to the scale of the single architectural object. If the former are composition, the latter are montage, and the Palace of the Soviets is eloquent evidence for this point. But the technique of montage was deduced directly from the city read as a conservation of fragments... 16 Ibid., 143.

The earlier work, the individual buildings, attempted a resolution of the crisis; the new and immense structures look to allegorically keep faith with that crisis by incorporating its logic of multiplicity. (We will see in a moment why these efforts too must be failures - already the Soviet allusion suggests that without state power the projects remain purely utopian.) Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus offered another direction, while giving rise to a tension between expressionism and engineering on the one hand, and between modular or prefabricated architecture and individual artistic creativity on the other.

It is worth anticipating the evolution of these stories, whose denouements certainly provide a kind of judgment on the achievements themselves. The professionalism of Gropius after his departure from Germany is well-known, and constitutes an abandonment of the architectural struggle itself (at least as it is conceived by Tafuri and Dal Co.). The case of Le Corbusier, though, is more interesting. In this later period, Le Corbusier's work becomes Corbusian - the famous "International Style" - which is to say that his creative practices harden over into a kind of ideology (just as, alternatively, the experiments of the various avant-gardes also congeal into a kind of international avant-garde ideology in their own right). 17 Ibid., 100. This is the work of the codification of Le Corbusier's lesson to CIAM, and indeed, in a kind of conceptual climax, CIAM will be characterized as ideological: given the relatively early use of the word modern in its title ("Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne," founded in 1928), it can be credited as one of the most influential sources for the ideology of "modernism" in general. "To it probably belongs the credit for having founded a large measure of the predominant ideology of modern architecture, endowing architects with a model of action as flexible as it was already out of date." 18 Ibid., 147. (Nor should the relationship with such ideology-producing texts as Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's International Style be overlooked.)

It is the reason for this characterization that interests us for the moment:

The approach of the CIAM reflects all the limits of radical architectural thought: the absolute continuity postulated between production in series and construction of the city expressed a utopian conviction. In flatly mechanistic fashion it applied to the entire urban scale the system of design and production applicable to the small scale of the private dwelling... The CIAM discussions made it seem almost as if the nature of the
city was thought to be identical with that of the architecture it contained, so that once control over the modes of formation and production of the buildings that made up the city was assured, one would also have the key to planning its entire development.\(^{19}\) ibid., 246.

This is to say that in order for a "solution" to qualify from the outset on either the level of urban planning or on that of the individual building, the incompatibility of the two levels must be registered from the outset, and acknowledged and even lived with the appropriate degree of anxiety (still a basic experience for Tafuri and Dal Co and a kind of test of authenticity).

We must now set in place one of the two narrative climaxes of this long story in the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Following the logic implicit in the discussion of Le Corbusier, we can suggest that the extraordinary valorization of Mies in this book is a tribute to the way in which, according to its authors, he more than any other modern architect kept faith with the contradiction itself. His resolution of it was to embrace it, to manifest and articulate it at its most irresolvable, to practice "composition as the expression of insoluble dichotomies."\(^{20}\) ibid., 183. It is the apotheosis of failure, and the very essence of that icy nihilism of glass that we earlier heard celebrated in different ways. "Where the Neue Sachlichkeit ended by codifying the style of the new 'tattooed city,' Mies built silence."\(^{21}\) ibid., 183. The glass surfaces of his buildings are analogous to Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau in that they accumulate the reflections of all the junk and detritus of the city, but "in the neutral mirror that breaks the city's web. In this, architecture arrives at the ultimate limits of its own possibilities. Like the last notes sounded by the Doctor Faustus of Thomas Mann, alienation, having become absolute, testifies uniquely to its own presence, separating itself from the world to declare the world's incurable malady."\(^{21}\) ibid., 341.

Despite the allusions to Stéphane Mallarmé, the evocation of this particular negative aesthetic utopia resembles nothing quite so much as Roland Barthes's "écriture blanche," white, or bleached, writing.

But this is only one of the book's climaxes: in fact, it has two, just as the fundamental contradiction it explores has two poles. If Mies dramatizes the kind of negative solution available in the pole of the individual building, we have yet to see what is possible at its other pole, that of the city itself. Here, it would seem, a different combination of success and failure is available. In the first place, from the Werkbund on, the utopian speculations about essentially middle-class garden cities and satellite cities gets inflected in the direction of industrial building on the one hand, and housing for factory workers on the other. It is not until the postwar period that the ideal of the Siedlung - a worker's housing block within the city itself - becomes an active preoccupation of architects and planners in both Austria and Weimer Germany. The result - what can be called enclave architecture - is, in the second place, made possible only because leftist, mostly social democratic parties are in power in the cities and provinces in question and support the new projects.

Although Frankfurt is a crucial site for such experiments (under the leadership of Ernst May), the authors reserve their most enthusiastic encomia for developments in Vienna, where "the new projects rose like pugnacious islands proclaiming themselves proletarian monuments of very different dimensions and form from the architecture of 19th-century Vienna surrounding them."\(^{22}\) ibid., 92. They continue:

The Red strongholds had their peak in the Karl-Marx-Hof, designed in 1927 by Karl Ehn, author of other significant working-class projects such as the Bebelhof. Stretching more than five-eighths of a mile and covering just under 190,000 square yards, for 1,382 habitations plus nurseries, collective laundries, a library, offices, shops, an out-patients' clinic, and green areas, the Karl-Marx-Hof is the most "epical" of the Viennese superblocks. The huge arches opening in its massive buildings, the articulation of its masses, and the emphasis on simple volumes, make it, as it were, an individual, a symbolic unity pridefully counterposed to the urban context. One cannot help thinking that the essence of the great bourgeois novel is the drama that counterposes the positive hero to society. What Ehn created can be thought of as the greatest novel-in-architecture of European urban culture between the two wars. . . . In the work of Ehn lives the ultimate "utopia of the semantic," lost in the tragic affirmation of the socialist humanity that opposes the annulment of Kultur and its traditions. Here we truly have Socialist Realism, here the myth of the totality of the new man promulgated by Lukács is completely accepted. The myths of the bourgeoisie shaped the most complete "Magic Mountain" of Austrian Marxism.\(^{14}\) ibid., 91-92.

Great realism, socialist realism, versus Mallarmé: the semantic fullness of content as opposed to the nihilistic void of all meaning. The twin climaxes of Modern Architecture thus stand in complementarity to each other as positive to negative, the concrete realization of the urban as opposed to the radical empty cipher at its center. Mies fulfills the destiny of the individual building, the Karl-Marx-Hof signifies that of the modern industrial city. Being versus nothingness: the allegory of the fulfilled totality, the allegory of its absolute negation.

However, it is important to understand that the Siedlungen are not more successful - I am tempted to say, in an ontological sense - than Mies's glassy voids. It is a failure that goes well beyond the empirical destiny of these pro-
Tafuri and Dal Co history, are narrative endings which fail to sense, that they constitute elements of a kind of reflexive in which the very appeal to that structure forces the critic itself intact and indeed more virulent in its operation and modest: not merely the usefulness of the conceptual struc-
narrative that foregrounds the very category of the ending
bolically resolves the fundamental contradiction between
struction on a world scale. But in the long run, the enclave
effects than it was before.
allegory ends up undoing itself, and from an act that sym­
allegory of revolutionary society as a whole, just as social­
ord that has been thrown into instability for a longer or shorter period of time, if not indefinitely. But supposing one confrons a permanent instability, a permanent chaos, from which a kind of order briefly emerges, only to vanish again. Can that still be called a crisis?
The notion of a contradiction presupposes that you can articulate a troubled or conflictual situation; that you can posit oppositions and force fields within it such that it becomes unthinkable, even if you are unable to resolve it. I am suggesting that today we are closer to an antinomy than a contradiction, since within it even those conflictual opposi­tions our historians posited for the modern period are no longer detectable in that form. I want to argue that the notion of the contradiction offered the hope of a solution, even when it might have seemed utopian or fantastic; and that this was owing to the very structure of the contradic­tion itself, for when you have two opposing terms, it becomes irresistible to speculate on possible mediations or syntheses between them. (On some level, of course, I am repeating current doxa about the disappearance of utopias and the waning of the political in our time.) Still, the narrative of Tafuri and Dal Co reminds us that the modernist situ-
ations not only provided the space for the elaboration of utopias alongside this or that pragmatic, yet nondialectical program, but that it also suggested that another ultimate form of dialectical authenticity lay, as in the case of Mies, with a lucid and implacable commitment to the contradiction itself, beyond any hope of solution or resolution. "Like its object, thought remains shackled to the determinate contradiction," said Adorno. 34 Theodor Adorno. Philosophy of Modern Music, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blumenter (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

34 This possibility, I believe, has also disappeared from the scene in this age of postmodernity.

Let me now, though, outline the reasons for the disappearance both of the classical building and the classical city. These reasons lie deeply embedded in the logic of globalization itself. In the third world, one of the poisoned gifts of the new late stage of capitalism has been the Green Revolution, which destroyed the older peasant mode of agriculture with hybrids and chemical fertilizers (not to mention current genetic experimentation), and set those peasant countries on the path to the ratios of the advanced countries, in which on the whole no more than seven percent of the population is still engaged in agricultural pursuits. The mass of unemployed peasants then moved, in desperation, to the cities, where staggering demographies now defy every political solution or form of urban planning. Oddly, there is a structural resemblance of these enormous agglomerations with the equally desperate structures of the first world, whose problems are in effect caused from the other end of the social spectrum, and in particular by the upper-class strategies of gentrification and land speculation, which have driven the poor and the unemployed out of the cities into peripheral areas. The fiscal crisis of the Western cities (as it is so often described) merely underscores the fundamental point I want to make here: namely, that in our time the city's problems cannot be solved by any properly urban mechanisms, and that therefore older modernist visions of planning, zoning, immanent urban solutions of all kinds, are no longer thinkable. This does not mean that the dilemmas of the postmodern city can be solved by extra-urban means or by the state itself: probably they cannot be solved at all. But the older modernist urbanisms are no longer on the cards, which is to say that even the concept and image of the city that used to be available in the modernist period is no longer present. There is no such thing now as what used to be designated by that word city; true postmodernity would probably mean being able to invent a new one. In any case, I trust that the relationship between globalization and this dissolution of the urban has also become clear: the Green Revolution as a worldwide capitalist development on the one hand, and the land speculation that has accompanied the new global finance industry on the other.

I also want to dispel certain thoughts of celebrating globalization under the rubric of some new contradiction of the local and the global, or through some conflict between the old-fashioned state and decentralization on a political, as well as social, basis. Saskia Sassen has pointed out in Globalization and Its Discontents that the finance industry must very definitely occupy crucial centers, even if the relationship of those world centers to the individual cities in which they are housed is problematic, at least for the categories of the modern. Once upon a time the local and the regional had to do with nature, that is to say, with older agricultural modes: the local in the older sense has disappeared along with them, leaving in its place so many tourist images for the delectation of a now worldwide society of the spectacle. To oppose non-Western to Western values is to be taken in by old culturalist ideologies and the propaganda of contemporary religious (which is to say, fundamentalist) movements. The world today is standardized and at least tendentially postmodernized. What were formerly "non-Western cultures" are merely the ingredients of an immense image hybridity, it being understood that there is no "Western" culture either, and that global modernity is neither Western nor non-Western.

In terms of the state today, and of the other pole of the former contradiction - the individual building - I want for the moment only to quote a remark made in conversation by Peter Eisenman: "You could build the most remarkable building in the middle of Tokyo and no one would pay any attention." I do not know whether architects build private homes any longer today (they would need, like Rem Koolhaas's villa in Bordeaux, to have unique specifications in order to generate some kind of symbolic value), but one has the impression that innovation in office buildings - if any are still needed - is today simply a matter of greater and greater height. So only museums are left, which already have some purely lateral or marginal relationship to the city fabric: black holes of the past into which the new urban crowds eagerly implode, as Jean Baudrillard remarked a number of years ago.

But first, I want to see whether we can find any equivalent today for the purity of the Messian contradiction. Such an equivalent would then necessarily have to be radically impure and welcoming of chaos as enthusiastically as Mies's glass rebels it. I believe that, alone among the architects who have come after modernism, Koolhaas has succeeded in providing a program for what Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown only described as a situation. I should also add that at this point Koolhaas offers the image of the first truly global...
architect, the first true architect of globalization: not because he builds buildings all over the world (lots of great architects do that) but because, as in his Pearl River Delta project, he eagerly seeks out urban and architectural difference, not for culturalist or pluralist-humanist reasons, but because such fresh collisions "cause epidemics. . . . Globalization destabilizes and redefines both the way architecture is produced and that which architecture produces." 16 Rem Koolhaas, S.M.L.XL (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 96. For Koolhaas, whose experience thus ranges from Japan to Los Angeles, from China to the former Berlin Wall, from Singapore to Atlanta, globalization brings "the return of Babel," whose exacerbating program establishes "an infrastructural project to change the world, its aim montage of maximum possibility collected from any point, lifted from any context, pilfered from any ideology. It promises the final installment of the Promethean soap opera." 17 Ibid., 67–68.

Koolhaas’s culture of congestion, to return to that as illustrated in Delirious New York, marks a first articulation of a new, postmodern, truly globalized approach to chaos and demography. It asks us to revel in the new situation and to affirm it in such a way as to derive enthusiasm and energy from it. From the labyrinth that is S.M.L.XL (an extraordinary, spatial book that could have gone a long way toward helping print culture overcome the CD-ROM had it not compromised itself by agreeing to number its pages) I want to quote a characteristic passage, about the Forum des Halles in Paris:

Here an entire urban region is now a seamless, almost Babylonian amalgam of destruction, kitsch resurrection, authentic historical particles, a delirium of infrastructures, a mass grave of both good and bad intentions that crawl out of the pit like the rejected species of an alternative evolution . . .

What about the culmination of La Défense, where all the geometric rigor of a city collapses in a maelstrom of randomness and incoherence, made more pathetic by the profusion of roads, ramps and other "connections" that resemble a wind-tunnel test accidentally executed in concrete? Yet it mysteriously works or, at least, is full of people. 18 Ibid., 106.

"Full of people." This is the crux of the Koolhaas aesthetic. His immense megastructures are planned not to channel or organize city crowds but to augment and magnify them, to increase the chaos: to let it happen, if one can imagine reading this expression as the sign of an active rather than a passive operation. So it is clear that what used to be negative in the older modernist era has now become positive in the era of globalization, and marks the place of the first affirmation of Koolhaas’s part. Yet so far, there does not seem to be any opposition at work here; even allowing for the obsolescence of contradiction, an antinomy also demands some kind of binary tension: with what kind of term does congestion seem incompatible and somehow irreconcilable?

I believe that it is to be found in the image of the act of leveling, bulldozing, clearing away, flattening out: the true gestural equivalent of the end of nature in which the tabula rasa of late capitalism, and its speculators and developers, finds its active embodiment. The razing of all the qualities of the former "site" offers all the exhilaration of a new kind of reduction: something one senses in Koolhaas’s celebration of the American "typical plan," and in his manifesto for an abstract "generic city" as the emergent form of the new globalized world. For the logic of the tabula rasa was already evident in Koolhaas’s seemingly perverse celebration of the so-called "Typical Plan," by which he means the standard engineering layout reproduced throughout "nonsignature" engineering — constructed office buildings across the United States.

It is zero-degree architecture, architecture stripped of all traces of uniqueness and specificity. It belongs to the New World. The notion of the typical plan is therapeutic; it is the End of Architectural History, which is nothing but the hysterical fetishization of the atypical plan. Typical Plan is a segment of an unacknowledged utopia, the promise of a post-architectural future. Just as The Man Without Qualities haunts European literature, "the plan without qualities" is the great quest of American building 19 Ibid., 335–36.

His evocation of Singapore, however, is even more vivid. Singapore is unique in being a one-time-only combination of late-capitalist anarchy and communist planning and renovation. As Koolhaas puts it, it "installs a condition of permanent instability, not unlike the ‘permanent revolution’ proclaimed by the students of May ’68":

The new republic’s blueprint, its dystopian program [becomes]: displace, destroy, replace. In a delirium of transformation the island is turned into a petri dish: gigantic clearances, levelings, extensions, expropriations create laboratory conditions for the importation of social and architectural cultures that can be grown under experimental protocols, without the presence of anterior substance. Singapore is turned into a test bed of tabula rasa. The transformation of the entire island in the name of an apocalyptic demographic hypothesis is in apparent contrast to its smallness and its permanent land shortage . . . A regime like the one in power in Singapore is a radical movement: it has transformed the term urban renewal into the moral equivalent of war. 20 Ibid., 105.

I want now to turn to the status of the individual building in our newly globalized and modernized era, and for this I want to examine the work of Peter Eisenman, and in particular his Aronoff Center at the University of Cincinnati, surely one of the most extraordinary buildings of the last decade.

Anything 35
see it in terms of a phenomenon that has lately been a matter of fascination for me: namely, the way in which a building that does not and cannot fit into the city fabric is capable not merely of separating itself out and turning away from that fabric altogether, but at one and the same time of replicating that entire city fabric within itself, becoming itself a miniature city and a microcosm of its external context. Remember that Mies's buildings remained events within the city: even if they constituted black holes or an icy void at its center. Nonetheless, they did something to it. For Tafuri, in much the same fashion, the skyscraper is considered a kind of unique event within the metropolis: a strike, an interruption, a sudden touch-down, which is necessarily made to comment on the city and to emit a message about it.

The kind of building I am thinking of will no longer be an event inside the city, it will no longer comment, its exterior will neither allude nor repel. This will be something paradoxical enough to say about a very large form disposed across a hill on the order of Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase, or better still (Eisenman's own image, and the alleged inspiration of Aronoff in the first place), the interlocking of those conveyor-belt plates that move your baggage out along the airport display ramp. But perhaps Aronoff's parasitic relationship to the remnants of the two already existing structures it so unexpectedly "completes" and incorporates can be thought to be some kind of protective concealment from the logic of the urban fabric outside it.

What I want to stress here, however, is the way in which the interior of the building, through which hundreds of students stream every day, offers a unique and somehow self-contained experience: the way in which it substitutes for the city, which in its disaggregation today can no longer offer the classical spatial-urban pleasures. It is useful to contrast this temporal experience with the one Le Corbusier so carefully planned out in advance for his visitors at the Villa La Roche:

This house . . . will be rather like an architectural promenade. One enters, and the architectural vista presents itself immediately to view: one follows a set route, and a great variety of perspectives present themselves: there is a play of light, highlighting the walls or casting shadows. Bays open onto perspectives of the exterior, and one rediscovers architectural utility.

"One follows a set route": what intervenes between this dictate of the modernist demiurgic act and the aleatory pathways of the Eisenman center is not only an aesthetic of chance but, above all, the computer. Eisenman delights in those computer-generated variants of space in his building, which he himself could not consciously have planned or predicted. Far from a new or neoclassical sense of order, it is a chaos, indeed a Koolhaasian "culture of congestion," that is simulated within this miniature city — this mimesis not of a traditional city center but of an underground post-world war III warren of corridors and ancillary spaces of all shapes and kinds. Pedestrian bridges and misplaced monumental staircases trace out a kind of miniature indoor Venice, whose campos surge without warning out of artificial alleyways and stairwells, down upon which the windows of offices gaze. The equally aleatory multiplication of vistas and points of view, perspectives and gazes, projects some new role for sight in these spaces of urban futurity, a free-floating sight and visibility abstracted from the familiar humanist supports. If the skyscraper remains the emblem of a heroic modernism, perhaps just such underground cities can lend their image and their concept to the styles and production of a globalized future.

But the two "poles" of our present opposition — congestion on the tabula rasa of a bulldozed surface, congestion in movement underground — do not seem to add up to a contradiction in the modernist sense. So their problem, whatever it is, cannot yet be solved. Perhaps the utopian approach today is not the older modernist one of projecting a possible solution to an impossible contradiction but rather one of reconstructing the problem and the contradiction itself in the first place.