

SOLID-VOID

the 30-second architecture

3-SECOND FOUNDATION
In architecture, solid-void theory describes the relationship between built and open space, while regarding both as contained volumes equally important to the designer.

3-MINUTE ELEVATION
Solid-void and figure-ground theories are derived from Gestalt psychology and best known from optical illusions such as the famous faces- vase drawing by Edgar Rubin. Depending on which part of the image, white or black, is perceived as containing volume, the viewer will identify in Rubin's illustration either a vase or two faces. The Dutch artist M. C. Escher exploited this phenomenon in his impossible architectural figures, which constitute veritable visual puzzles.

Solid-void theory works on the concept that what the architect designs is as much the (solid) mass of a building as the (void) spaces surrounding and enveloping it. It is based on the concept of positive (built) versus negative (open) space, so, in this sense, the façades of buildings lining a street become the walls shaping the volume of space making up that street. Solid-void theory thus encourages the architect and planner to give equal, if not more, importance to the design of open space than to that of built space. In urban design this becomes particularly relevant through the use of figure-ground diagrams, essentially maps or plans marking all built space in solid black (figure), while all open space remains white (ground). Frederick Gibberd, designer of the new town of Harlow, Essex (1947-72), promoted the reversal of such diagrams, presenting buildings in white and open space in black in an attempt to put emphasis on the design of space itself rather than built matter. In *Collage City* (1978), architectural critic Colin Rowe analysed several large cities through figure-ground plans, arguing that each city had been produced through a continuous process of superimposition and collage of objects, structures and textures.

RELATED TOPICS

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3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

M. C. ESCHER
1898-1972
Dutch printmaker, known for art often showing ambiguous or impossible perspectives

FREDERICK GIBBERD
1908-84
British architect and town planner

COLIN ROWE
1920-99
British-American architectural critic and teacher, who promoted an eclectic style and the use of collage in design

30-SECOND TEXT

Anne Hultzsch

White versus black, built versus open space: solid-void theory uses graphic effects to illustrate the interaction between a building and its surroundings.

