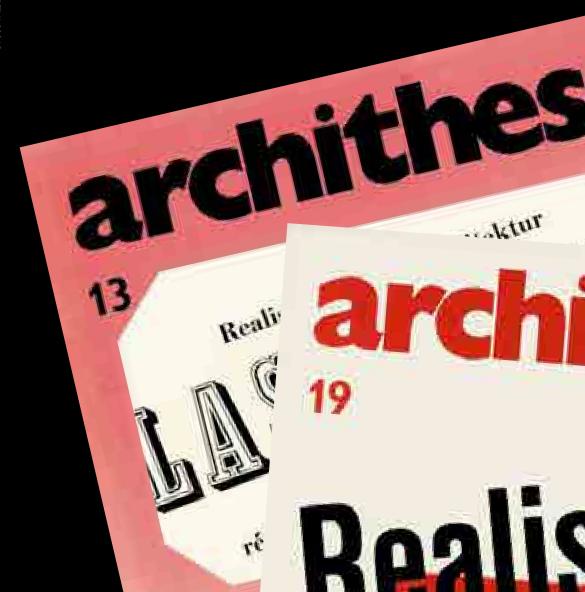
## II REALISM AND AUTONOMY

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From Idealism to Disenchantment:
Realism in and beyond archithese by Irina Davidovici

142
To Laugh in Order Not to Cry:
Interview with Robert Venturi
and Denise Scott Brown
by Stanislaus von Moos

167 Rules, Realism, and History by Alan Colquhoun

177 Problems of Architecture and Realism by Giorgio Grassi

188 A Realist Education by Aldo Rossi

194
On The Problem of
Inner Architectonic Reality
by Bruno Reichlin
and Martin Steinmann

# From Idealism to Disenchantment

## Realism in and beyond *archithese*

#### Irina Davidovici

Two issues of *archithese* published in the mid-1970s (number 13 / 1975 and number 19 / 1976) framed the agenda of architectural realism and autonomy that would shortly accompany the arrival of postmodernism. Under the shared title "Realismus in der Architektur" (Realism in Architecture) each issue had its own particular handle on the theme. Issue 13, subtitled "Las Vegas etc.," literally pink-tinted realism with reflective irony, connecting it to Robert Venturi's and Denise Scott Brown's forays into middleclass American popular culture. Issue 19, coedited with guests Martin Steinmann and Bruno Reichlin, had the explicitly theoretical ambition to provide a cogent, if synthetic, definition. Presenting a mainly European perspective focused on Italian neorationalism, the editors painted a pluralist overview of architectural realism as a theory whose general validity would transcend specific historical or cultural conditions. The differences between these two issues were partly explained by the make-up of the editorial boards. The first had been curated by the archithese editor in chief, Stanislaus von Moos, together with his two U.S. guest editors and Swiss historian Jacques Gubler. The second issue had been coedited by von Moos with Steinmann and Reichlin, both trained architects and researchers at the gta Institute of ETH Zurich, who brought an undertone of earnest theoretical density. The two issues were conceived as a diptych: the first, exploring an impressionistic understanding of realism through the lens of

contemporary architecture; the second offering a systematic overview from historical and theoretical perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

Culled from both *archithese* issues, the texts selected for this section were penned partly by Swiss writers (von Moos, Steinmann, Reichlin) and partly by international figures (Venturi and Scott Brown, Giorgio Grassi, Aldo Rossi, Alan Colquhoun). Their range bears testimony to the journal's global perspective and explains the wider, indeed international, resonance the journal had by this time acquired. The historical legacy of the texts lies in their early exploration of ideas that later became defining components of architectural postmodernism, anticipating its explicit emergence in Charles Jencks's The Language of Post-modern Architecture (1977). Their curatorship betrays an editorial ambition to forego the immediate interests of the Swiss readership in favor of contributing to a wider theoretical discourse. Veering from the pragmatic aim of the journal's funders—to present the latest architectural developments worldwide to the local professional audience issues 13 and 19 were intended as an international contribution, demonstrating the journal's relevance beyond its immediate context. Subsequently, the concepts of architectural realism and autonomy were woven together into a hybrid design method that gained traction in the Swiss architecture of the 1980s and 1990s, influencing and resonating in various contextual architectural productions in Europe and beyond.

This text provides commentaries for the selected articles, integrating them into a partial overview of the established discourse on architectural realism and autonomy. In the decades since the selected articles first appeared, a perceptible sense of transformation occurred in the oscillations between the theories and practices associated with these notions. Historically, even when intended to express a critical view of a nominal "real," realism was grounded in the search for an underlying order. In its societal dimensions, the disenchantment of architectural realists concealed an ultimately idealist belief in the existence and necessity of meaning. Today, overtaken by other priorities, that perspective is tinged with the nostalgia usually reserved for certitudes that no longer matter.

#### An Imperfect Reality

The conversation "To Laugh in Order Not to Cry" between von Moos, Venturi, and Scott Brown, recorded in October 1974 in Philadelphia, posits the notion of realism as the precondition for socially engaged architecture. In opposition to the modernists' attempts to bend reality to suit their vision, Venturi and Scott Brown acknowledge existing constraints and contradictions as generators of form. This position is reflected in the issue's editorial, which states,

Today, the renunciation of bold building alternatives, the acceptance of reality and what is possible within its framework is an important concern of socially committed architects. ... It is not just a matter of escaping into a sociological and planning empiricism, but also to challenge the architect to take a closer look at the rich store of traditional and folkloric images and forms that history has left us.<sup>4</sup>

Realism, that is, is a political matter, informed by the specificity of socioeconomic conditions. Conversely, the attempt to conceal or suppress them to bring into being an alternative reality—procedures associated with the modernist project and manifest since the late 1960s in U.S. advocacy planning—is seen as a withdrawal from reality:

[I]t seems to us that the usual rhetoric of modern architecture about "building for the poor," and so on, is not an approach to reality but a flight from it. And as soon as one tries to keep a lookout for opportunities to get closer to the reality, one finds that there is simply no option other than to work within the system—or to give up and design utopias.<sup>5</sup>

This critique of modernist design procedures, however, contains a paradox that hinges upon architecture's social engagement. Both modes of practice—the former aiming at the production of transformative utopias, the latter at the analysis and interpretation of the realities on the ground—claim a sense of social conscience. At the same time, both are defeatist: whether by engaging in knowingly quixotic attempts at challenging the hegemonic system or by subverting it from within. The realist approach of Venturi and Scott Brown consisted of studying "what cities actually look like and … understand why it is that they look the way they do—without all too many aesthetic and moral expectations." Nevertheless, this critical acceptance resulted in a misalignment of design aims and procedures. Venturi and Scott Brown used irony as a critical

device to distance themselves from the imperfect reality they were attempting to make sense of:

Our answer is that we try as best we can to get closer to the realization of our social concerns—specifically, in the immediate future and with the aid of instruments that the society around us makes available. As artists, we use irony. ... We see irony as a means to help the individual to survive in a culturally multicolored, thrown-together society. We believe that the role of a socially committed artist or architect in our society does not have to be so far removed from that of a jester.

The title of the interview, "To Laugh in Order Not to Cry," indicates the true cost of adjusting to an imperfect reality. If, by using irony, Venturi and Scott Brown found they could address the lack of ideological content and the potential generalization of postwar capitalism, they also acknowledge that the conclusions thus reached are incomplete.

#### The Right to Architecture

The shift in tone of the second archithese issue on "Realism in Architecture" is largely explained by the influence of its guest coeditors. Unlike the art historian von Moos, Steinmann and Reichlin had trained as architects at the ETH during the 1960s, part of a politicized generation that closely followed the debates of Italian neorationalism. Both men had conducted research at the gta Institute in the chair of Adolf Max Vogt. The Ticinese Reichlin had assisted, together with his partner in practice, Fabio Reinhart, Rossi's teaching studio at ETH from 1972 to 1974. In 1973 they had been actively involved in the Fifteenth Triennale in Milan, "Architettura Razionale," and in 1976, alongside Eraldo Consolascio, had collaborated with Rossi on his Venice Biennale exhibit, the collage Città analoga (The Analogous City). A researcher at the gta Institute from 1968 and until 1978, in 1975 Steinmann curated the ETH exhibition Tendenzen—Neuere Architektur im Tessin, which theoretically reframed the recent Ticinese architecture as an illustration of architectural autonomy. 8 The collaborative editorship of *archithese* 19 followed a similar agenda to the Tendenzen exhibition, exploring the potential of realism to enact a "critical revision of the notion of architecture itself."9 To this end, the editors invited contributions from

architects Colquhoun, Grassi, Rossi, and Scott Brown, Marxist philosopher Hans Heinz Holz, and architectural historian Otakar Mácel.

Steinmann and Reichlin's definition of *realism* was relative to the notion of architectural autonomy. Rather than consider the role of architecture within wider cultural, political, and social structures, they proposed an interpretation of realism pertaining, first, to intradisciplinary reflections on the history of architecture and, second, to its material presence. Their essay "On the Problem of Inner Architectonic Reality" examines how the conceptual category of realism could be applied to architecture. In the article, Steinmann and Reichlin reject both the purely ideological and purely functional understandings of realism, focusing instead on its rhetorical potential. This vision of realism amalgamated Rossi's interest in formal typological analogy with Venturi and Scott Brown's appreciation of everyday environments.

For Steinmann and Reichlin, the inherent reality of architecture is generated in dialogue with its own history. Quoting Rossi's hermetic formulation "l'architettura sono le architetture [architecture is architectures]," they argue that "the fundamental dimension of meaning lies in the relatedness of architectural language to itself (self-reflexivity)."10 On the other hand, echoing Scott Brown's contribution, they posit architecture's inherent reality in an empirical understanding, ultimately aimed at the experience of its constructed, material existence. This grounding of architectural production in readings of reality-cultural baggage, rules, habits, and customs derived from personal and collective experiences — established ideological connections with both neorationalism and structuralism. Realism in architecture is thus understood in a double sense in which its reflections on social reality are ultimately subsumed under its own, sensuous nature.

The repression of architecture's own concrete reality has brought with it its reduction to an "object of daily use." This is in keeping with a general trend to separate contemplative life from practical life and to restrict it to a compensatory, consolatory function. Practical life permits only desire  $(d\acute{e}sir)$ , which is the driving force of the capitalist process of valorization, but it precludes self-satisfying pleasure (plaisir).... The pleasure of architecture is one of these deprived pleasures. The goal is to demand in the name of realism the right to the pleasure of architecture. <sup>11</sup>

Delivered with the confidence of a manifesto, this final statement nevertheless opens more questions than it answers. It posits the aesthetic pleasure of architecture as a counterpart to its utility and outward desirability, both equally subject to capitalist consumption. Freeing the aesthetic experience from the same predicament, however, implies an autonomy of architecture without recourse: its ultimate isolation as artwork. The intellectual legacy of the article is cemented at its midpoint, where it addresses the question of architectural intelligibility: "Understanding the significance of a work means determining its position within a dense network of relationships. The denser this network is, the more numerous the examples, and the more concrete the knowledge, the more structured the field of architecture seems to the observer, no matter his preferences."12 According to the authors, this density of meanings renders architecture legible—presumably as symbol but also in the concrete entanglements of form, material, construction, typology, and relations to site. In this legibility that is, in the architectural work's connections to embodied experience—the work is able to lay claim to its realism. In hindsight, this statement can be read as an incipient form of a design method that situates every architectural object in a network of relationships—from its inner-architectural, typological history to the history of its site. This vision had profound implications for the subsequent Swiss and international discourse.

#### **Between Autonomy and Heteronomy**

For British architect and critic Colquhoun, realism represented an entry point to the issue of architectural autonomy. His essay "Rules, Realism, and History" examines the tension between architecture as "self-referential system" with its own traditions and value systems, and architecture as a "social product" shaped by wider social and economic circumstances. Colquhoun is more skeptical of its aesthetic dimensions. He argues that historical attempts in art to circumvent stylistic norms by defining realism as a universal, unmediated language had been doomed, since the understanding and the represen-

tation of "reality" were different categories to begin with. Conversely, architecture retained a double condition—as part of the real world and as representation of that world—which the modern movement had "radically" conflated. The overlap between the (supposed universally intelligible) classical rule systems and the actual circumstances of architecture had resulted in a fundamental misalignment of form and content. Colquhoun resolves this tension in a dialectic manner, arguing that any substantive change in architectural norms must take into account "two variables—the socio-economic system" and the aesthetic rule system—[that] can only be accounted for dialectically."14 Paradoxically, architecture's attempts to achieve realism by evading stylistic norms resulted in a new dominant style. Its disconnection from the ideological or symbolic meanings attached to certain forms had resulted in an eclecticism even more arbitrary than that of the nineteenth century, of which Rossi's "purely self-reflective" Gallaratese housing block is a prime example. 15 Given the proven futility of the search for an unmediated, primordial language, Colquhoun argues that the rethinking of realism must take into account the constant modification of cultural conventions by external socioeconomic pressures. The emergent synthetic, contingent realism "would gain its validity both from existing aesthetic structures and from a reality which would affect and alter these structures."16

The text "Problems of Architecture and Realism," also included in *archithese* 19, is the transcription of a lecture delivered by Italian architect Grassi at ETH on June 2, 1976. Its point of departure is Georg Lukács's aesthetic theory describing the architectural work as simultaneously fulfilling a function and expressing this function symbolically. Grassi proposes the notion of "appropriateness" as the framework for architecture's responsibilities as an inherently collective work. "Thus the notion of 'suitability' must always include the generalizing tendency that characterizes the historical experience of architecture; that is, the sense common to all the solutions of a particular problem that architecture poses to itself over time, be it the house, the public place, the street, and so on."<sup>17</sup>

Architecture's collective intelligibility is illustrated through a gamut of aspects: the correspondence of formal articulations and methods of construction, the relation to handicraft, the durability of meanings attached to forms, the necessity of professional "discipline" as guarantor of its communicability. Its potential as cultural superstructure is inextricably tied to its contribution to wider societal goals. In the end, "while architecture is linked to an immediate use, it is also the 'world' that most directly bears witness to the collective desire to leave a trace for the future." Grassi's argument is thus aligned with Colquhoun's dialectic of architecture as artistic and social product, yet stops short of advancing a more proactive agenda.

Rossi's contribution, "A Realist Education," came at a pivotal moment in his career. In the same year, he exhibited at the Venice Biennale the collage La città analoga, created with his Zurich assistants Reichlin, Reinhart, and Consolascio, and published the related article "An Analogical Architecture" in A+U. 19 Through these outlets, Rossi unveiled a new design method based on "a different sense of history, conceived of not simply as fact but rather as a series of things, of affective objects to be used by the memory or in a design."20 Analogical architecture is inherently subjective, articulating forms through the processing of personal experiences, sources, and decisions. Rossi's reorientation toward an individual poetics effectively supplanted the rationalism of his earlier typological and morphological method, which he had deployed during his teaching at ETH from 1972 to 1974 and which his ETH devotees still zealously followed.

Contrary to Reichlin and Steinmann, in his article Rossi is skeptical about architecture's connection to "realism," a category usually pertaining to art, literature, and film: "However, unless for some academic purpose, it is silly to make realism into a category of architecture. Otherwise, it will end up like rationalism, or symmetry, or so many other names that are useful for expressing a certain idea." He argues that architecture could be realist only inasmuch as built artifacts have the capacity, with admittedly limited means, to produce

genuine emotion. The title "A Realist Education" refers to early formative experiences carrying emotive reactions that, in time, had become personal resources for his own projects: the "distant, fascinating, grandiose" reality of socialist realist art, the "everyday and antique" realism of Roman construction and Lombard houses. These references built up a multifaceted concept of "reality," blurred by personal reflections and analogies so as to acknowledge its own subjectivity.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Dialectical Realisms**

The two *archithese* issues on architectural realism bring together a wide range of disciplinary and methodological approaches. The collection of critical essays is arranged around a set of dialectical tensions, sampling—as Akos Moravánszky argues— Rossi's existential listlessness and Scott Brown's unedited reality as an ideological polarity.<sup>23</sup> This is due not only to the use of opposite referential frames, socialist-realist and liberal-capitalist, but also to procedural differences. Rossi's insistence on formal autonomy and Venturi Scott Brown's nonjudgmental acceptance of the everyday—Rossi emphasizing the formal aspects of architecture; Venturi Scott Brown, its sociopolitical reality rendered a dialectical rereading inevitable. Colquhoun, Grassi, Steinmann, and Reichlin seem to concur that such a dialectic is centered on the constantly renegotiated tension between the aesthetic and functional attributes of architecture. Colquhoun rephrases the dichotomy of architectural autonomy versus its social origins and responsibilities as a "dialectical process, in which aesthetic norms are modified by external forces to achieve a provisional synthesis."24 Accordingly, the "traditional" realism that sought to read "real" conditions by rejecting stylistic choice could be superseded by a dialectical reading that considered both the actual conditions explored and the aesthetic dimensions they generate. Steinmann's and Reichlin's affirmation of architecture's concrete reality sought to resist the excessive intellectualization of architecture, a reiteration of its material presence. Subsequent developments in the actual architectural production of northern Switzerland over the following two decades offer several illustrations of such syntheses.

#### Realism and Postmodernism in Swiss Architecture

The archithese realism issues illustrate the debt of Swiss architecture to a double theoretical import, Anglo-Saxon and Italian, widely associated with postmodernism. The weight and significance ascribed in Switzerland to this discourse is all the more remarkable since, in the 1980s, the highly heterogeneous architectural profession almost monolithically rejected postmodernism as an architectural proposition. The collective attitude is neatly summarized by Ticinese practitioner Flora Ruchat-Roncati, who dismisses it as "a purely pictorial, superficial dimension."25 Across regional and generational categories, the Swiss voiced their rejection of formal arbitrariness, their contempt for frivolous irony, their suspicion of elaborate theories, and their abhorrence of shoddy construction—all seen as postmodernist motifs. Above all, however, postmodernism challenged Swiss architecture's uninterrupted, if constantly probed, relation to architectural modernism as a form of cultural habituation.

As a rallying cry in 1980s and 1990s Swiss architecture, opposition to the postmodern discourse paved the way to its own self-definition. And yet, along ideological and intellectual lines, this resistance became both more nuanced and more partial. An older generation, cast in a firmly rationalist mold, would not accept the masking of rational structures behind stylized historicist elements—a procedure seen, in the modernist mindset, less as ironic than blasphemous. Even those who openly grappled with the impossibility of a total correspondence of form and construction balked at the idea of an arbitrary, seemingly haphazardly applied, classicist scenography.

In contrast, the younger generation of Swiss architects born around 1950, several of whom had studied at ETH under Rossi, were well attuned to the reevaluation of history as an instrument for design. Whether rejecting a historicist-formalist set or a constructional Potemkin village, they relied, to a great extent knowingly, upon the conceptual foundations of postmodernism, showing a keen interest in its design procedures. This cohort instrumentalized the conceptual and methodological principles of postmodernism to carve out a position distinct from the

somewhat dogmatic, limited, and dated modernism of their older peers. This Oedipal impulse manifested itself in the amalgamation of motifs derived equally from the work of Rossi and Venturi Scott Brown. Rossi's melancholy appreciation of postindustrial landscapes merged with Venturi's and Scott Brown's fascination with a vital popular culture, finding new expressions in the local situation. By virtue of economic and political conjectures (the import of U.S. material values, the palpable effects of the transition from industrial manufacture to a service economy), both motifs reverberated deeply in postwar Switzerland. The proliferation of peripheral rust belts and the emergence of a new entropic (sub)urbanization, amplified by the economic slumps of the 1970s and early 1990s, represented a main category of the "real" that architects felt bound to address. As Herzog & de Meuron compellingly asked,

What else can we do but carry within us all these images of the city, or pre-existing architecture and building forms and building materials, the smell of asphalt and car exhaust and rain and to use our pre-existing reality as a starting point and build our architecture in pictorial analogies? The utilization of these pictorial analogies, their dissection and recomposition into an architectural reality is a central theme in our work. 26

This translation of "pre-existing reality" into "an architectural" one lies at the crux of architectural realism. In the Swiss case, realism sided strongly with Rossian melancholy, whereas Venturi's and Scott Brown's distancing use of irony was collectively met with a blank stare. If, throughout the 1970s, the fascination with Rossi's discourse led to experiments with the stark geometries of neorationalism, by 1980 this latter-day Italianate style had been abandoned—and with it, much of the formal vocabulary of a developing postmodernism.<sup>27</sup> The reason was the collective recognition that the resulting architecture barely resonated in the Swiss popular imagination. As Marcel Meili wrote, "it was impossible simply to graft rationalistic Italian typologies onto our existing cities."28 Instead, Meili and his contemporaries advocated an architecture that retrieved its meaning "from the fabric of customary activities secreted by actual modes of life in Switzerland, rather than from a typological tradition."29 One of the most literal adaptations of the Rossian discourse to the Swiss context was pursued over many

years in the ETH Analogue Architecture Studio, originally set up by Reinhart, Rossi's former assistant. The architecture of the "analogues" was redefined through the "oldnew" (altneu) architecture of Miroslav Šik, a contemporary of Meili and a fellow student in Rossi's studio at ETH in 1977–78. $^{30}$ 

I have discussed elsewhere the multiple meanings ascribed by Swiss architects to the idea of realism.<sup>31</sup> The varied positions of architects such as Herzog & de Meuron, Šik, Meili Peter, Burkhalter Sumi, and other contemporaries signals the range and heterogeneity of Swiss realism. Alternate categories—the sensory presence of material, the reconstruction of everyday environments or practices, the pragmatism of construction, the adoption and abstraction of typical forms, and so on—could all be seen as realist design strategies. Little else connects, ideologically or referentially, the synthetic modernism of Diener & Diener's knowingly anonymous buildings in Basel; the timber grammar of Burkhalter and Sumi's forestry stations; the didactic tectonic experiments of Meili Peter; Gion Caminada's exacting reinterpretations of vernacular in his native Vrin; or the deployment of local gneiss in Peter Zumthor's Therme in Vals. And yet, all these take as a point of departure a generalized design method, based on the objective, nonsentimental appraisal of existing situations. Whether inspired by local modernisms in a minor key, the pathos of suburbia, or abstractions of alpine vernaculars, this common method drew its meaning from the analysis, interpretation, and reconstitution of typical, culturally recognizable "preexisting" realities.

#### Realism in Translation

The *archithese* explorations of architectural realism in the mid-1970s created a nexus of connections between Swiss architecture and international theory. Their trajectory is easier to identify closer to the time, most notably in the republication and translation of selected *archithese* themes, articles, and authors. These contributions propelled a wider discussion around the operative role of history as architectural tool, subsequently incorporated into postmodernist design procedures. Bernard Huet, who edited the thematic issue of *L'architecture* 

d'aujourd'hui "Formalisme-Réalisme," translated three texts from the 1976 archithese issue "Realismus in der Architektur": Rossi's and Steinmann and Reichlin's texts in full, and excerpts of Grassi's ETH lecture "Architekturprobleme und Realismus." 32 Huet placed Italian neorealism—and Manfredo Tafuri's theorization of early twentieth-century realism—in the archithese trajectory of Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Soviet socialist art, and Mácel. His editorial presents realism as a counterpart to a "political," "technocratic," and ultimately "irrational" formalism that had raised the specter of architecture's dissolution into economic or technical operations.<sup>33</sup> Conversely, Huet argues that realism in architecture does not consist merely in "accepting reality, but of using it in order to transform it politically."34 This attitude echoes Brecht's plea for a politicized realist writing capable of "discovering the causal complexes of society / unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power / writing from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught up."35

In 1989, the issue of realism reemerged as the appeal of postmodern irony unraveled. Liane Lefaivre locates the "Dirty Realism" of emerging European architects away from the populist projections of Venturi and Scott Brown and in the urban grittiness of corroding industrial neighborhoods:

Whereas the pop contextualists of the 1960s were "learning" from the vital popular culture, these architects of the late 1980s appear to be "learning" from the frayed, abandoned, once-thriving industrial edges of cities and from their ransacked centres; from the Docklands in London, La Biccoca in Milan, the Péripheriques in Paris and Lyon, Kreuzberg and Moabit in Berlin. Reality is seen as harsher, and consequently the mood is on the whole confrontational. <sup>36</sup>

This "harsher" actuality was equivalent to the urban discontinuities that Herzog and Meili had acknowledged and felt compelled to address in their own design. Lefaivre illustrates her notion of "Dirty Realism" with a different and diverse coterie, including Jean Nouvel, Rem Koolhaas, Laurids Ortner, Carel Weeber, Kees Christiaanse, Hans Kollhoff, and Zaha Hadid. Their inclusion is argued based on a common method, extracted from the confrontation with the context of a European every-

day—described in the article as "Reaganomic, Thatcherite, postindustrial." These architects grounded their designs in common strategies of estrangement, which Lefaivre connects with the procedure of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization, coined by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky. There is no clear reason to exclude from Lefaivre's account the design operations of Swiss contemporaries, who also engaged within the immediate context by incorporating its fragments into their designs, submitting them to degrees of abstraction, reductivism, and recomposition. These common strategies, rather than the specific cultural context of the architects, rendered "dirty realism" an artistic strategy for its moment in time.

#### A Less Innocent Realism

The notions of architectural realism and autonomy that archithese had explored in 1976 came back to the fore in the early 2000s in the context of the postmodernism reviews that began, in earnest, at the end of its implicit statute of limitations. The architectural discourse trailed, as it often does, cultural criticism. Art historian Tomás Llorens distinguishes realism as a critical category—not merely as the faithful representation of a given reality but as giving formal expression to otherwise unexpressed social realities. 39 As early as 1996, Hal Foster had located "The Return of the Real" in the attempts of artistic neo-avant-gardes to ground artistic production in societal critique.<sup>40</sup> Foster theorized art-historical realism in terms of cultural trauma, itself based on the Lacanian theoretical model of "the traumatic as a missed encounter with the real."41 Following the cultural imprint left by the tragic apocalyptic reality of 9/11, this theme was then forcefully reprised in U.S. discourse, which has rewritten the notion of realism into an altogether less stable and objectivity-affirming construct than ever before. This indefinite pluralism is made explicit in *The Real Perspecta* (2010), in which the newer, less innocent realism is loosely framed by the lens of "the physical, the imaginary, and the traumatic."42 In comparison with the equivalent project of archithese, this heterogeneous collection of essays no longer offers a comprehensive framework for a recognizable realism.

In the architectural discourse of the last two decades, realism and autonomy have been revisited in the context of major reevaluations of 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s theory. These reviews did not merely position these notions historically but also pondered their continued impact. 43 K. Michael Hays circumscribes the peculiarity of architectural realism by arguing that "the 'real' represented by architectural realism is a real that architecture itself has produced."44 In Architecture's Desire (2010), he reiterates architecture's capacity to comment critically on—rather than merely depict—the realities that be. 45 In The Project of Autonomy (2008), Pier Vittorio Aureli sites autonomy in the context of the politicized debates of 1960s Italian architecture, in which Rossi played a central role. Realism in an era of postcriticality is addressed in Utopia's Ghost(2010), Reinhold Martin's reframing of postmodernism as a discursive formation. Martin returns to a central dilemma of realism, architecture's dual condition as both the representation of reality and an actual component thereof: "a cipher in which is encoded a virtual universe of production and consumption, as well as a material unit, a piece of that universe that helps to keep it going."46 Martin had earlier addressed the paradox of realism by announcing the notion of "utopian realism" as a "style with no form ... utopian not because it dreams impossible dreams, but because it recognized 'reality' itself as - precisely an all-too-real dream enforced by those who prefer to accept a destructive and oppressive status quo."47

Thanks to its relativism, realism is the gift that keeps on giving. While its exhaustive review is not the objective here, certain common themes are worth highlighting. In *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013), Fredric Jameson revisits nineteenth-century realist literature as the synthesis of "narrative impulse" (the *récit* as the context and the act of narration) and "the realm of affect" (in which the story is elaborated to achieve a scenic affective quality). AB Mary Lou Lobsinger applies this antinomic character to her analysis of postwar Italian housing. By confronting the intrinsic paradox of realism with the ideological and typological trajectory of housing projects, from Tiburtino to Corviale, she acknowledges not only the

bewildering variety of positions included in the theoretical notion but also the necessity of grounding it at all times in the (relative) reality of the architectural project.

In the mid-1970s, archithese merely reopened the debates on realism; it could not bring them to an ordered conclusion. Its international contributions were later credited in K. Michael Hays's anthology Architecture Theory since 1968 (1998) and historicized in Beatriz Colomina's Clip Stamp Fold (2010).49 And yet, the newer reconsiderations of realism make few, if any, explicit references to the archithese discourse. On the one hand, the archithese realism issues are themselves reflections of an international discourse into which they were quite naturally reassimilated. On the other hand, this process of assimilation should not stop us from acknowledging their momentous impact on a constellation of related agents and protagonists who were key drivers of subsequent developments in Swiss architecture. As with Italian theory in the late 1960s and early 1970s, realism and autonomy were connected in archithese with a renewed understanding of historical study as retaining a certain operativity.<sup>50</sup> Within this mindset, history—and, indeed, its emanations in present-day reality: types, landscapes, the city —could be used to clarify architectural problems and define new design strategies. Its consequences for Swiss practice have been discussed, and the effects still reverberate today.<sup>51</sup>

The notion of realism in architecture is, as in art, subject to an unresolvable oscillation between its double ontology as artifact in the world and as representation of that world. Architecture, moreover, locates the paradox of realism in the impossibility of any number of subjective dispersed realities being summed up as one nominal "reality" or being adequately represented by any one, static building.<sup>52</sup> The dispersed realities of the twenty-first century preclude even the remote possibility of a cogent synthesis like that formulated in the *archithese* issues decades ago. Revisiting their notion of realism today brings attention, more than anything else, to its idealism.

- 1 Editorial, "Realismus' in der Architektur," archithese 13 (1975): 3.
- 2 "'To Laugh in Order not to Cry' Interview with Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown," Interview by Stanislaus von Moos, 142–64 in this publication. First published in *archithese* 13 (1975): 17-32.
- 3 Stanislaus von Moos, "Las Vegas etc.," archithese 13 (1975): 16.
- 4 Editorial, "'Realismus' in der Architektur," *archithese* 13 (1975): 2–3. Translation by the author.
- 5 "To Laugh in Order not to Cry" (see note 2), 142-64.
- 6 Ibid., 155.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 K. Michael Hays, ed., Architecture Theory since 1968 (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1998), 246.
- 9 Stanislaus von Moos, "Realismus in der Architektur," *archithese* 19 (1976): 2. Translation by the author.
- 10 Bruno Reichlin and Martin Steinmann, "On the Problem of Inner Architectonic Reality," 194–209, 205 in this publication; emphasis in original. First published in archithese 19 (1976): 3–11. This argument repeats an identical statement in Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, "Die Historie als Teil der Architekturtheorie: Anmerkungen zu neuen Projekten für Zürich, Bellinzona, Modena und Muggiò," archithese 11 (1974): 20–29, here 21.
- 11 Reichlin and Steinmann, "On the Problem" (see note 10), 206; emphasis in original.
- 12 Ibid., 205.
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- 22 Ibid., 193.
- 23 Ákos Moravánszky, "Formen exaltierter Kälte: Rossis Rationalismus und die Deutschschweizer Architektur," in Aldo Rossi und die Schweiz: Architektonische Wechselwirkungen, ed. Judith Hopfengärtner and Ákos Moravánszky, 209–22 (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2011), 220.
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- 26 Jacques Herzog, "The Hidden Geometry of Nature" (1988), trans. Claire Bonney, in *Herzog & de Meuron*, ed. Wilfred Wang (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1992), 143.
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- a+u Architecture and Urbanism 309 (1996): 24–25, here 24.
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- 30 See Eva Willenegger, Lukas Imhof, and Miroslav Šik, *Analogue Oldnew Architecture* (Lucerne: Quart, 2019).
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- 44 Hays, Architecture Theory since 1968 (see note 8), 254.
- 45 K. Michael Hays, Architecture's Desire: Reading the Late Avant-Garde (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2010).
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- William S. Saunders, 150–61 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 160.
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- 49 In Hays, Architecture Theory since 1968 (see note 8), 246–47, the archithese realism issue edited by Steinmann and Reichlin is obliquely mentioned in a network of related contemporary publications, including Steinman's article in the Tendenzen catalog and its reproduction in A+U in 1976 and L'architecture d'aujourd'hui in 1977. Beatriz Colomina and Marie Theres Stauffer, "Interview with Stanislaus von Moos, Archithese Editor in Chief 1970–1980, Zurich, October 27, 2007," in Clip Stamp Fold:
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- 50 Ruth Hanisch and Steven Spier, "'History Is Not the Past but Another Mightier Presence': The Founding of the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at the Eidgenössische Hochschule (ETH) Zurich and Its Effects on Swiss Architecture," *Journal of Architecture* 14, 6 (2009): 655–86, here 674–75.
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# To Laugh in Order Not to Cry

Interview with Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown Authors: Stanislaus von Moos Denise Scott Brown Robert Venturi

First published in: archithese, 13 (1973): 17–32

Translated by: Steven Lindberg

## 1. On Eclecticism, Irony, and Several Functionalist Myths

S.v.M.: Much of what you have planned and built in recent years smacks of eclecticism. Architects perceive that as somehow frivolous, as confusing. Because they assume that quality in architecture is first and foremost a question of originality, that, in other words, a building is good if it refers as neatly as possible and without further ado to the requirements of the program. But when planning you are not ashamed to adopt models of very different origins, historical as well as popular and commercial models—including Las Vegas.

R.V.: First, a general remark: Every architect, every artist learns from numerous different sources and role models, consciously or unconsciously and in different phases of his creative life, and I don't believe that one can say or assume that certain sources are "right" and others not. As far as I am concerned, I believe that an architecture will be that much richer and more diverse the more sources an architect has, and I would never establish in advance that one source is better than another. Admittedly,

for us certain sources were more important than others in certain phases of our creative work. In the years around 1960, when we were designing my mother's house (figs. 29, 30), we were very heavily influenced by Italian architecture, especially by mannerist architecture, but the "Shingle Style" also played a role—more in the background. We found inspiration in so many different buildings, such as the Villa Barbaro in Maser (I especially love the rear wall of the giardino segreto: a curved gable with no substructure [fig. 28]), in the Porta Pia (fig. 27), and also in the Villa Savoye—a building that is, despite its austere shell, extraordinarily complex (fig. 22). I addressed that in my book Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. We have learned more since then. The ordinary and folklore have increasingly entered our field of vision, and today anonymous commercial architecture is one of our most important sources.

Admittedly, we are still sufficiently orthodox "modern architects" of the old school to keep us from copying a certain style all too literally and completely. That is one of the reasons for our mistrust of the so-called White School.<sup>2</sup> These architects copy Le Corbusier

Stanislaus von Moos, Denise Scott Brown, and Robert Venturi

## Lachen, um nicht zu weinen

### Interview mit Robert Venturi und Denise Scott Brown

#### 1. Usber Ditektizionus, busie und entige funktionalistische Mythem

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ein Eintheis sociaten Glücks aufgehaften, eines Zussindes, ein die Manechen misser sein wer den land weder Kurst ooch fiftetpilk terobeigen wenden.

A.V.: Ich febr terne besonderen Gennrome sich dem Gebeit der Psychologie, aller en schentriner doch ein romiglicher menzehlicher Zustand zu sein, in einer Umseht zu Mont, die keine Bertige zu vergringenen Erfahrungen auf welst, Messchant schemer ein grosses Verban (the Le Corbusier of the twenties) more literally than any eclectic American architect around 1900 would have done when borrowing elements of Norman farmhouses or Italian palazzi for a house or a bank. I believe—at the risk of being dogmatic—that the influences must be more diverse and less direct in order to produce real and intense works of art.

*S.v.M.:* In other words, the sources themselves and the values they embody seem far less important to you than how those sources are turned into something new.

*R.V.:* That's right. And that's also the reason we love pop art: the pop artist is interested not so much in the ordinary reality on which he draws as he is in its reworking—by changing the context, the scale, the proportions.

S.v.M.: Is that what you have in mind when you speak of irony?

R.V.: Well, all of that should be understood, in part, a little as a game, as a joke. That is, we do not work like the "Battle of the Styles" architects, who used styles for propagandistic purposes. Observing styles is one way to think about architecture that seems especially exciting to us; that is to say, it stimulates our work.

D.S.B.: In our book on Las Vegas we referred to an essay by Richard Poirier,<sup>3</sup> which is about how hardly any voice is heard in Joyce's *Ulysses* that is not imitating some other voice. The sum of these defamiliarized voices *is* Joyce. Joyce uses an amalgam, a collage of mimicry, to express himself. Nevertheless, it would never occur to anyone to say that *Ulysses* is not Joyce's own work, just because it is "eclectic" in its structure.

R.V.: You know, we are only just beginning to return to symbolism in architecture. That is very difficult for us, and new. We don't even know how we are supposed to treat symbolism in architecture. We were trained as modern architects in the traditional sense: that is, we learned to avoid symbolism and ornament as much as possible. So we are groping around in the dark.

In my case, it perhaps plays a role that I was trained as an architect in the forties at Princeton—and not, say, at Harvard. In Princeton, art history played an important role. Architecture was part of the Department of Art and Archaeology. I had a natural interest in art history. Other

architecture schools followed the Bauhaus method at the time—that is to say, not too much attention was paid to historical buildings—apart, perhaps, from those that Giedion had legitimized as precursors of modernism.

S.v.M.: As an art historian, of course. what you are saying speaks to me. If I were an architect with a traditional modern training, perhaps I would have more difficulties. Among many architects and theorists today, an almost iconoclastic puritanism dominates, a fundamental mistrust of images per se. In Germany especially, you can hear things like: Form always lies, art always lies. It is a pretense, an obfuscation, and in that sense a symbol or rather, an instrument—of oppression. From such a perspective, formal games in architecture represent nothing other than an attempt to prevent progress in the direction of a final goal of social happiness, a state in which people will be naked and will need neither art nor rhetoric.

R.V.: I do not have any particular knowledge in the field of psychology, but for me it seems like an impossible human condition to live in an environment that has no connections to past experiences. People seem to have a strong desire for security, for pleasure, and for comfort that comes from things that are not absolutely essential. More than that, everything you learn, you learn from imitation. Look at a small child. What is sometimes too funny and comical about the behavior of children is the way they understand the form more quickly and immediately than the content. They understand the form but not the content, and the lack of a correspondence between form and content is what fascinates us and makes us laugh.

If imitation were not such an important element in human coexistence, then every generation would be absolutely primitive—in the unpleasant sense of the word.

D.S.B.: That is also why we think Alan Colquhoun's essay is so good.<sup>4</sup> He is trying to show that architects who believe they can derive form directly from function—perhaps with a little aid from intuition—are very naive. Because that's just not how the brain works. Not only are we anything but free of associations with our experiences of the past, we would also cripple an important dimension of our creativity if we wanted to free ourselves from

these associations. All that can be added to that is that the architects who believe they are free and independent of influence from existing forms and formal languages are in reality all but tyrannized by formal languages that they adopt unthinkingly—formal languages that are perhaps not especially suitable in light of the functional tasks with which these architects see themselves confronted.

## 2. On Pop Art, Consumerism, and Advocacy Planning

S.v.M.: You have mentioned your historical sources and also talked about how important the anonymous sphere of commercial architecture has become for your work in recent years. Can you go into more detail about your sources in the twentieth century? Who are the contemporary artists you consider especially important for your work?

*R.V.:* You mean artists working today we admire?

S.v.M.: Yes, or those working between 1950 and 1970 whose work has somehow proved important for your own work.

R.V.: We have learned a great deal from the masters, of course: Aalto, Mies, Le Corbusier, Kahn. We have also learned from many of the pop artists: Warhol, Oldenburg, Johns, Rosenauist. Lichtenstein. It took some time before I "discovered" pop art myself. But when I had, I learned a great deal. Their world of motifs was particularly important to me, the ordinary element and its relationship to our sensibility. On the other hand, we have not learned a great deal from the abstract expressionists, in contrast to the neo-realists, whom we find very interesting. The conceptual artists, in turn, do not interest me, in my creative field. But I am not trying to be a critic here: we observe these artistic movements very much for our own ends and use them as part of our personal learning environment.

D.S.B.: To name a few more names: there are the architectural pictures of John Bader—painted from photographs. We have assembled a collection of old postcards, and he in turn borrowed from Steve Izenour a series of old original photographs of White Towers on which

to base a series of paintings.<sup>5</sup> I should also mention Mahaffey, a painter from Philadelphia, who bases his paintings on beautiful architectural postcards; for example, a postcard of the Art Deco insurance palace opposite the museum in Philadelphia. And above all Ed Ruscha from Los Angeles, whose vision und whose interest in commercial art is very close to ours (figs. 31–33).

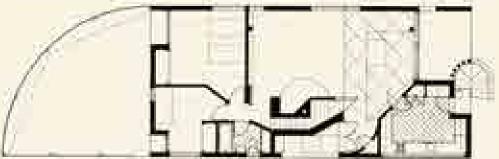
S.v.M.: One could conclude from all of that that you are more interested in the American status quo as such than in exploring the possibility of changing that status quo. The opulently designed Las Vegas book conveys that impression as well. From a European perspective. however, it seems that anyone who goes to Las Vegas and spends time studying the commercial Strip must already have a strange. decidedly erotic relationship to consumer society, to the world of commodities. Ulrich Franzen—to mention only him—called this relationship "Nixonite." To him and many other modern architects who declare that it is the task of the architect to build for a better, more humane, et cetera, world, you seem to be exponents of a system-stabilizing intelligentsia. Do you see yourselves in that role?

D.S.B.: That is a very long question and much more difficult to answer because it makes us aware of so many thoughts at once. We believe that our ideas are rooted in the social and aim at social improvement. In our book, in the context of a detailed discussion of this question, I said, "Don't bug us for lack of social concern; we are trying to train ourselves to offer socially relevant skills." But our critics cite only the first half of that observation: "Don't bug us for lack of social concern." Moreover, our entire argumentation that supports this observation and lends it meaning is simply ignored.

To answer your question, it is important first to recollect that the American context is very different from the European one. We believe that our—let's call it—neo-populist stance is a left-wing position in the American context rather than a right-wing one. On the other hand, the arguments of our critics sound like left-wing arguments in Europe, but within the situation in the United States they are not really left-wing arguments. In truth, they represent an escape from reality, because America quite simply completely lacks the social and technical

Stanislaus von Moos, Denise Scott Brown, and Robert Venturi





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#### 2. Unber Pop Art, Wommelt und sAthycopry Plannings

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S.v.M.: Ja. order solution, disc revenient 1980 until 1970 arthetrated und denien Week sich sin regenderie bedautsen für ihr engenes Schäften movemen hat.

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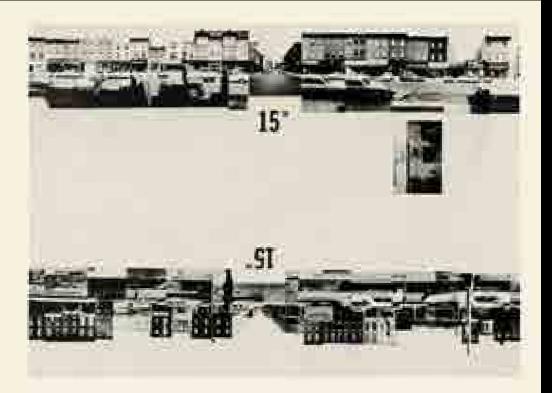
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1 fig. 34 Venturi & Rauch, with Denise Scott Brown (collaborators: Steven Izenour and David Mauker), Part of a visual dossier on the revitalization project for South Street, Philadelphia, 1968.



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organization necessary to realize the many European ideas of social reform with the aid of architecture. In the United States in the fifties and sixties, on average around 20,000 apartments were built per year as public housing. In the seventies, this average was probably even lower. In view of that fact, it seems to us that the usual rhetoric of modern architecture about "building for the poor," and so on, is not an approach to reality but a flight from it. And as soon as one tries to keep a lookout for opportunities to get closer to the reality, one finds that there is simply no option other than to work within the system—or to give up and design utopias. But if one tries to achieve improvements here and now, that sounds like conservative politics, especially if one tries to achieve social goals with the help of private entrepreneurship. It is a complex situation that has little to do with the wagging finger of the neo-leftist architectural elite.

S.v.M.: So, one could say that the aesthetics and the ethics of the modern movement is directly dependent on the possibility—or at least the hope for a possibility—of working under a bureaucracy that is able to hand out substantial contracts in the area of public housing construction. Because this possibility does not exist in the United State, the social reformism of the modern movement in America is largely irrelevant.

D.S.B.: Not just irrelevant: it is abused by the establishment to justify socially repressive architectural programs. I can give you an example. When we were asked by the residents of a rather poor neighborhood in Philadelphia (South Street; fig. 34) to help their effort to stop the construction of an expressway, they said to us: If you like Las Vegas, then we trust you not to try to "revitalize" South Street at our expense. We were called in because people felt that we were first and foremost interested in what cities actually look like and that we could understand why it is that they look the way they do—without all too many aesthetic and moral expectations. To these people, that at least seemed like a good start. But for many architects, of course, that is fundamentally wrong. They find the architect "has to go to the people" and put up bold, clean, modern apartments. Now we have seen what happened in the United States, where these bold new apartments were built based on the corresponding social rhetoric —but unfortunately not for the right people. In fact, in general what happened is that the residents of a poor neighborhood had to clear the field while a wealthier public moved into the residential blocks built according to CIAM principles. However much the modern movement worked to put poor and disadvantaged groups of the population in good apartments, the more rarely it actually happened—and for that reason several of us are trying out other methods. We studied Las Vegas, among other reasons, because people (at least people who belong to the middle and lower classes) seem to appreciate Las Vegas, at least more so than they appreciate the architecture that the architects tell them they should really appreciate. A very confused response to your question ...

S.v.M.: A confused question, perhaps ... D.S.B.: No, not your question: the issue itself is confused. Our answer is that we try as best we can to get closer to the realization of our social concerns—specifically, in the immediate future and with the aid of instruments that the society around us makes available. As artists, we use irony when looking at this situation perhaps in a similar sense to that which Poirier had in mind in his article when he wrote that the artist takes the material for his art from the world around him. If the artist is in agreement with his world, then he uses this material openly and directly; if not, then ironically. We believe that we use it ironically: we laugh in order not to cry. We see irony as a means to help the individual to survive in a culturally multicolored, thrown-together society. We believe that the role of a socially committed artist or architect in our society does not have to be so far removed from that of a jester.

There, once again, you have our divided relationship to society. In many respects, it is horrible; in many respects, wonderful—and this split is expressed in our work as irony.

*S.v.M.:* So, a kind of gallows humor, as a German colleague, Michael Müller, expressed it in his response to your recent lecture in Berlin?<sup>7</sup>

*D.S.B.:* Yes, but it is kinder, less nasty, than gallows humor. We are not at all against this form of society. We believe not only that our position as American architects is a compro-

mised position but also that the position of the whole industrialized world is compromised —compared to the rest of the world. For that reason, we are against many aspects of our society ...

S.v.M.: ... but you are not apocalyptic. D.S.B.: No, not even by inclination.

## 3. On Monumentality Today; or, Problems of an Aging Revolution

S.v.M.: Why is it that modern architecture tends more and more to a heroic temper? Why are so many new buildings, especially in the United States, increasingly reminiscent of the monumentality, the theatricality, and the pomp of the architecture of the City Beautiful Movement, both in character and in tone (fig. 35), despite the anti-Beaux Arts theory it is still burdened with? How do you explain this phenomenon? I ask you because it seems to me that within today's architecture scene you represent a position extremely opposed to post-brutalist heroism.

D.S.B.: I believe that what we can observe in some cases today is connected to two things: to the revolutionary zeal of the modern movement, on the one hand, and to the impetus of a revolution that is suddenly turning reactionary, on the other. That means the zeal remains but the revolution itself has become reactionary. I believe that is one of the reasons for the heroic temper of modernism. I recall, for example, what the Italian architect Albini once said: that modern architecture had been a beacon that kept him alive during the fascist period and during the war. Now the ardor underlying this feeling was passed down through several generations, but the revolution itself has gotten old and gone over to the establishment camp.

Moreover, education in architecture is extraordinarily authoritarian, especially in America with its Beaux Arts background—more so than in England, for example, where there are schools such as the Architectural Association. Architects are trained to become leader figures. They have social prestige and consider themselves society's gurus. In that sense, they are just as bad as psychiatrists, this other large, authoritarian professional group. We are

informed, and you cannot understand that. If you think you want to drive a car and want to live out in the suburbs, that only proves that you don't understand anything: You should walk and live in a megastructure. That is the typical attitude of an architect. Then there is something else: In America, architecture has long since been a concern of the upper class, and a concern of men; that is in part because anyone who wants to open up his own architectural office has to have a second income. It also seems to us that Gropius, as a kind of Prussian among the modern architects, was very well suited to the Boston Brahmins: that it was a kind of alliance of two related types. And, in fact, modern architecture established itself particularly well at and around Harvard and also spread from there across the country.

Another reason for the current hardening of the arteries in architecture is that architectural education has moved farther and farther from learning craft skills. American universities no longer have time for a meticulous basic education in construction and the building trades; and one consequence of that is that we get a modern architecture without traditional constructional finesse and without details. But a man like Mies was a craftsman through and through. The next generation had already largely lost this sense of the craft, and in the generation that followed almost nothing more of it remained. It seems to me that this loss of the foundation in the craft has resulted in rather conceited architects and a rather conceited architecture.

S.v.M.: I don't entirely understand your criticism of Gropius. I don't really see him as the great, authoritarian "Prussian" (leaving aside the fact that he would probably agree with what you say about the loss of the sense of craftsmanship). He once said that the color he likes most is "colorful." The whole Bauhaus would have been inconceivable without his essentially nonauthoritarian, pluralist attitude.

D.S.B.: I am, of course, not speaking of Gropius as a person; I'm speaking of his convictions as an architect.

*R.V.:* His prescriptions for a "total" and "objective" design of the environment<sup>8</sup> have a strong puritanical streak; they aim at a world in which leading architectural figures design

Stanislaus von Moos, Denise Scott Brown, and Robert Venturi

## Rire pour ne pas pleurer

### Interview avec Robert Venturi et Denise Scott Brown

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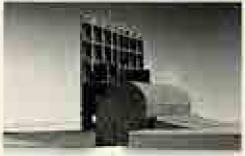
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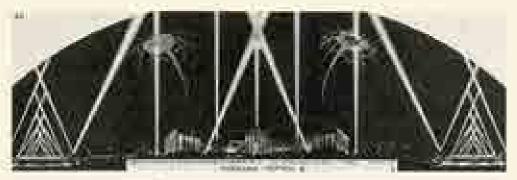
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### ↓ fig. 41 Venturi & Rauch, Study for bicentennial celebrations in Philadelphia, 1972.





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← fig. 42

Venturi & Rauch (with David Vaughan), Reconstruction of the outlines of the home of Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, with underground exhibition spaces. Under construction.

← fig. 43

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the "total landscape" in order to achieve a total unity, and specifically a unity that is regulated from above, by the experts for the rest of humanity.

I am in complete agreement with what Denise said about the progressive revolutionary ardor that is in reality reactionary. It is heroic to be a revolutionary; you risk your life doing it. It seems to me that this heroic feeling still lives on, somehow, this rhetorical quality, the dogma of a revolution. We live in an expressionist period, I don't really know why, but it is a period that is expressed in part in the form of exaggerations of earlier dogmas.

S.v.M.: It seems to me that something else plays a role in addition to all that. People seem to feel comfortable in an environment in which there are monuments that recall heroic events and conflicts. That is in part the sense of the tradition of classicist forms in American "state architecture" — or at least the tradition of classicist austerity in architecture: it wants to symbolize the triumph of law and order, of state control over disorder and laissez-faire, from the eighteenth century right up to Boston City Hall (fig. 4).

R.V.: What you are saying about monumentality seems right to me. People want rhetoric; they want expression, both in their lives and in their environment, and they want the big message summed up in a manageable form. And that is how it should be. But it may be that today, in this special era, no one is entirely sure what this big message could be. Perhaps the big corporations were entirely sure of themselves—at least until a few months ago. But even they have become somewhat more discreet; often they even try not to stand out too much.

I agree with you that now and again society wanted big public messages in the form of architecture, but I simply don't know what our big messages could be in America today. There are really just two kinds of popular, easy-to-understand messages: On the one hand, the architectural images of the big corporations, of big business, and, on the other hand, the leisure images à la Las Vegas. I wouldn't say that we are so confused today that we cannot have any public messages—big, rhetorical messages—beyond that. That would be too

simplistic. I would not go that far, although it is clear that today we cannot make any big architectural message summed up in a form, like that of, say, Chartres in the twelfth century. We cannot have that here in America for various reasons. If only because we are not all Catholic; we have an extremely heterogeneous society, and we find ourselves in a time of confusion: we are in a kind of mannerist period. Be that as it may, I suspect that in the future the medium of our public messages will not be architecture. Our big public statements will not be architectural in the same sense as, say, in Chartres, on the Acropolis, or in Versailles—nor in the same sense that was still possible in the American city of the nineteenth century, with its train stations and city halls. I don't know what it will look like, in fact—perhaps they will be enormous public billboards or enormous three hundredfeet-tall sculptures à la Oldenburg, in keeping with the spatial scale and speed in our cities. In any case, I believe that the solution to the problem will no longer be pure architecture (it was not pure architecture in the past either, of course). And I also believe that the monuments of the big corporations are somehow irrelevant. I believe that a great deal in the area of our architectural monumentality today is an empty pose, in contrast to a rhetoric that has a real effect.

*D.S.B.:* People searched for years for a "message" for the American bicentennial (1976), but they never found anything convincing.

S.v.M.: Will it be a multimedia event? R.V.: Well, that's an interesting way to approach the problem, because in the past hundred years world's fairs were mono- rather than multimedia events, right? In any case, they were events that glorified the Industrial Revolution, with the help of progressive, technological architecture—of the kind described by Giedion. That's no longer true today: We have no Crystal Palace, no Galerie des Machines, and no Eiffel Tower. Today, even Buckminster Fuller and Frei Otto are rather boring. The truly interesting things at our world's fairs happen in the area of film and the television movie. In such a situation, architecture is not supposed to be anything more than a receding backdrop for the national and international offerings at such a fair.

Architecture should express what it has to express not by means of its forms but by means of symbols. The symbols and messages should be an "appliqué." They constitute an environment that consists of messages and not of "pure architecture." The belated heroic architectural monuments that we mentioned earlier are nothing other than the last gasp of pure form, the quite boring last gasp.

*D.S.B.:* The big public messages or confessions could be things like, for example, the effort to finally address the problem of poverty. Philadelphia proposed for the bicentennial that a large part of the municipal expenditures

should go to social programs in order to eliminate the worst deficiencies in the city. But Washington didn't want to hear about it. Ever since, the feeling here has been that there won't be a lot to celebrate in 1976 if these social measures are not taken up first. Our own proposals for a bicentennial exhibition composed of exhibition sheds and symbols should be understood against that backdrop (figs. 38–41). (Philadelphia, October 1974)

[Ed. Note: "[...] the Art Deco insurance palace opposite the museum in Philadelphia" referred to above are the Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Company Building (today the Ruth and Raymond G. Perelman Building), ca. 1927, designed by Zantzinger, Borie, and Medary; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.]

#### **ENDNOTES**

- 1 "Shingle Style": this term describes a series of American homes of the late nineteenth century in the tradition of the Arts and Crafts Movement that were important for the history of the evolution of architecture. See Vincent Scully, The Shingle Style (New Haven, 1955).
- 2 Or the so-called New York Five: Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk, and Richard Meier. See various authors, *Five Architects* (New York, 1972).
- 3 Richard Poirier, "T.S. Eliot and the Literature of Waste," *New Republic*, May 20, 1967.
- 4 Alan Colquhoun, "Typology and Design Method," *Arena*, June 1967, 11–14, reprinted in Charles Jencks and George Baird, *Meaning in Architecture* (New York, 1969).
- 5 See Paul Hirshorn and Steven Izenour, "Learning from Hamburgers," *Architecture Plus* 1, 5 (June 1973).

- 6 Ulrich Franzen, "Letter to the Editor," in *Progressive Architecture*, April 1970, 8.
- 7 "Functionalism Yes, but ...," lecture as part of a symposium on "Das Pathos des Funktionalismus" [The pathos of functionalism], organized by the Internationales Design Zentrum, Berlin, September 1974.
- 8 See Walter Gropius, *Scope of Total Architecture* (New York, 1943).

# Regeln, Realismus und Geschichte

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# Rules, Realism, and History

Author: Alan Colquhoun

Sources:
archithese, 19 (1976):
12–17
Alan Colquhoun,
Essays in
Architectural
Criticism: Modern
Architecture and
Historical Change
(Cambridge, MA:
MIT Press, 1981),
67–74 (EN)

Captions translated by: Steven Lindberg

Perhaps the most crucial problem in architecture today is that of its relationship with the culture of society as a whole. Is architecture to be considered as a self-referential system, with its own traditions and its own system of values, or is it rather a social product which only becomes an entity once it has been reconstituted by forces external to it?

There is undoubtedly today a strong current of opinion which tends toward the first of these alternatives. These ideas seem to have appeared as a reaction against the weak theoretical position forced on architecture during the last fifteen years or so, during which its defenses have been attacked by successive waves of operationalism, systems methodology, poetic technology, social realism, and even certain semiological discussions, all of which have had as their chief aim the dismantling of "architectural values"—what Reyner Banham has called the "cultural baggage." On the one hand, architectural creation has been postponed until an apparently endless process of induction and analysis (whether technical or social) has been completed; on the other, aesthetic fervor has been encouraged, provided that its roots were either expressionistic or populist, and the

existence of any valid system of rules or norms belonging to the tradition of "high architecture" has been denied. If it has been admitted that architecture is a "language," then it is a language which springs from intuition, unhampered by any previous knowledge of the subject—a language more natural than natural language itself, since it does not have to be learned.

These tendencies—which are still very strong—are, in one sense, the result of one of the most powerful motives of avant-garde art since the mid-nineteenth century—the drive toward "realism" or "naturalism." The successive artistic revolutions of the last 150 years have all been attempts to "get behind" the "stylistic" representation of ideas, to destroy the artificial rules which not only mediate between the representation and the reality but also give this representation a particular ideological coloring. It is true that this search for a primordial language with which to express man's relation to reality eventually took a form which seems almost the antithesis of realism. when, instead of imitating structures which were immediately given, it attempted to discover hidden and underlying structures. This turn toward formalism, which sought to create

analogues of the real world, not only affected painting and literature as "imitating" arts but also architecture and music, where the humanizing and reassuring elements of style belonging to the "classical" repertoire were rejected in favor of more elementary structures.

But if the aim of this revolutionary force was to eliminate style and to discover essences, it was in the end bound to come up against the fact that our mode of understanding "reality" and our mode of "representing" reality artistically are separate things.

Already in the 1920s Boris Tomashevsky drew attention to the infinite regress in which the avant-garde found itself in literature:

"In general the nineteenth century abounded in schools whose very names hint at realistic techniques of motivation - 'Realism,' 'Naturalism,' 'the Nature School,' 'Populism,' and so on. In our time the Symbolists replaced the Realists in the name of some kind of transnaturalism ... a fact which did not prevent the appearance of Acmeism ... and Futurism. ... From school to school we hear the call to 'Naturalism.' Why, then, has a 'completely naturalistic school' not been founded...? - because the name 'Realist' is attached to each school (and to none)... . This explains the ever present antagonism of the new school for the old-that is, the exchange of old and obvious conventions for new, less obvious ones within the literary pattern. On the other hand, this also shows that realistic material in itself does not have artistic structure and that the formation of an artistic structure requires that reality be reconstructed according to aesthetic laws. Such laws are always, considered in relation to reality, conventional."1

The facts stated here, though clearly admissible in the case of the "nonutilitarian" arts, might be questioned in relation to architecture, which has to embrace both the real and the representational—the work of architecture being part of the real, "usable" world, as well as a representation of that world. It could be argued that the Modern Movement radically confused these two aspects, attributing to the need for practical buildings a representational function or, conversely, burdening the representational function with the responsibility for solving practical building problems. But if it did this, the reason must lie in the fact that these two aspects of architecture, which are independent from a logical point of view, are never independent experientially, and that the search for the "essence" of the building has an aesthetic motivation, embracing a certain idea of utility and its representation—one in which the transparency of the form was symbolic of a reality which could be totally described and manifested.

Thus the "materialism" of modern architecture was just as "metaphysical" as architecture had ever been, and this seems to show that when we are talking of architecture, we are referring to a system of representation of essentially the same kind as that found in the other arts. It is no more possible in architecture than any other system of representation to arrive at the ne plus ultra in which the representation and the represented coincide: the need for aesthetic laws of construction must be admitted. Such laws are not like the laws established on the basis of hypothesis and experiment in the physical sciences—laws which, according to Karl Popper, have to be capable of falsification. If we are to make a scientific analogy, we should rather say that they are like the paradigms" which, in Thomas Kuhns's analysis, determine the area of scientific discourse. They are norms, and a complete description of the phenomenon of architecture could no more neglect to include them than could a description, say, of football omit to include those rules which alone render the game intelligible. In Tomashevsky's terms, they are "conventional."2

But however much the necessary existence of such laws may justify a view of architecture as a self-referential system, it does not support a view which would regard such a system as dependent on laws which are absolute and unchanging. The laws regulating aesthetic construction are subject to change, and this change comes about not from inside the aesthetic system but from outside.

That this is true can be seen even in a system so apparently independent of technical and economic conditions as music. The change in musical language which came about in the eighteenth century, when a contrapuntal gave way to a homophonic method, can only be explained by a change in the social function of music. What took place was, of course, a purely musical change, and it can be completely explained in terms of rules which belong to music alone. Nonetheless, the motivation for the change was external to music.

Up until the nineteenth century, the external pressures on architecture were no more than on the other arts, but since the Industrial Revolution, and with increasing intensity in the twentieth

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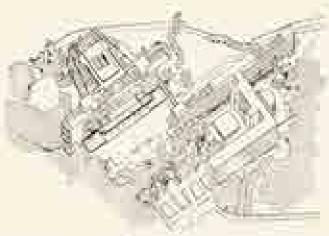
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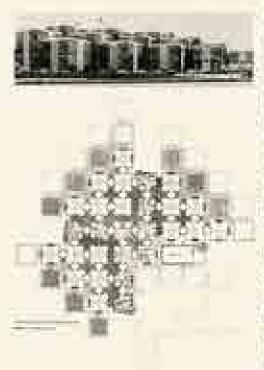


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Such a process, involving two variables—the socioeconomic system and the aesthetic rule system—can only be accounted for dialectically.

As an example of this process in operation, let us look at what might be called the "facade problem" in modern architecture. In the early days of the Modern Movement this problem was widely held to be nonexistent. According to the organic analogy, the external form of a building was supposed to be the result of its internal organization; "facadism" was identified with an architecture of false rhetoric. Yet certain architects, notably Le Corbusier, retained the facade and the related function of frontality as part of their architectural language. The problem of frontality is not simply the problem of the outside appearance of the building, though this in itself is bound up with the whole problem of the building as a representation in the public realm and cannot be attributed to superficial rhetorical needs. It is also connected with the problem of the interface between public and private and the transition from "outside" to "inside." In these terms it is a purely architectural problem—a problem that will not dissolve however much the conditions external to architecture change.

But the problem cannot be solved by recourse to any unalterable system of architectural rules. It can only come from taking the existing rule system, adapting it to the new conditions, and laying down a revised set of rules. In all his major buildings, we see Le Corbusier facing this problem with unrivaled inventiveness: the turning of the staircase through ninety degrees at the Villa in Vaucresson (fig. 1), the system of virtual frontal planes in the League of Nations building (fig. 2), the elaborate entrance system in the Salvation Army hostel (fig. 3), the invention of the *brise-soleil* (fig. 4), to mention only a few cases. As

a counter-example we might take one of Herman Hertzberger's projects (fig. 5). In his attempt to generate the plan as a system, Hertzberger has ignored the problem of the facade. His buildings can only be comprehended as internally generated, and no reference is made to the problem of the building as a representation or to the approach to the building from outside. The building is seen as a fragment of "real" space, whose laws of extension lie in the building's internal organization, and the space between buildings as a specifically architectural problem is ignored. These criticisms are objective. The faults which they expose are the result of the belief that architecture can be created without the establishment of aesthetic norms.

It is also to Le Corbusier that one must turn for an example of new architectural rules. The most obvious of these are the "Five Points," and with this example one notices a characteristic of the modern situation which differs from the past; rule systems tend to be invented by individual architects and tend to attain only a limited degree of acceptance. What in previous epochs was part of the langue has become a function of the parole. Mies's invention of a network of virtual structure superimposed on the curtain wall is another such rule system. The rule system can even extend to the behavior of people within a building—as can be seen in Le Corbusier's drawings—thus annexing to the architectural sphere something which, in earlier periods, belonged to an external rule system (rules of social behavior) (fig. 6).

The invention of rule systems by individual architects has often resulted in the transformation of buildings in accordance with a contradictory rule system. One of the most striking examples of this is the modification of Pessac, where the organization of homes according to the principles laid down in the "Five Points" has been altered to conform to petit-bourgeois norms requiring small windows, shutters, pitched roofs, and so on (fig. 7).

The proposition that architecture is a self-referential system has been accompanied by a "softening" of the rule system which was developed during the 1920s and which has, albeit with important developments and shifts in viewpoint, governed architectural practice until recently.

Owing to the fact, mentioned above, that the rule systems of modern architecture were made

by individual architects, or, at most, by small groups claiming to stand in some special rapport with the *Zeitgeist*, there cannot be said to exist, within the framework of the Modern Movement, any firm basis for excluding alternative rule systems. The norms of modern architecture have no "right of exclusion," and the very fervor with which the Modern Movement insisted on the inextricable links between architecture and the approaching "world culture" meant that, once that great ideological vision had faded, the rules of architectural form supporting it would also tend to weaken.

It is therefore possible to see the modern tendencies toward historicism, not as constituting an alternative to a monolithic Modern Movement but simply as acting out a centrifugal tendency which was never far beneath the surface.

But this development nonetheless has its paradoxical side. However much architecture derives its historicity from its own internalized tradition, it still depends for its realization on the "occasion." And the occasions which are provided by modern social life for the symbolism inherent in the rule systems of classical architecture are very rare. In this way we seem to see a separation taking place, not only between architecture and the broader ideological patterns, but also between architecture and those very occasions which a "realistic" architecture should accept. From a situation in which "style" was finally to be superseded, we find ourselves in a situation in which everything is "style"—including the forms of the Modern Movement itself—a type of eclecticism more arbitrary than that of the nineteenth century,

since at that time the choice of a style was based on its ability to represent certain political, philosophical, or religious ideas.

An example of this can perhaps be seen in Aldo Rossi's Gallaratese, where the "virtual" elements—giant pilotis, a "classical" arrangement of windows - refer less to the program than to some kind of "absent" architecture. The function of the rule system seems less to establish an architecture of meaning than to bring architecture back from the verge of an empty garrulousness, where reality is reflected in endless functional episodes each more banal than the last-those stair towers and service shafts which so often form the lexicon of modern buildings. Whatever one may say in defense of such an architecture of polemic, there is a danger that the belief in an architecture which is purely self-reflective might lead to a devaluation of the building program and to an architecture which would no longer need to be built.

The dichotomy posed earlier (architecture as an internally or externally referential system) should be replaced by a less simplistic concept—that of a dialectical process in which aesthetic norms are modified by external forces to achieve a partial synthesis.

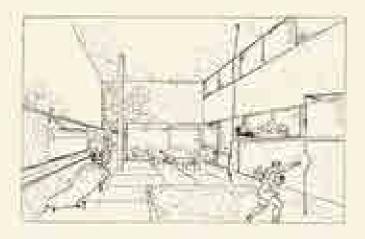
The kind of realism according to whose tenets a fundamental language can be disclosed, and which rejects the mediation of style, should be replaced by a new realism which would gain its validity both from existing aesthetic structures and from a reality which would affect and alter these structures—a realism which accepts the fact that it is not possible to foresee a society whose unity is fully reflected in the forms of its art.

#### **ENDNOTES**

- 1 "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1965), 82–83.
- 2 I am not concerned here with the question of whether the norms of art have any basis in nature. This problem, which belongs to epistemology, has a long and complex history, and, as a problem, it appears in different guises at different historical periods. In the Renaissance the laws of art were considered to be divinely ordained. With the rise of the bourgeoisie and the development of empiricism, artistic norms began to be considered as

residing in the link between sensation and mind (that is to say, in the subject rather than in the object) and their universality as being due to social customs. But from the eighteenth century, and increasingly with the development of mass culture and consumerism, social customs lost their de jure force, and the resulting incoherence (expressed in eclecticism) was certainly one of the reasons for the attempt by avant-garde art to rediscover archetypes and to reduce the subject to psychological, and even physiological, laws. At the same time an opposite tendency emerged—the study of the sign as a social function. The sign was not studied, as it had been

in the eighteenth century, as the natural reflection of normative social customs but, in the generalized form in which it appears in any society whatsoever, as constituting a de facto rather than a de jure system, and as being essentially arbitrary and conventional. This essay, by stressing the de facto, conventional, and ludic aspects of the architectural sign, creates, perhaps, an unbalanced picture. It leaves out the extent to which the sign is always, in an ideological sense, motivated and therefore the extent to which meanings are historically limited.



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Harrison Marrie Bernard







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# ARCHITEKTUR-PROBLEME UND REALISMUS

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## Problems of Architecture and Realism

Author: Giorgio Grassi

Sources: archithese, 19 (1976): 18–24 Original typescript courtesy of the author (IT)

Translated by: Shanti Evans Steven Lindberg

I will try to discuss this subject from the viewpoint of my work; that is, from the viewpoint of the architectural project.

I think that the concrete response architecture can give to the question of realism lies above all in its being itself without going astray, in expressing its own necessity and pragmatism; that is, in renewing its raison d'être on each occasion.

While this may even seem obvious, in reality it is not, if we think for example of the experimentalism we see in this field today; whereas, I believe, architecture renews its propensity for realism at the moment in which it rediscovers its fundamentals, its tradition. Having said that, the question of realism in architecture takes on specific relevance as a result of the characteristics of architecture itself. Among the typical characteristics of architecture, one is undoubtedly decisive: I am referring to the "reality" of architectural space. There being no discernible gap between representation and object represented, the question of realism is posed in this case in highly unusual terms. For example, that the distinctive evocative quality of architecture can never be expressed through its forms as negation or as open

contradiction is evident. Only someone who can imagine a built architecture capable simultaneously of negating itself (an architecture that is incoherent, useless, that does not stand up, etc.) can postulate an architecture of denunciation or protest; for instance, an "expressionist" architecture in the current sense of the term. In reality the architecture of expressionism is a marginal experience; where it has entered the history of architecture, its character derived in the majority of cases from superficial elements, often scenic or decorative ones. This characteristic mode of forcing architectural figuration, distorting or shattering it on the plane of the image, can also be found in the architecture of the past. There, too, since such works never display elements of contradiction within the process of construction, what stand out are the stratagems of an essentially "pictorial" nature (from Laon Cathedral to Borromini's Sant'Andrea, and so on). Which means, for example, that architecture may even be ambiguous (ambigua), but it cannot express—that is, evoke—ambiguity (ambiguità); and this is its peculiar fate. The fact is that architecture cannot be make-believe without paying a high price.

For this reason architecture appears not only to be stable (stabilita), necessary—that is, affirmative in and of itself—but also and always essentially approbatory (approvativa). And just as architecture's range of expression is limited by this thematic renunciation, the sphere of critical interpretation is greatly reduced for aesthetic inquiry as well. (See the inapplicability of the canonical distinction between critical realism and socialist realism and other forms of realism.)

In his Ästhetik [Aesthetics] Lukács gives a definition of the particular nature of architecture, and it is one that I find very important. He says something like this: architecture creates a real and appropriate space that visually evokes its suitability.

The crux of the question of realism is entirely contained within this definition. Obviously, the realistic content of architecture pertains to both these moments highlighted by Lukács. However, the two moments are inseparable, in the sense that one can be defined only through the other and vice versa. The realism of a pillar consists of course in its function, but also in the sensations that its form evokes: and within this perception the pillar's support function is contained anew. That is, in design, the definition of "suitable space" will owe a great deal to the extent to which the notion of 'suitability" itself has been analyzed—a suitability that is precisely what is being evoked. Whence the reciprocal, inevitable link between different works of architecture over time.

If by appropriate space we can understand, for example, its unequivocal conformity with functional, technical, structural, and other requirements, then this sense of appropriateness, as well as its special quality and role in the project, becomes accessible only through an observation that is aimed at evoking the particular world of architectural representation: the world of forms.

The eye that intends to share and thus evoke, the evocative eye, has a particular way of looking at the historical experience. It judges, seeks the truth of the object, recognizes the moments when it repeats itself. And, in contrast to the nostalgic eye that likes to linger, it shuns models. In other words, it does not rely on first appearances but looks for confirmation, attentive only to the logical and progressive

thread that binds works of architecture together over time. Thus, it will be very difficult, for example, to force the notion of "function" to remain within the limits of immediate necessity or those of relevance to the present. And it will also be very difficult to turn it into an ideology. If by function is meant conformity to the use made of architectural forms. I believe that when all is said and done necessity has by now fixed those forms. It suffices to observe that, up until the bourgeois city of the end of the last century, the connection with function had never been a problem for architecture. The extreme functional specification of the parts of the dwelling, for example, is a typical product of the bourgeois culture that attained its definitive form at the end of the century; but the same is true for the layouts of buildings in general: it is a false problem that has been passed off as new content (it is in this sense that the ideologization of function should be understood).

We can say the same thing about the technical aspect. This can never be overruled by the aesthetic conception, but neither can it become an aesthetic in its own right, as some still accredited tendencies would have us believe (the Bauhaus must take some responsibility for this). Instead it has always been the specific task of the technical element to demonstrate its necessity directly.

Thus the notion of "suitability" must always include the generalizing tendency that characterizes the historical experience of architecture; that is, the sense common to all the solutions of a particular problem that architecture poses to itself over time, be it the house, the public place, the street, and so on. In other words, suitability cannot disregard the element of universality that is evident in each work, and therefore the irrepressible progressive propensity that such solutions display.

This is the domain of the typical forms of architecture, of its elements of permanence, of those forms that seem more than others to present themselves as definitive solutions to particular questions. Let us give some examples: Filarete's Ospedale Maggiore in Milan, Piermarini's University of Pavia, Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation, and Mies van der Rohe's Convention Hall are buildings remote from one another in time, and yet they are in fact

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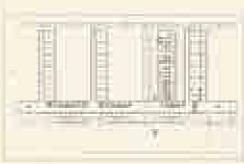
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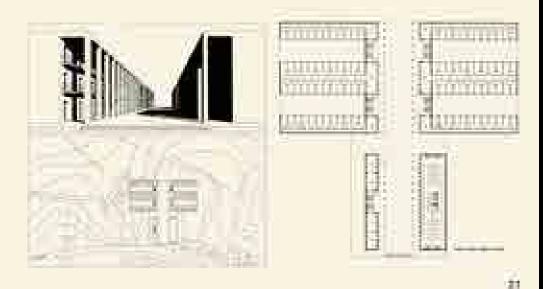
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1 fig. 3 Competition project for a student dormitory, Chieti, Italy, 1975, 1976, with A. Monestiroli. Perspective and site plan.

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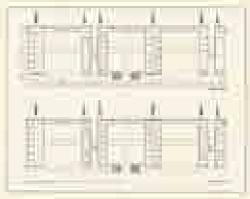
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† fig. 5 Competition project for the regional administration in Trieste, on the Corso Miramare, 1975. Photograph of model.

"contemporary," because they have in common the tendency to establish themselves first of all as "types"; that is, as essentially definitive responses.

To be sure, reference to the specific conditions of architecture does not exhaust the notion of "suitability," but it does indicate a definite choice of method for design. The rest belongs to the sphere of the meanings of architectural forms. The built city, the layouts and forms of the rural landscape, and in general everything that reflects human domination of the natural element express collective contents. Architecture is to a great extent their mirror, and this is how forms take on stable meanings.

So the notion of "suitability" also embraces the reflection of those collective contents that belong to a line of progress, regardless of how they manifest in the present. This principle of progress, which corresponds to a well-defined interpretation of the historical process (seen as a unified course in the multifaceted world of cultures), is the subject of precise analysis by Ernst Bloch. I quote here a passage from his famous 1955 essay *Differentiations in the Concept of Progress*. Bloch writes:

"Everywhere there is an advance from a primitive commune, through class societies, to the ultimate maturity of socialism; and everywhere, in all ensembles of social relations, there is the human element—from the anthropological to the humanum—which colors these ensembles so variously and holds them in a uniform embrace. ... Therefore this humanum (still in process) ... provides the only genuinely tolerant (i.e., utopian-tolerant) point of time. And the more nations and cultures belong to the humanist camp, the larger and surer will be the reality and therefore the conceivability of a single goal for the multiverses in the new history of culture." (Sitzungsberichte der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin [Berlin], no. 5. [1956]: 23–24)

Architecture is the designated interpreter of these collective contents that place themselves above the conditions of history and yet are included so permanently in the historic process. This, in any case, positive trend, this line of progress that Bloch invites us to recognize in history, represents perhaps the last thing we can reasonably repeat on the subject of the evocative quality of architecture. All that we might say about the raison d'être of this particular, necessary world of architectural forms is that, by its nature, it cannot express ambiguous or random contents.

And so it is that the world of possible forms, the realm of design, shows its innumerable ties with the past through images that have been constructed over time. It is revealed only in the comparison with this past, and it becomes reality only through a concrete, positive "imitation." Imitation understood, that is, not as nostalgic reminiscence but as comprehension and surmounting, as continuity and unity of more general objectives; finally as the moment par excellence for a positive transmission of the elements of the discipline.

Just as we must reckon with the peculiar characteristics of architecture, we also must consider the specific conditions of the "discipline"; for these embody, so to speak, the transmissibility of architecture. Naturally they are directly connected with the former, and this connection is fixed in time, but since we are able to recognize such conditions precisely because they are the product of innumerable experiments and trials, they offer the assurance that they provide suitable means and solutions stemming from unchanging needs: just as a utensil represents the undisputed form and stability of a use.

In this the "discipline" of architecture is very close to handicraft. Tessenow deserves credit for having approached, at that particular moment, the relationship between architecture and handicraft from the correct angle of tradition. His intervention was decisive for a series of false problems that the modern movement was debating. But Tessenow got it wrong when he saw handicraft as a condition that preceded the work of architecture. Accepting this version would mean recognizing a de facto fracture between the moment of confidence in the skills acquired, of "manual ability" in addition to that of observation and knowledge, and the moment of imagination and of succinct choices: that is, the moment when intellectual qualities are brought to bear. This split (which is not present in Tessenow's work) means consciously distancing design from experience, architecture from its reality. We could say the same thing of Loos's famous axiom:

"Only a very small part of architecture belongs to art: the tomb and the monument." (Adolf Loos, "Architecture," in *On Architecture* [Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2002]<sup>1</sup>)

Breaking up this unity of experience may meet the needs of contingent questions. as in the case of Loos and Tessenow himself. but it invariably proves pernicious. It means detaching architecture from the reason for its existence. It means nullifying its state of constant effort to overcome the contradictions of reality in its representation, which is the condition of that existence. When dealing with handicraft, we do not raise questions of realism, just as we never pose the problem of invention or imitation. The model in handicraft is always the work itself, and this is not modified. It is not the same in architectural design. The specific conditions of the project always maintain a high degree of uncertainty and complexity: the more numerous the conditions limiting the design prove to be, the more it gains confidence, and so these conditions are necessary. And since they arise and are defined in the course of the work, the work is also always defined as it is carried out. Here, too, the model is the work itself, but it is modified: designing also signifies adjusting the "images" to the work that is being shaped, in such a way that the person who is creating is always also in part a spectator.

So architecture must always be attentive to handicraft while clearly bearing in mind that the conditions of craft and architectural labor only partially correspond. If anything, we might say, turning Tessenow's hypothesis on its head, that the condition of craft is the utopia of architectural work. And this is true and manifest precisely in the moments of greater unity, of stability of form in history; in those moments in which image, evoked form, real form, means, and techniques coincide perfectly in the unity of the style: in fact, moments of great formal stability are precisely those that bring architecture closest to the state of a craft.

Finally, another aspect of the question of realism regards the special relationship that exists between the work of architecture and the public. In fact, architecture is a public work, a collective work par excellence. This is why we should give careful consideration not only to those tendencies that seek to exclude architecture from the field of art, but also, for example, to the fact that today there is a general lack of interest in architecture, which again

signifies exclusion of architecture as such from the realm of common goods.

The fact is that architecture must first come to terms with itself; that is, with its specific characteristics. At the same time, however, it has to face up to its social responsibility. From this point of view, the question of its relationship with the public cannot be ignored. This is why the language of architecture is—or indeed ought to be—a direct language. Moreover, since architecture enters directly into life—for instance, through the functionality that takes it outside the domain of art—this creates a permanent bond that offers the public a basis from which to pass irrevocable judgment.

Yet another less obvious, but equally strong link that derives from architecture's particular evocative purpose has already been mentioned. It is the link between architecture and society and its grand collective aims; it is the characteristic conceptual tension that manifests in style, which in turn is destined to embody those aims (see, for example, the architecture of the bourgeois revolution). A link capable, therefore, of performing a well-defined historical function in the domain of cultural superstructure. This tension can be recognized in all the great architecture of the past: in the most significant moments in the history of cities, in their buildings, and in their dominant forms. This tension is maintained as historical conditions change; this is due not only to the fact that forms become part of collective memory but also, and above all, because these forms represent very long-term goals (see again Bloch's concept of progress). The forms themselves do not lose their efficacy with respect to these aims over time. This is the precise meaning of the question that Hannes Meyer asked at the end of his 1942 essay "The Soviet Architect":

"Shall we, the architects of the democratic countries, be found ready to hand over the pyramids to the society of the future?"

Above and beyond the symbolic meaning Meyer assigned to the pyramids, he also affirmed the destiny of architectural forms to serve as a concrete, perennial testimony. In fact, while architecture is linked to an immediate use, it is also the "world" that most directly bears witness to the collective desire to leave a trace for the future. Let us take the same examples as before:

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#### Zum Problem der immerarchitektonischen Wirkfarkert (Fittiggrung von ligen 11)

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Filarete's Ospedale Maggiore in Milan, Piermarini's University of Pavia, Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation, and Mies's Convention Hall are buildings remote from one another in time and thus suited to demonstrating this aspiration and this destiny. They are works of architecture that correspond to well-defined cultures, but through the common tendency to establish themselves first of all as "types," they become universal and progressive; that is, archetypal in the truest sense—namely, in the sense of Meyer's "pyramids." Rather than meeting an expectation for the present, these buildings interpret utopia; that is, they evoke "appropriateness."

In reality, the medieval city, the cathedral and the castle, the elements of the monarch's city or of the neoclassical one, townhouses and squares always go beyond the real city in their forms, even though they are the very constituents of that city.

In this sense realism cannot avoid reckoning with the particular destiny of architectural forms to serve as testimony. If architecture shirks this task, then we can say that the very sense of its "durability" is lost.

This is true even for personal exploration. That is why it is difficult to accept much of today's experimentalism, even when it affirms architecture. I am referring to those attempts at geometric composition and decomposition that most clearly display their abstract and radical basis: or those explicitly and program-

#### **ENDNOTE**

1 German original: Adolf Loos, "Architektur," *Der Sturm*, 15. Dezember 1910.

matically "unfinished" or "makeshift" works of architecture; or, finally, those explorations that are based on experiences in another practice, such as sculpture or painting (for these last cases what holds good, in my view, is the opinion expressed by Michelangelo, who, trusting solely in architecture, also assigned it a permanent preeminence).

We must also judge those experiences that have programmatically tackled the question of realism from this same point of view: apart from the decisive and complex experience of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries, I am referring, for example, to the architectural neorealism of postwar Italy-but it is also necessary to consider the far less widely debated "pragmatic" choices of much of Northern European architecture. I am thinking here of the gross misunderstanding that has led to the equally paradoxical and degrading imitation of the image of the Gothic-bourgeois city. Architecture cannot escape its fate of being a collective work in the broadest sense; just as it cannot evade the particular world of its representation by neglecting, for instance, thematic questions that have always been peculiar to it (such as the question of the "monumental" and the absurd controversy over "monumentalism").

Only by confronting the themes of its own historical experience can architecture reasonably hope to vie with it and aim to be a concrete point of reference in daily life.

### A Realist Education

Author: Aldo Rossi

Source: *archithese*, 19 (1976): 25–28

Translated by: Brett Petzer

"They called me Pablo because I played the quitar." With this sentence. Cesare Pavese begins The Comrade, his most personal novel, and also the work most closely based on a specific program -realism. From the first sentence, realism is interwoven with personal drama, in language that blends García Lorca with Piedmontese. Italian neorealism rediscovered the Paduan countryside with new realist principles that come as much from the Americans—Hemingway, Faulkner as from distant memories of picaresque novels. The landscape of Italian neorealism is that of Luchino Visconti's Obsession. An incredible Clara Calamai wanders, sunglasses on, through the gardens of Ferrara, looking for the love and the blame entangled in her everyday reality. Reality emerges here from a singular composition of monuments and emotions that envelop the characters, with a sublime and ridiculous mélange of the music of Verdi. An aria from La Traviata fades into ditties of the time, "Ma [sic] il tuo vecchio genitor" [But your old parent] and "Fiorin Fiorello / L'amore è bello" [Love is beautiful]. while the Castle of Ferrara strips itself of de Chirico's metaphysics to present itself as a heap of bricks, a shed, or a wood-fired oven made by a long-gone peasant civilization.

In Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà*, realism is more straightforwardly aggressive. However, the black children of America, the ladies of the night, the boarding rooms beyond belief, the body sold for a packet of *Américaines* under a scorching sun—today, all of these look almost archaeological, like evidence of an impossible Italy. Fellini could use them in a new *Satyricon*.

These are, perhaps, my memories of realism; at that time, one could find it in the grand cinemas and in small outlying ones, in Aristarco's *Cinema* magazine, and in the pages of the Politecnico. With these examples we tried to translate reality; perhaps we simply discovered it.

Later, in films, we met the Soviets again. Pudovkin and Eisenstein seemed identical: an unknown world was discovering reality—a distant, fascinating, grandiose reality.

As a young student, wandering the immense streets of Moscow, this reality seemed incredible to me, as I had an interest in architecture. The provocative, incredible, gentle architecture of the time of metro stations and the university on the Lenin Hills.

Was this realism?

## Une éducation réaliste

«On minapers if Patrio points que je scuars ris la gostonea, o est avaic cetto perava vue Casana. Pavesa communica Ab camenade", la toman la prior temporousi do II all' exett at remo dated sail. he base to plus his an propiers with process; to restitute. Oto la grandire phone le rédient mi estive our crame personnel. It was geographic autobiographique, à un terunique du Chrétie. Lorda: six fond dunc la diulante piùmostela. Le depressions dation a redocurrent to compagne de Padiale avec de falacique principae de No-Done, principes out his viervent output des Anteriosims - Herengewy, Facilities - Soc de lointeina provenira de romas picarepous. Le converge de occetatione italian est color de-#Officensitiess the European Viscontil. One recover able Class Commat particolt; seed out foreman de saled. Its senting de Ferrero, sharphase Corporar at its faute prohipsoning starts ha totallite shouldenne, at 14 marks an port date one composition propulate ex monuments at de em-Difference and environment for personnense, averen plus un métange eublière et nidicole de mo-Vigue de Verdi. Un est de la Traviate se ristim. hux charlestroottes de l'apoque: «Má II hui: vacchin parettery gyes a Florie Projetto / Camure in toution, handile moir te afaitaine de Perrisis ou Olabutile de la instrubissione de De Christi et al. we préname commit un recroque de briques. frammer, old from a main of area equitionsion presalmine (differentialis) Microscopi,

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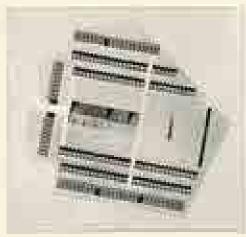
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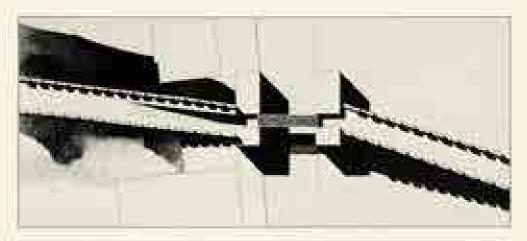
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↓ figs. 3–4 Aldo Rossi, the "portone" in Bellinzona, 1974, with Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart. Plan (3); elevation (4).





#### Abber Street

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At first, I saw realism as an alternative: more than anything, it seemed to triumph over the gray, carceral aspect of modern architecture.

I repeat, it was not architecture specifically that interested me then (and that is still true); it was rather the emotion that architecture (among other things), and despite its limits, seemed to give me.

That is why, for me, socialist realism in architecture was a glorious chapter. Many of the debates I have followed flow from this issue. However, unless for some academic purpose, it is silly to make realism into a category of architecture. Otherwise, it will end up like rationalism, or symmetry, or so many other names that are useful for expressing a certain idea.

Realism can, in some ways, be a social or political issue—so can bone bleaching. What statistics textbook has studied the structural stability of human bodies interred in the Great Wall of China or in other ancient or mythological structures?

These are the gestures, the sorrows, the shames of an unknown city.

I was looking for an everyday realism. It had to be ancient too. I countered the study of typological schemas of modern movement with the long hallways of houses in Lombardy, and from the emotions I returned to a degree of certainty. The great courtyards represented the insula, the local elements of Latin colonization in antiquity. What the Romans had built accepted this civilization and gave it a universal form: this was the most authentic relationship with reality. That is why realism—or reality—was riddled with analogies, references, reflections, and relationships licit and illicit. But I was also increasingly free in my thinking about architecture: Clara Calamai's love and blame in *Obsession* could wander calmly through the hallways and corridors of my projects, while Tanzio de Varallo's *David* offers up the unforeseen meaning of the "analogous city."

Is realism, then, only pedagogical and didactic? No, certainly not. But it is certainly not academic; it flees from academics and doctoral theses, from professors and their students, with its incredible, marvelous, oblique vitality—or, more precisely, its reality.

# On the Problem of Inner Architectonic Reality

Authors: Bruno Reichlin Martin Steinmann

Source: archithese, 19 (1976): 3–11, 24

Translated by: Steven Lindberg

"We are like sailors who have to rebuild their ship on the open sea, without ever being able to dismantle it in dry-dock and reconstruct it from the best components."

Otto Neurath

Around 1950, when socialist realism (which had been worked out as a theory or method in the period before World War II) was monopolizing that concept with its own interpretation of it, various attempts were made to counter it with a materialist standpoint taken from Neues Bauen [New Building]. That is true, for example, of Georg Schmidt, for whom this view was confirmed by the fact that *Sachlichkeit* [objectivity/functionalism] is the German word for "realism" ("Realismus und Naturalismus"). The proposition of his brother, Hans Schmidt, that building was by its nature technology—that is, a matter of necessity—describes the foundation of this realism: building is the technology that

"everywhere where it does not have to take anything alien to its nature into account is ... calculating with specific laws, the laws of forces that apply in nature." ("Die Technik baut," 1930)

This realism aims to exchange the laws of style or, more generally, of form, for "more natural" laws (precisely the laws of nature),

with which reality could be grasped directly. (Alan Colquhoun addresses this question in more detail elsewhere in this issue.)

(It is characteristic of the seriousness of his view that, for a time after the Great Depression, under transformed conditions of production, Hans Schmidt rejected as formalism the forms of Neues Bauen; that is, as a style in the nineteenth-century sense that was not grounded in the reality of the construction site.)

In the Dessau-Törten housing development (1926–27), Gropius adopted precisely the approach of the technological way of thinking and working, which

"clearly designs outward from the materials, from the building processes, and from the requirement for the finished building,"

as Schmidt wrote. But: the forms are not simply the consequence of the construction processes; they illustrate them (on a scale of mechanization that was not employed at all). Another building by Gropius in Dessau, the Arbeitsamt [Employment Office], makes clear how the form was determined on the level of organization, as laid out by Karel Teige: the organization of spaces, levels, paths, and fixtures that serve the procedures in a building and constitute its content.

# Zum Problem der innerarchitektonischen Wirklichkeit

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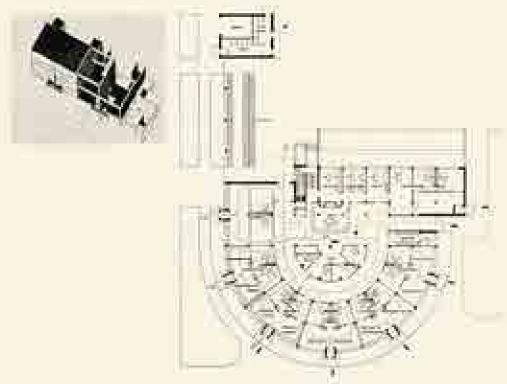
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↓ fig. 1 Walter Gropius, Dessau-Törten housing development, construction scheme, 1926.

↓ fig. 2 Walter Gropius, Employment Office, Dessau, 1928–29, plan of ground floor, "Arrangement of the main facility on ground level to avoid congestion on the steps."



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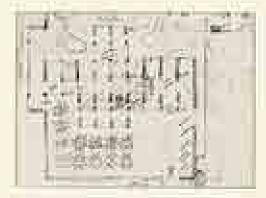
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This simplifying interpretation of realism preferred certain demands at the cost of others, striving for quantifiable values such as "light, air, openness" and ignoring unquantifiable ones such as the "values of the interior" (which are more closely tied to form and are passed on through mimesis). The realm of form was limited to that of "calculation," and that which could not be captured by these impoverished criteria was excluded from it. (In science, the same approach would mean not perceiving at all new facts not predicted in a theory.)

As long as the only task of form is to conform to measurable values, it remains far underdetermined. Le Corbusier pointed to this fact when he took up a position against the aforementioned interpretation:

"An engineer works out the section of a beam; the inquiry into the strain it will bear gives him the coefficients of tension, resistance and inertia. But the coefficient of inertia is the product of the height and breadth of a beam chosen by himself. Therefore he can choose a beam height for his beam whose only justification may be his own pleasure; the breadth is a necessary consequence of that height." (The City of To-morrow and Its Planning)

Indeed, an architecture whose only content is the laws of nature, of construction, and of distribution has no assured criteria for the determination of form, as all formal and cultural motivations are banned from it as "arbitrary." In reality, for lack of laws of form, they return to it as all the more arbitrary! That explains the diversity of forms in postfunctionalist architecture.

The view that understands functionalism as realism disputes the reciprocal relationship between form and content, believing it can grasp social reality directly in this way. In truth, the social, extra-architectural, and inner-architectural aspects do not relate to one another as an "either-or": they are different from one another and are conveyed by one another. For that reason, Lukács denounced the view of realism that tries to understand works of art as simple social phenomena without also constantly integrating their particular aesthetic constitution: they decline into a trite sociologism.

Architecture belongs to the "world of commodities" and is determined by particular social needs. To satisfy these needs, architecture

creates certain material-technical structures, but, in a second reflection [Widerspiegelung], it transforms these structures that exist as a reality "for themselves" such that they become a reality "for us." (This is exactly what Lukács charges functionalism with: that, in a sense, it equates the second reflection, which turns the building "for itself" into a work of art "for us," with the first reflection that produces the building "for itself," and thus sublates the "vividness" of architecture.)

This definition of the architectural reality is correct, but it does not avoid the risk of being perceived as "contentist," so long as this reality is studied from "outside" and one does not proceed from within it. The Russian formalists deserve credit for having asked the question of realism (in literature) from "inside." Roman Jakobson's essay of 1921 refers to the processes that realism employs. The reason for realism should be sought in the development of society, but the processes that realize it aesthetically obtain their significance inside literary structures themselves. (The use of popular language, for example, is not realistic because of its "populism" but because of its antagonism to "high" language: by means of the violation of norms that it represents and from which obtains its significance in relation to the violated norm.)

Concerning this level—the level of innerarchitectural reality, which is often not perceived at all in the question of realism in architecture we will speak below, at the risk of seeming one-sided.

In the realistic approach, art is often reduced to ideology or to offering a "picture" of society. The philosophers, sociologists, and so on who find themselves restricted by this idea are those who attribute to art merely an expressive function and who differ from it only in relation to something other. At least one of the roots of this "contentist" obstacle, which persists even in a Marxist aesthetician such as Lukács, was clearly recognized by Walter Siti in his book II realismo dell'avanguardia [The realism of the avant-garde]; namely, when he writes that contentism

"is derived, strictly speaking, from a sin of idealist origin; the work cannot be considered a phenomenon because one cannot find in it the mechanism of work."

This insight leads us to starting out from work in our study.

"Art is based on an ability, and it is an ability to labor. Anyone who admires art admires labor. And it is necessary to know something about this labor in order to be able to admire it and enjoy its result, the work of art." (Bertolt Brecht, "Betrachtung der Kunst und Kunst der Betrachtung" [Contemplation of art and the art of contemplation])

Understood in this way as labor that can be determined based on the dialectically conceived productive process that it represents, architecture turns out to be a special form of knowledge that is its own object, as material that is always worked out

"precisely by the imposition of the complex (sensuous-technical-ideological) structure which constitutes it as an *object of knowledge*, however crude, which constitutes it as the object it will transform, whose *forms* it will change in the course of its development process in order to produce knowledges which are constantly *transformed* but will always apply to its *object*, in the sense of *object of knowledge*."

(Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Lire le capital* [Reading Capital])

There is therefore no Archimedean point outside the architectural work from which one could understand the "teleological" meaning, the essence, the "nature" of architecture. If one disregards the labor that is concretized in a work, it appears in a deceptive "naturalness" that conceals its artificiality: the fact that it is the product of certain labor processes and techniques that establish the functioning of the poetic fact.

In other words, architecture not only reflects a social reality but points to its own reality of form.

"An architectural mass, a relationship of tones, a painter's touch, an engraved line exist and possess value primarily in and of themselves ..., the fundamental content of form is a formal content." (Henri Focillon, La vie des forms [The Life of Forms in Art])

From this derives the call for a theory immanent to architecture that studies this reality by working out the categories suited to grasping the similarity and difference of all works and the poetic approaches that can be found in them (the rhetorical figures, their updating, and so on).

When Bernhard Hoesli describes "transparency" as creating locations in space

"which can be assigned to two or more systems of reference—where the classification is undefined and the choice between one classification possibility or another remains open" (commentary on Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, *Transparency*) he is characterizing one of these rhetorical figures that has found its more multilavered realization in modern art but can be traced again and again in the history of art. The immediate collision of parts (pezzi e parti) in Aldo Rossi's design for Scandicci (1968) as a case of parataxis, the inflection in the house in Chestnut Hill (1962) by Robert Venturi, the various forms of symmetry -they are all such rhetorical figures. In the forms of their actualization, they constitute the poetics of the works. For example, mirror symmetry is systematically called into question by Le Corbusier: "non-symmetrical balance" (Klee) of the northern facade in Garches (1925-27), a certain kind of chiasma in the first design for Carthage (1928), and so on.

It is illuminating for the rhetorical status of architecture that Rossi also included the aqueduct of Segovia among the points of reference for his design in Milan-Gallaratese (1970–72). The difference in time and the difference in purpose separating Roman engineering and a residential complex confirm that for him it has to do with an analogy of purely formal values. In the aqueduct, Rossi saw the mastering of large scale by a strict rhythmic articulation (of particular importance in this respect is the theoretical work written by Ginzburg in 1923: Rhythm in Architecture!).

When Rossi says of analogy that it is

"a way to understand the world of forms and things so directly that it can hardly be expressed other than through other new things" ("Analoge Architektur" [Analogous architecture], lecture in Zurich in 1976)

he is calling for anything but an irrational approach to the world of forms; rather, he is drawing the logical and necessary conclusion from the insight that the special, also sensory experience of space, form, materials (and the associated pleasure) originates in the most appropriate way from comparison.

The tradition of the métier itself proves the effectiveness and necessity of this kind of architectural knowledge: the provision of evidence as usual in the treatises, with their very different comparative plates based entirely on a structured, ordered inventory of variations; the traditional teaching of architecture founded on the copy, imitation, the building survey, working in the studio, and, finally, also on study journeys (the stay in Rome and the *voyage d'Orient*).

1 fig. 4 Aldo Rossi, Competition entry for the town hall of Scandicci, 1968, photograph of a model.



Otives our feculifysopie in Garchee (1925-271) sine transmiss Art von Chiatess im wister Entwart for Kachiego (1929), undappenter

Für der rhaternochen Storige der Antilitektien (ii) es erfeitweit, statz Wesst unter den Bartugs punktion für aufmen Ermauft zu Mittland Garturanson (1975–1972) sisch den Antilitekt vom Segonia antightir. Gerinde der zettliche Unterschaub und der Unterschied des Zeienten ille den römissten begenauntens und der Wohnerlige vernan, bestätigen, dass es Zeit um eine Abstigse von son formisiert Westen zu bijn ist her Adjunishts son Rouss die Malemening der annoige Oberengen styrch eine einem Bedeustung als in Joseph Hinschild alle 1923 von Originalität gestigten der burg vortigente dissententen.

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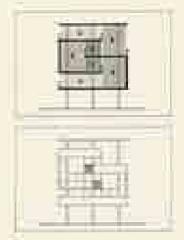
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fig. 6 →
Le Corbusier,
Villa in Carthage,
1928, first project.
Analytical drawing
from a study
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University objects the farmer plants of the Schwitzpenddit auf die zutocome Entstehung der Anchetextur, iss zinner Ecosophiscog segnet siell. the Architectur abor such attendig repe Withbook areas not Terretoken und Makersallen, Probriefur and Efficiencement, unifocciolitie, their Ebe. Defaulty of Admin't Autonomy wie fighte-phone. Die Lecter's Werke von Jürme Stirling briden all nan erometilchen Diskury üter dinees abotiarms. So student pacts the freemigures have in-Locaster (1988-7962) Materials. Mittel and Kostovuktionen des Ingenteurlagues Ides TB. Adultion batta i all. Helending subsettly bac, tellpropries a supremittent, clare of higher Montres, days, Thanse school Eventhuistivismus, also siner Berroquing dia invenetti dese Ansignico de Ihrani Programmingemucht hubbs. This hemershooms Erytemhand scharm harm sovietier Szirling, im Ofwetti. Smarrier or Husbarre (1968-1972); an alone Greate gestouren zu sein in den Klossentraln. lies reproduction die Architektor gaze die Feiindress solve des l'appaints Design, auf die sielle Stirting in alread Verglatelt beautiff bereit. Shift in dan Begriffen der Andronikhur über von Spracmic title Devision by sprachers, while thre Milwhattomery, worth the Architektur shower Tratito. tolorusper, with the equipmentality.

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fig. 11 → Olivetti Divisumma-18.

fig. 12 

James Stirling,
Olivetti Training
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In our view, what Jacques Derrida writes on the production of text also applies to the production of architecture:

"Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse [this also applies to architectural discourse], no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each "element"—phoneme or grapheme [or archeme, to use a term that has been introduced into the semiology of architecture]—being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text." ("Sémiologie et grammatologie" [Semiology and Grammatology], Social Science Information, June 1968)

The site of these changes is history. According to Karl Popper, however, history (i.e., the description of change) and essence, "nature" (i.e., what remains unchanged during the change) are correlative concepts. More than that: the "nature" of a thing all but presumes change, since the latter brings the different sides of the thing to the fore; that is, its "nature." It [history] can be grasped as the sum of the possibilities inherent in a thing and change as the updating of their "nature." From this Popper draws the conclusion that nature can only be known through its change and that the concepts to describe it must be historical (The Poverty of Historicism). That is the precise meaning of this seemingly hermetic sentence from Rossi:

"the architectures are the architecture."

And that leads to the conclusion that the significance of architecture is determined only in relation to itself, to its tradition, whereby tradition comprises in equal measure both the works and the ideas we have of them. In other words, the fundamental dimension of meaning *lies in the relatedness of architectural language to itself* (self-reflexivity). The history of architecture is thus not simply a great repository of experiences gained; rather, it is the place where the meaning of architecture is formed. That guarantees the intersubjective—that is, relatively objective—character of the terminological and sensory experience associated with it.

Understanding the significance of a work means determining its position within a dense network of relationships. The denser this network is, the more numerous the examples, and the more concrete the knowledge, the more structured the field of architecture seems to the

observer, no matter his preferences. For the architect, this knowledge is determined as métier: this

"sets boundaries against the bad infinity in works. It makes concrete what, in the language of Hegel's *Logic*, might be called the abstract possibility of artworks." (Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*)

Architecture is the object of a special knowledge related to its own reality. That makes it an undeniable fact. Abandoning this reality and its problems in the name of an immediacy of expression (which is often understood to be social engagement) means condemning oneself to architectural aphasia, once again deceiving our senses concerning fundamental experiences. For only the tritest naturalism can imagine there could be spontaneous sensory experiences that are not mediated by a social, historical knowledge. The forming of the five senses is also, as Marx noted,

"a labor of the entire history of the world." (Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte [Economic-philosophical manuscripts])

Our thought processes above placed the main emphasis on the autonomous creation of architecture. Over its evolution, architecture has, however, also continually acquired new realities, techniques and materials, problems and inventions, and so on. Its creation is both autonomous and heteronomous. The best works of James Stirling represent a genuine discourse on this "both-and." For example, his engineering school in Leicester (1959-63) adapts materials, means, and structural engineering techniques (from the nineteenth century) - sometimes directly, sometimes mediated by the works of Russian constructivism, a movement that had for its part made this kind of adaptation its program. Heteronomous creation seems to have reached a limit in the same Stirling's work; namely, in the Olivetti building in Haslemere (1968–72): in the classroom wings, the architecture reproduces completely the formal language of industrial design, to which Stirling deliberately appeals in an analogy. Rather than speaking with the terms of architecture about the language of design, about its mechanisms, the architecture of these wings is, as it were, "spoken" by the latter.

One special form of heteronomous creation is found in the works of Venturi and Rauch.

They pay attention to the "ordinary" architecture of suburbia, which they make the point of departure for their own "high" architecture.

"We say our buildings are 'ordinary'.... But, of course, our buildings in another sense are extraordinary, extra-ordinary. Although they look ordinary, they are not ordinary at all, but are, we hope, sophisticated architecture designed very carefully, from each square inch to the total proportions of the building. Literary critics have known about this all along, that is, about the use of clichés, the use of common, everyday language which makes the literature of Eliot and Joyce, for instance, extra-ordinary. This is a widely-used method in all art, and it is well-known, except, apparently, to architects." (Conversations with Architects)

The theory of the "decorated shed" that the Venturis propose, "learning from what's there," seems to declare architecture to be the packaging of a commodity. In this way, it seems to rationalize in the Freudian sense a fundamental experience that the "man on the street" has in the world of commodities: the contradiction between commodity appearance and use value. By restricting architecture to pure drawing, moreover, it represents a not-easyto-accept renunciation of sensory experiences. (The Venturis criticize "high" architecture precisely because one has to walk through it in order to enjoy it.) But the fact that the works that emerged from the theory of the "decorated shed" are a clear reflection of the aforementioned contradiction is indebted to the trick inherent in works of art; that is. to the fact that the antagonisms of reality

reappear in them as the object of poetics and as problems of form:

"Form ... is that through which artworks prove self-critical." (Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* [Aesthetic Theory])

In that sense, the architecture of Venturi and Rauch is realistic in the same way that the novels of Balzac are.

The repression of architecture's own concrete reality has brought with it its reduction to an "object of daily use." This is in keeping with a general trend to separate contemplative life from practical life and to restrict it to a compensatory, consolatory function. Practical life permits only desire (désir), which is the driving force of the capitalist process of valorization, but it precludes self-satisfying pleasure (plaisir). What Roland Barthes writes in his challenging book Le plaisir du texte [The Pleasure of the Text] applies to the exclusion of pleasure from architecture:

"One out of every two Frenchmen, it appears, does not read; half of France is deprived—deprives itself of the pleasure of the text. Now this national disgrace is never deplored except from a humanistic point of view, as though by ignoring books the French were merely forgoing some moral good, some noble value. It would be better to write the grim, stupid, tragic history of all the pleasures which societies object to or renounce: there is an obscurantism of pleasure."

The pleasure of architecture is one of these deprived pleasures. The goal is to demand in the name of realism the right to the pleasure of architecture.

↓ fig. 4 Aldo Rossi, Residential unit in Gallaratese, Milan, 1970. The portico.



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#### Zum Problem der Innerwechtetsonischer Wirkfichkeit (Fortumeng vom Beiter 11)

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