The point to be established is that the criterion for claiming a space is a good piece of architecture is that the space fits. I like this idea for many reasons. One is tempted to ask what it means, however. And that would be reasonable. So, as a first stab consider the following:

– A space fits in a space if it is in harmony with the space it is in.

To understand what it is to be in harmony with a space is best approached negatively, that is, it is easier to explain when a space is not harmonious than to explain what harmony means. This approach has many drawbacks. In particular, by saying what harmony is not is not to say what it is. However, there is no need to nail down a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, since, as I argued above, the meanings of the criteria change in the act of application.

Nevertheless, there are several things we can say about harmony that should at least set us on the track to, if not a definition, at least a characterization. To begin with, there seems to be a scale on which different degrees of harmony can be mapped. At the extreme end of the scale is the religious sense of harmony found, for example, in Buddhism. Closer to our theme is the harmony of the Japanese Tea Ceremony. At the other end of the scale is the lack of harmony we find in a space that startles us or which continually draws our attention back to it because of a sense of inappropriateness. At this end I would place Michael Graves' Portland building.

To begin with, the Portland building appears to disregard its surroundings. It has tiny windows that create a kind of visual dissonance with those of the buildings around it. It does not harmonize with its location, rather, it just sort of sits there. The building is an impediment to moving around the area, whether that movement is visual or physical. It shares little architecturally with the surrounding edifices. It is an example of excessive variation. It is located in what would seem to be a square area that might otherwise be a park, and yet it seems to mock the idea that there could have been a park here instead, it is a heavy building whose parts seem arbitrarily thrown together. Visually, it is a bully.

Assuming that this example has provided us with some sense of what it is for a space not to be in harmony with another space, let us now take a look at what appear from a distance to be dual skyscrapers which Graves designed in The Hague, the Netherlands. From the train as you pass by them at a distance, they appear to be almost perfect. Tall and massive, they have exaggerated traditional Dutch rooflines that make their placement appear natural. They appear to be wonderful examples of the common sense architecture of which I spoke earlier. Graves has managed to bring forth a traditional design that has withstood the test of time and yet given it a clearly modern presentation. There are historically good reasons for the style of roofline mostly having to do with the weather. In addition, the style has acquired a kind of emblematic nationalistic character. These are clearly Dutch.

Unfortunately, the buildings contribute to a kind of artificial demarcation of parts of the city, between the lived-in city and the governmental city that empties into the evenings. The governmental complex, of which they are a part, forms a

clump in the middle of a vibrant part of the city that you have go around to get from one part of the lived-in city to another. What appeared from a distance to be two separate buildings are in fact part of a single complex grounded in a massive base. In this respect it behaves very much like the Portland building. The complex interferes in the life of the city, it has negative and dark aspects to it. There is a large city park half a block away that the building in no way recognizes. Rather, it metaphorically appears to threaten that space. Since no one lives there, it is dark at night except for the glare of streetlights, empty and brooding, even menacing. Thus, despite the pleasing visual effect from a distance, the actual impact of the building appears to be negative.

Is the space marked by the The Hague Graves complex harmonious or not? The answer is not, as you might think, "it depends", rather I would claim that it is not given that, in one clear sense, it really does not "fit", since it, like Graves' Portland building, does not contribute positively to the environment it is in, rather it disrupts it. Yet the lack of harmony is not exactly the same with respect to the two spaces, and this is part of what I mean when I said that the meaning of the concept is modified by its application. On the positive side, the Graves building asserts "Dutch" in a Dutch environment. On the negative side, it has this negative impact on the social life of that space. The Graves Portland building, however, could also be said to have a disruptive social affect since it sits in a space that probably would be better served as a park. But who knows, the possible park could become a major location for drug dealers and other undesirables. Irrespective of its social impact, it remains the case that it is visually not a fit. There is nothing in the design that says it belongs there, that it has anything in common with the neighborhood, that it has a historical linkage with the area. It is just an ugly building plopped down in the middle of a city to which it has no relevance.

The more one thinks about it, the more the notion of relevance becomes increasingly important in evaluating a space. To see my point, let us return to the Graves The Hague complex. Surely, one would say they are relevant. They are governmental buildings, their monumental size is traditional in government buildings, speaking to the transcendent nature of government. They are clearly Dutch government buildings, so there is a second relevant feature. However, if Graves had put these two buildings where he put his monstrosity in Portland, they would have clearly been out of place and clearly not a fit. The interesting question is "Why not?" It seems that when talking of relevance, we have to look at additional features of the space. Are they, for example, relevant to that city, conceived as an historical space? Not as they stand. If the city decided to build a new governmental center at the outskirts of town, that might have been a different story. In fact, it would have been a wise thing to do, it could have been an opportunity to showcase the modern Netherlands and highlight its vibrancy and dynamism. As it currently stands, those buildings are disruptive of the space they are in and you cannot be both disruptive and harmonious. Celebration of the site is crucial but not by way of degrading what else is already there. Visual excitement is important, but not to the point of contributing to an overall failure of the impact on the space.