I HISTORICITY AND MEANING

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Expanding Notions of the Past

Approaches and Forms

Marie Theres Stauffer

When an art historian in the early 1970s proposed creating a series of texts on architecture, it is hardly surprising that the historical dimension of building played a role. That aspect probably also benefited from the fact that Stanislaus von Moos founded archithese while living in Rome. The presence and significance of the history in that environment need not be especially emphasized. In the Rome of that time, however, other significant factors were also present. Von Moos's choice to live in the Eternal City was connected with a research project on Italian Renaissance architecture. In the context of that project, von Moos was part of a scholarly community whose members maintained a lively exchange while conducting research at various countries' Italy-based study centers. 2 A not insignificant number of scholars from that network later wrote articles for archithese. Furthermore, Italian debates on architecture, long conscious of history, had since the 1960s only increased their reflections on the debates' historical dimensions.

Beyond Italy, the significance of the history had increased in international discourses on building as well. Von Moos was thus positioning his series in a broader context and establishing particular emphases by doing so. Accordingly, *archithese* quickly stood out from other specialist journals as both independent-minded and original for its emphasis on text and its broad horizon of cultural history, as well as for the topics it addressed and its formal design. This approach especially differed from the way architecture was reported on in Swiss circles, to which von Moos

attributed a lack of exacting criticism.³ His view was shared by the architect Hans Reinhard, who, while president of the Fédération Suisse des architectes indépendants / Verband freierwerbender Schweizer Architekten (Swiss Federation of Independent Architects, FSAI), was also involved in the founding of *archithese*.⁴ The avowedly pragmatic FSAI was prepared to finance a decidedly theoretical debate in order to "once again focus on architecture as a design problem and as a conveyor of cultural meaning."⁵

The comments that follow engage with the five essays from various issues of *archithese* that precede this text. Special attention is paid to historicity, which is treated from the viewpoints of "Historicity and the Present," "Rise and Reversal," "Cycles," and "Constants (and Rifts)." In restricting the present discussion to selected aspects, the intent was to better confront the arguments of various authors against a backdrop of separate themes and in their historical cultural context.

History and the Present; or, Old and New

Various contributions to *archithese* emphasize the question of historicity by relating antithetical concepts to one another—"old" and "new" or "historical" and "contemporary." These antitheses are made even more trenchant by pitting "modern architecture" against "traditional construction" or "inherited building fabric."

In the essay "Phase Shift," von Moos presents his own reflections on the relatedness, interdependence, and relativity of "old" and "new." He uses examples of architectural objects and urban planning phenomena that have enjoyed a certain boom and appeared in various places and times. His title refers to the fact that that which has only just emerged reaches a next stage through enduring presence and lasting use. In such cases, that which broke with conventions at the time it originated will transition over the years into its own convention and eventually into the phase of "being old(-fashioned)." That does not have to be the case, however. From von Moos's discussions one could also conclude that the new preserves some of its unconventional aspect if it collides with conservative attitudes and is therefore

unable to establish itself. This outcome is revealed, for example, in the disapproving attitude in the "New World" toward architectural innovations: "In the meantime, the sentiments of the 'common man' continue to cling to bourgeois ideas of sensual gratification." By contrast, modernism is "affiliated with the world of business, bureaucracy, and schools—as well as, more recently, with 'urban renewal'"; under those circumstances, architectural modernism "remains a concern of the intellectual elite; it appears to be unattractive to the majority of people."

Whether the original difference between the new and the traditional is preserved, one must also consider the fact that, over the years, architectural innovations "grow old" in the sense that they become historical. An additional element comes into play, too, as inadequate maintenance can cause innovative buildings to look disproportionally "outdated," as von Moos observes of American cities of the 1970s, with their "skyscrapers, freeways, and billboards."8 At the time they were built, these constructions were symbols of a (seemingly) unlimited progress based on an extremely liberal economic system that benefited from far-reaching deregulation. In the United States, construction projects are understood primarily as short-term investments—and in that sense also as episodic signs of the efficiency of the market economy. As much as possible, American architects take advantage of the great design freedoms offered by the task of creating a "monument to uniqueness," but hardly consider questions of durability. Once the "monument" has become a "kind of gigantic scrap," it has passed its moment of relevance and is at risk of losing even its use value. Two decades into the twenty-first century, this situation has only grown worse, as demonstrated, for example, by the many scaffolds placed over sidewalks in Manhattan to protect passersby from falling facade elements!

Von Moos observes a somewhat inverted correspondence in Switzerland, a country of the "old continent." There, a discreet but continual progression of architectural modernism is taking place that affects even the worlds of the middle class: the "new" is spreading in parallel, as it were, with the preserved traditions.

As a result of this "sidling" openness to "modern architecture," broader strata are open to accepting inspiration from the land of unlimited opportunities, only to immediately clothe them in a high "mediocrity" and implement them with "propriety." But that is not yet enough. In "Phase Shifts," von Moos also observes that the "highly industrialized" countries of the "old continent" have the ability to make the new even newer: architectural forms and construction methods developed in the New World are assimilated in old Europe after a time—that is, they are "phase shifted." Once borrowed, however, high-rises, highways, and urban infrastructure become (technologically) more "solid, modern, tasteful, and 'clean.' In a word: new." 11

Rise and Reversal

Certain preconditions must be met for building types and methods of construction to be adopted in places that are at considerable geographical distance. In the 1960s and 1970s, these preconditions were essentially based on the fact that in the twentieth century the United States had risen to become a world power. This position of political supremacy was also tied to advanced positions in many other sectors, including construction technology. At the latest from the 1950s onward, the latter was a point of reference for building construction in Switzerland and communicated the mythos of the skyscrapers of Chicago and, especially, New York. A broad swath of the Swiss public at the time was impressed, both positively and negatively, by American metropolises and their architectonic monuments. Against the backdrop of this general attitude, which could acquire the features of an idealization, von Moos's reading is fresh—and deconstructive in the literal sense. It attests both his fundamental critical distance and his personal, on-site exploration, which permitted him a look at and behind the scenes. In the 1970s, when transatlantic flights were expensive, such experiences were available to only a few Europeans, which is why many knew the Manhattan skyline or the multilane viaducts of the U.S. Interstate Highway System only from films and photographs. As Rosemarie Bletter explains in her article "Shrunken Metropolis," such media put the looming residential and office

towers of urban America in a particularly advantageous light.¹²

In the United States, too, skyscrapers were avowedly objects of self-glorification, as Bletter notes. ¹³ She addresses the most outstanding examples built during the construction boom of the 1920s in Manhattan with an eye toward a special kind of decor. It consisted of these buildings being made accessible to urban people a second time in the form of models or photographs: "Often these skyscrapers feature lavishly decorated portals" or special decorative elements in the halls on which the building in question is shown in miniature form. ¹⁴

Bletter hypothesizes that the miniature is supposed to offer a more tangible picture of the high-rise, whose overall form is difficult to take in because of its height, the tapering required by the building code, and the building density of the local context. She also notes among those architects who built skyscrapers a certain discomfort resulting from the economic pressure that demanded the optimization of profits and consequently enormous building heights. In Bletter's view, reproducing the building as a model restored it to a human scale. One may also assume that the architects wanted to illustrate their work fully to passers by and users of the building to ensure that their creative achievement was appreciated. Likewise, the decoration of portals and lobbies must have served the client's interest in creating a status symbol. The additional financial investment in "miniatures" was surely intended to firmly establish the particular form of a building—whether the Empire State Building or the Chrysler Building—in the visual memory of New Yorkers and thereby give wing to the mythos that had grown up around the tall towers with respect to one's own building.

If the mythical high-rises of Manhattan were about excessive heights (initially) passed off as futuristic, the later Swiss reception of this building type reveals a combination of excessive height and reversal—though this combination was not perceived as such. In postwar Europe, skyscrapers were considered the building forms of the future. 15

Another kind of reversal in combination with a certain excessive height concerns the value of historical architecture.

Von Moos opens up both old and new to debate, whereas Bletter, Jürgen Paul, and Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart express in their texts their appreciation for historical forms of architecture and settlements. Recall that until the nineteenth century the new was preferred. The only exceptions were buildings of high symbolic capital and special meaning for society. Everything else that had existed for a long time and no longer conformed to current taste or was worn out and defective was replaced whenever possible. The existence at the beginning of the twentyfirst century of a broad consensus on the cultural meaning and material value of historical buildings is a "modern" approach and the result of a multistage process. What follows is a synthesis of several important aspects of this development that were significant with respect to the situation in the 1970s and hence at the time the archithese contributions discussed here were being written.

The first significant factor is the increasing centrality in the second half of the twentieth century of historical architecture and building traditions in debates among specialists but also among a broader public with an interest in culture. This centrality was connected to the loss of historical buildings in the context of the postwar economic miracle and the associated building boom. Interventions in the existing urban fabric that were careless and of dubious quality occurred in many places in industrially advanced Europe, peaking in the period around 1970 especially, as von Moos and Jürgen Paul note in their articles. ¹⁶ Criticism of this "destruction" also grew in parallel with its spread.

The increased interest in the historical and the need to protect it led to the founding of institutions such as the International Council on Monuments and Sites (1965), which followed the signing of the Venice Charter (1964). This and other initiatives urged a differentiated approach to architectural heritage, encouraged it to be understood as a witness of its time, and established the foundations for protecting cultural sites and individual structures. One other important factor was that the buildings of architectural modernism were becoming historical artifacts themselves. This was particularly true

of the buildings and projects of the 1920s and 1930s but also for those from the period immediately after the war. The emerging historical distance took on an additional, concrete reality from 1965 to 1976 as the "great masters" of "modern architecture"—Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Alvar Aalto—passed away.

In some European countries of the 1970s, especially in West Germany, the two decades of reconstruction following the Second World War also had a major influence. In many places, the approach had been to replace historical districts that had been heavily or even just slightly damaged with superficially "modern" buildings. Design and sociocultural dimensions were neglected in favor of purely functional and economic considerations. The result was formal impoverishment and monotony on a large scale and for those reasons rightly met with various sorts of resistance.

In his essay on the Kornhaus in Freiburg im Breisgau, which had been built at the end of the fifteenth century, Paul discusses one aspect of the postwar approach to the historical building fabric; namely, the reconstruction of historical buildings that were destroyed in the war. ¹⁷ As Paul shows in his text, the historical dimension of lost (monumental) buildings was closely intertwined with their symbolic value, so that approaches to reconstruction also appealed to ethical standards. These crystallized especially in the question of whether to reconstruct the lost monument faithfully or "in the form of a free recreation" based on "specific values of formal structure." ¹⁸

The practicality of faithful reconstruction depends on adequate documentation of the historical building and whether it can be adapted to the functional, technical, and legal requirements of a later era. All of this led to a construction process that was as complicated as it was expensive and nevertheless resulted in practice in a new building in terms of materials. For that reason, faithful reconstructions are rare. By contrast, the freely recreated landmark building can be built at lower cost using current technologies. One significant disadvantage of this approach, however, is that the reduction to "specific values of formal structure" results in the loss of the

very decoration that was an indispensable source of meaning in the original historical context. For those reasons, the middle road that is often taken is to cloak a "new" core in an "old" shell. This creates a commercially optimized interior that remains hidden beneath the old garb.

Projects from the early twenty-first century such as the Berliner Schloss (Berlin Palace) make clear that the subject has lost nothing of its currency. As in Freiburg, in the German capital a historicizing shell was literally "glued" to a concrete core, but there it does not even extend across all of the facades. Superficial recreation thus results in an incoherent picture. One of the problems posed by—more or less faithful—reconstruction, combined with contemporary facades on the other sides, is that the outcome lacks both architectural and conceptual qualities. The juxtaposition of contrasting architectural forms should ideally generate a tension that has aesthetic qualities. With both the Kornhaus in Freiburg and the Berliner Schloss, however, the resulting side-by-side architectural forms are unconvincing for two reasons. First, the contrast does not succeed on formal grounds; second, the old and new differ in quality. The Berlin newspaper taz remarked on historical value: "this architectural hybrid simulates for us a history that we never had."19 The author was writing with the Berliner Schloss in mind, but the words also apply to the example in Freiburg. The (naive) will and (understandable) desire to repair "a history that cannot be repaired" quickly become evident in such projects. 20 To find a persuasive solution is incomparably more difficult.

Cycles

Charles Jencks's essay "Architecture Today and the Zeitgeist" also addresses the theme of reversal, in the sense of a new orientation around a historical approach; specifically, the cyclical emergence of architectural forms in the language of classicism. ²¹ Jencks associates this periodic phenomenon with repressive power structures, which deserve to be questioned critically. ²² The intent of this essay, however, is to emphasize the historical and its significance, which is why it is more relevant here that the

classical approach, in its reference to the architecture of antiquity, represents a paradigm that has the concerted influence of a centuries-old tradition.²³ The cyclical emergence of classicism is thus manifested on a powerful foundation. Modern architecture, which was not only oriented toward the future in its ideas but also broke with the past by introducing new forms and construction methods, had an incomparably shorter tradition. The relationship between (neo) classical and modern architecture also must be differentiated in another way: modern architecture's approaches to construction and design were above all opposed to nineteenth-century historicism—and to the question of style. Yet admiration for the outstanding monuments of earlier eras was widespread among the great modernist architects. One need think only of Mies van der Rohe's interest in the work of Karl Friedrich Schinkel or Le Corbusier's grappling with the Athenian Parthenon or Rome's monumental historical buildings.²⁴ The formal idiom of modernism, which countered classical models with abstract forms, asymmetrical dispositions, and refusal of historical decorative elements, can nevertheless echo the earlier models on a structural or typological level. These echoes are, however, downplayed in the look of the buildings and are overshadowed on the discursive level by a rhetoric that presents itself as vehemently futuristic.

Constants (and Rifts)

In his contribution to *archithese*, however, Jencks did not so much address the architectural works of the modern era as the ethical and moral stance of their authors. According to him, it is typical that architects appeal to the zeitgeist and very much bend to it; accordingly, one could speak of a "constant." As examples, Jencks mentions several of the great figures of the modern movement who tried to come to arrangements with the fascist dictators of the twentieth century or received architectural commissions from them. ²⁵ That these attempts often failed should be seen as a blessing of history; that such efforts should be condemned is beyond question.

Jencks's reproaches, however, are intended to discredit modernism and its architects. The historian was not alone in

that effort but rather was joining in a debate that became widespread in the 1970s. First and foremost, it condemned a specific architectural practice of the postwar period that must be characterized as a vulgarized form of the International Style and placed itself at the service of speculative architecture without spatial quality. One of the prominent voices in the debate was Robert Venturi, who, as early as 1966 in his Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, turned against "orthodox Modern architecture," by which he meant a superficial and simplified version that was widespread in the United States although not just there.²⁶ This condition is often blamed on the first generation of modern architects, and in North America the focus was on those influential representatives who from the late 1930s onward had taught at American universities. Another factor, however, is that numerous large building projects of the New Deal era and, especially, many examples of American public housing were planned without trained architects; that is, they were designed solely by investors and construction companies.²⁷ Apart from the flat roof and unframed windows of the modern movement, the resulting buildings have no connection to it whatsoever. That does not mean that modern architecture should not be criticized, however, as it was in various ways in the 1970s. Among the more reflective voices were those who criticized the abstract formal language of modern architecture as inaccessible and elitist or found fault with its distance from architectural traditions. Even proponents of the modern movement understood that it could no longer be a universal reference system on which a transformed world could rely.

If the growing esteem for the long history of architecture, in both its outstanding and modest manifestations, corresponds to the zeitgeist of the 1970s, another of Jencks's contributions in "Architecture Today and the Zeitgeist" was to historicize the use of the zeitgeist as an argument. Jencks related themes from the zeitgeist to "powers" of a specific era: those difficult to recognize factors that emerge only indirectly, of which it is often said that they inevitably determine events and the course of history. ²⁸

Also characteristic of the 1970s is Jencks's categorical distancing of himself from the concept of a singular "force"

that can be historically determined, such as "the Marxist appeal to inevitable laws of history" or Sigmund Freud's concept of a drive that underlies everything and is said to feed on the libido. Jencks thus abandons the idea of one external force or of one internal necessity to which human beings are completely subjected and operates instead with the concept of the "system." By doing so, he switches from one constant powerful concept to another. The idea of the system spread during the second half of the twentieth century through the reception of publications by Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy such as An Outline of General Systems Theory (1950) and General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications (1969), as well as Claude Lévi-Strauss's Anthropologie structurale (1958), Arthur Koestler's The Ghost in the Machine (1967), and Fred E. Emery's Systems Thinking (1969).

The concept of the system made it possible to introduce not only complexity but heterogeneity. "The system" was accordingly conceived as a structured set of (extremely) different elements with certain relationships between them. For that reason, Jencks's concept also includes the idea of the "dissectibility" of the system, a notion of particular interest to the broader idea of historical development. According to this understanding, a given zeitgeist is not simply "replaced" by another zeitgeist, with the human being remaining its unconscious victim. The idea of the system permits instead an analytical confrontation with structure, which can be disassembled so that its individual aspects may be critically assessed. That means, in turn, qualifying the entities thus reflected on, and on that basis "putting the system back together" without its dysfunctional parts.³⁰

Jencks's discussions also contain aspects of the discourses that emerged in the context of the revolts of the 1960s, such as the calls for change and participation. Jencks takes the side here of those demanding participation and intervention in the existing structures. He thus finds himself at odds with his period's more radical positions, which viewed any constructive intervention in the system as an improvement of a capitalist world order and hence as a task requiring critical distance. The call for active

intervention and participation also has an architectonic dimension; it focuses especially on integrating users in order to break up the architect-investor power relationship. Another point of agreement between Jencks's essay and the radical movements of the 1960s lies in its combative, sometimes polemical tone and preference for commentary and argument over balanced and detailed discussion. At one point, however, Jencks trails far behind issues that would have been current around 1970. He counsels going "along with" and understanding an "inexorable" fate and to that end makes an analogy to rape: when it is "inevitable," he writes, "lie back and enjoy it." Such chauvinistic making light of a serious crime, one that not only feminists of the period but theorists such as Michel Foucault branded as a form of torture, is not just reactionary but discrediting.³¹

Constancy and Permanency

The archithese article by Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart shares with the other texts examined here the great weight placed on the historical dimension. The title already points to this: "History as a Part of Architectural Theory: Notes on New Projects for Zurich, Bellinzona, Modena, and Muggiò." However the distinctive quality of the discourse of these two architects from Ticino is the theme of constancy. This factor concerns the staying power of architectural traditions and their historical-social meanings, which are constitutive not only of approaches to historical preservation but also of new projects. Within this framework, Italian razionalismo and, in a broader sense, the modern movement represent a phase of history that the two architects recognize as a specific tradition.

This attitude is expressed when Reichlin and Reinhart explain their project for the Kratz district of Zurich, between Paradeplatz and Bürkliplatz. In their plan for the district, they focus on the historical context, specifically on traditions that are local but linked to significant aspects of a more universal history of architecture. Thus, they refer on the one hand to Gottfried Semper's nineteenth-century plans for the Kratz district, plans that convey a classicistic approach both on the formal level and in the construction type of the

block perimeter. On the other hand, they refer to the modernism of German-speaking Switzerland, which in their eyes also has classicistic aspects.³³ The broader horizon—"contesto in assenza"—of the project in Zurich is ultimately formed by typologically or functionally comparable realizations that are part of the cultural memory of the history of architecture and are mobilized by every architect in a personal way.

The attention the architects from Ticino pay to the context of an architectural brief can be traced back to debates in Italy; for example, over Vittorio Gregotti's book *Il territorio dell' architettura* (*The Territory of Architecture*; 1962), which discusses the relationship between the architectural intervention and its urban surroundings, as well as that between architecture and history. With reference to Giulio Carlo Argan, Gregotti also took up the theme of typology; that is, of a kind of constant structural basis underlying certain architectural traditions and permanently shaping their disposition.

An even stronger basis for Reichlin's and Reinhart's approach were the ideas of Aldo Rossi, with whom they collaborated at the ETH Zurich and beyond. Rossi had pointed out as early as 1966 in his book *L'architettura della città* (*The Architecture of the City*) that "established building types [play a role] in determining the morphological structure of urban form as it develops in time."36 Accordingly, Rossi based his projects on historical architectural elements that are "abstracted from the vernacular, in the broadest possible sense."37 This implies that the design also integrates an inventory of the surrounding buildings with the idea of inscribing an aspect of memory in the completed building that is formally analogous to its context. In this way, the old lives on in the new; temporary interventions nevertheless guarantee the permanence of that which is established locally. With projects such as the Gallaratese apartment block (1968–1976) or the San Cataldo Cemetery in Modena (1971–1984), Rossi demonstrated this mediation between historical traditions and the elementary geometric forms of architectonic rationalism.

Historicity is for Reichlin and Reinhart thus a true point of departure for both their theoretical reflections and their design practice.³⁸ To some extent, historicity is also the objective of their

work, since, following a dictum of the German philosopher Hans Heinz Holz that they cite in their text, their projects are appropriate to the present "to the extent [they] have absorbed the past," yet they can also be recognized as being of the present because they both "absorb what we have not experienced ourselves in existing forms … and expand it."³⁹

Relations

The wealth of topics discussed here reflects the heterogeneity of the discourses of the 1970s. These diverse debates must be viewed not least as signs of the extent to which architecture and its historiography were undergoing a process of upheaval in those years. With regard to the central question of that era concerning future approaches and architectural forms, which was swallowed by the multifariousness and contradictoriness of various proposals, awareness of the historical seems to have been a kind of leitmotif.

The archithese of the 1970s presented an extremely informative selection of contemporaneous themes with an astonishing density. The fact that articles from these years can still be read, discussed, and reflected on in ever-new ways shows that the ideas and hypotheses presented in them have not exhausted their importance for the historical and theoretical discourse today. The "strange seventies" are, however, both a point of contact and a point of repulsion for the important architects of our time, in which the connection to history, too, is present and significant in ever-new ways.

- 1 See Stanislaus von Moos, Turm und Bollwerk: Beiträge zu einer politischen Ikonographie der italienischen Renaissancearchitektur (Zurich: Atlantis, 1974), in which he takes up again the subject of his dissertation at the Universität Zürich.
- 2 Many nations have research institutes in Italy's capital that focus on art, archaeology, history, and art history, including the American Academy in Rome, the British School at Rome, the

German Bibliotheca Hertziana— Max-Planck Institut für Kunstgeschichte, the Académie de France à Rome, and the Istituto Svizzero. The discussions have been referred to by Kurt W. Forster.

- 3 Stanislaus von Moos in conversation with the author, November 24, 1997, and October 27, 2007.
- 4 Before the first issue of the journal appeared, von Moos had already published, at Reinhard's invitation,

contributions to the quarterly journal of the FSAI. On the circumstances of the founding of archithese, see Hubertus Adam, "40 Jahre archithese," archithese 4 (2011): 38–42; "Fokus: archithese: Stanislaus von Moos im Gespräch mit Beatriz Colomina und Marie Theres Stauffer," Arch+, 186–187 (2008): 68–75; Marie Theres Stauffer, "Geschichte der Archithese: Kontexte der neueren Schweizer Architektur," Kunst und Architektur in der Schweiz, 4 (2004): 6–14.

- 5 Stanislaus von Moos in Hubertus Adam and Hannes Meyer, "Architektur und Architekturkritik: Ein Gespräch mit Stanislaus von Moos," archithese 4 (2011): 48–51; Stanislaus von Moos in conversation with the author, Zurich, November 24, 1997.
- 6 Stanislaus von Moos, "Phase Shifts," 92–108 in this publication, esp. 93. First published in *archithese* 16 (1975), 26–36, esp. 26.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 The focus on a comparison between the United States, a country in the "New World," and Switzerland in the "Old World" is made against the backdrop of the issue's theme, but one could also think of Scandinavian countries where similar phase shifts are manifested.
- 10 Von Moos, "Phase Shifts" (see note 6), 92. The "phase shift" of the title refers to a physical phenomenon: the difference in the phases of two waves or vibrations of the same frequency.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Rosemarie Bletter, "Shrunken Metropolis," IIO-I9 in this publication, esp. II7. First published in *archithese* I8 (1974), 22-27.
- 13 Ibid., 110-19.
- 14 German summary of Rosemarie Bletter, "Metropolios réduite," in *archithese* 18, 1974, S. 22; see also Bletter, "Shrunken Metropolis" (see note 12), 113 and figs. 1-5.
- 15 The skyscraper remained a central theme in architecture in the United States as well. The competition to have the tallest building encouraged the development of both construction and formal design.
- 16 Von Moos, "Phase Shifts" (see note 6); Jürgen Paul, "The Reconstruction of the Kornhaus in Freiburg im Breisgau, and Several Observations on Architecture and Historical Understanding," 62–75 in this publication. First published in archithese II (1976), 10–19.
- 17 Ibid.

- 18 Ibid., 66 (16 in original).
- 19 Esther Slevogt, "Wiederaufbau Berliner Stadtschloss: Neurose aus Beton," in taz, September 3, 2016, https://taz.de/Wiederaufbau-Berliner-Stadtschloss/!5332988/(accessed February 16, 2020).
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Charles Jencks, "Architecture Today and the Zeitgeist: A Critical Retrospective," 38–61 in this publication. First published in archithese 2 (1971), 25–41.
- 22 Ibid., 44-52 (33-35 in original).
- 23 The reading of the writings of Vitruvius, which became available to a broader readership from the fifteenth century onward, established ancient architecture as a reference system—and hence revived discussion of its arguments over and explanations of the construction, structure, and decoration of diverse types of buildings. That happened again and again in ever-new forms over the course of centuries.
- 24 The ABC group, to which architects from Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the Soviet Union belonged, did the most to distinguish itself from historical architecture in the 1920s and 1930s. On this, see, for example, ABC: Beiträge zum Bauen, 1924–1928, ed. Mart Stam et al. (Baden: Lars Müller, 1993); Sima Ingberman, ABC: Internationale konstruktivistische Architektur, 1922–1933, Bauwelt-Fundamente 105 (Wiesbaden: Vieweg, 1995).
- 25 Jencks, "Architecture Today and the Zeitgeist" (see note 21), 44–52 (26–28 in original).
- 26 By contrast, Robert Venturi greatly admired the modern architects of the first generation, such as Le Corbusier and Aalto. See Robert Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture I (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).
- 27 On this, see also Von Moos, "Phase Shifts" (see note 6), 26.
- 28 Jencks, "Architecture Today and the Zeitgeist" (see note 21), 25.

- 29 Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy,
 "An Outline of General Systems Theory,"
 British Journal for the Philosophy of
 Science I-2 (1950): 134-65; Karl Ludwig
 von Bertalanffy, General System Theory:
 Foundations, Development, Applications
 (New York: George Braziller, 1969);
 Claude Lévi-Strauss, Anthropologie
 structurale (Paris: Plon, 1958); Arthur
 Koestler, The Ghost in the Machine
 (London: Hutchinson, 1967); Fred.
 E. Emery, ed., Systems Thinking
 (London: Penguin, 1969).
- 30 Jencks, "Architecture Today and the Zeitgeist" (see note 21), 38-43, 52-59 (25-26 in original).
- 31 Ibid., 44-52 (26-28 in original).
- 32 Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, "History as a Part of Architectural Theory: Notes on New Projects for Zurich, Bellinzona, Modena, and Muggiò," 76–91 in this publication. First published in archithese II (1976), 20–29.
- 33 Ibid., 77-84 (20-24 in original).
- 34 Vittorio Gregotti, *Il territorio dell'architettura* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962).
- 35 Giulio Carlo Argan, "Sul concetto di tipologia architettonica," in G.C. Argan, *Progetto e destino* (Milan: Casa Editrice il Saggiatore, 1965).
- 36 Kenneth Frampton, Modern Architecture: A Critical History, rev. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 294. See also Aldo Rossi, L'architettura della città (Padua: Marsilio, 1966), translated by Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman as The Architecture of the City (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).
- $\begin{array}{ll} 37 & Frampton, Modern\ Architecture \\ (see \ note\ 36),\ 294. \end{array}$
- 38 On this, see especially the introductory section of Reichlin and Reinhart, "History as a Part of Architectural Theory" (see note 32), 76 (20 in original).
- 39 Ibid.

Architecture Today and the Zeitgeist

A Critical Retrospective

Author: Charles Jencks

Sources: archithese, 2 (1971): 25–41 Charles Jencks, Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 20–32 (EN)

Translated by: Steven Lindberg

La trahison perpétuelle des clercs1

The idea that man is an unconscious victim of external forces, or internal necessities, is one of the greatest intellectual orthodoxies of our time. Ever since the waning of traditional religions, men have been convincing themselves of one inevitable necessity after another, until the point has been reached where some of them have actually started to become operative in detail. Whether or not this desire to discover some omnipotent, external force signifies an intellectual rage for order and understanding or rather a deep psychological drive to identify with a superhuman force and avoid responsibility is open to question: but its existence is beyond dispute.

It can be seen in the Marxist appeal to inevitable laws of history, in the Freudian appeal to basic drives of the libido and most recently in the appeal to underlying forces of technology by Galbraith and McLuhan. It might seem at first, with such a superabundance of prime movers, that each one would largely serve to undermine the idea that any one was primary and therefore, perhaps, the whole idea of inevitable fate itself.

But guite the reverse has happened. What we have received is one fundamentalist explanation after another, with each supersession giving added hope to the belief that something really ultimate lies beneath the series of external appearances. Thus history could be seen as the gradual peeling back of layer after layer of partially true explanations which promised an absolute truth as their end. Recently, however, this search for an ultimate prime mover has reversed its direction and it now appears that if there is any such thing as an overwhelming fate it has to be considered as the concatenation of many forces together into a system, but it is even doubtful that this implies necessity.² For even within a rigidly deterministic system there always exists the possibility of transcendence and this transcendence often has an indeterminate element of chance. In any case, we have continually made the mistake of substituting a single force for the general system and having given up beliefs in a transcendental existence have located it behind and external to us. Thus Karl Marx:

"When a society has discovered the natural law that determines its own movement, even then it can neither overleap the natural phases of

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fig. 1 Vehicle Assembly Building, Cape Kennedy, view of exterior. An example of "technological determinism." The fact that these objects transcend individual determinants and appear to be determined by many precise parameters gives them a certain moral, not to say religious, authority, especially among architects.

↓ fig. 2 Vehicle Assembly Building, Cape Kennedy, view of interior. The VAB, "the largest building in the world," is so large that it creates its own weather conditions in its interior.



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its evolution, nor shuffle them out of the world by a stroke of the pen. But this much it can do: it can shorten and lessen the birth pangs."³

Or as McLuhan later put it: "There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening." 4

In other words, fate is not altogether fatal as long as we are willing to go along with and understand it. A Czech proverb puts the acquiescence even better: "When rape is inevitable, lie back and enjoy it." In fact, this fatalism, and the examples of it that will be quoted shortly from modern architects, is merely weak determinism. It doesn't even have the virtue of strong determinism such as is found in the religion of Islam which argues that the inevitable is only inevitable because we cannot know it. Rather. weak determinism asserts that although we can be aware of natural laws and inevitable trends we are actually powerless to change them. Thus it tends to undermine our will and reconcile us to that which we think is beyond our power.

The effects of this attitude on the future are often so unfortunate that, as Bertrand De Jouvenel says, "it deserves to be battered in the most brutal manner." What effectively happens is that we deny that knowledge of a force allows us to do anything about it; we mistake an *inexorable* trend for an *inevitable* trend and thus implicitly mistake an "is" for an "ought." Or in terms of a former example, we assume the positive virtues of some evolutionary trend even when its correlation is that the "rich get richer and the poor relatively poorer." 6

What has been the attitude of intellectuals and leading architects toward these external forces or pressures? Obviously it has been varied: both critical and passive, moral and acquiescent. Yet there is a very strong tradition in modern architecture, and one can predict its continuance into the future, of appeals to the Zeitgeist, or the underlying spirit of history. One might even say there has been an attempt to coerce or stampede society into accepting certain trends which the architect favors, under the guise of making them appear inevitable. I would like to substantiate this statement, but in order to avoid the misunderstanding that I am attacking particular architects or the whole modern movement, rather than an attitude of weak determinism, I will cross quote from

a number of architects, all of whom I agree with in other contexts.

In the early twenties Le Corbusier said: "Industry, overwhelming us like a flood which rolls on toward its destined ends, has furnished us with new tools adapted to this new epoch. animated by the new spirit. Economic law unavoidably governs our acts and thoughts." He was followed shortly by Mies van der Rohe's "The individual is losing significance; his destiny is no longer what interests us. The decisive achievements in all fields are impersonal and their authors are for the most part unknown. They are part of the trend of our time toward anonymity." Both attitudes were summarized by Nikolaus Pevsner in his justification of the modern style in 1936: "However, the great creative brain will find its own way even in times of overpowering collective energy, even with the medium of this new style of the twentieth century, which, because it is a genuine style as opposed to a passing fashion, is totalitarian." Although the last word was perhaps a slip of the pen and was later changed to "universal," it is a significant slip, underlining the attitude of "overpowering energy" or "overwhelming flood" which is often connected with a particular style or technological determinism. Indeed we find a continuation of this tradition today in many places. Because of what he terms "an unhaltable trend to constantly accelerating change," Reyner Banham suggests to the architect that he "run with technology and discard his whole cultural load including the professional garments by which he is recognized as an architect" or else the "technological culture" will "go on without him"⁷ or Buckminster Fuller uses the example of the rigorously designed space technology, to chide architects for not keeping up with the Zeitgeist and lessening the birth pangs of history. Common to all these prophecies is the appeal to a mixture of both moral choice and amoral inevitability: the conflation of an "ought" with an "is," or "will be." This position then leads to a form of pragmatism that says whatever exists, or works, is alright, or successful.

This step to pragmatism is a natural consequence of weak determinism, and its pitfalls have long been pointed out—particularly with respect to intellectuals in Julien Benda's *La Trahison des Clercs* [The betrayal of the

clerics] (1927) and Noam Chomsky's American Power and the New Mandarins (1969). In fact the pitfalls are so well known (Time Magazine formulated them explicitly)⁸ that only one example among many will suffice to illustrate the problem. It concerns the way in which "the new intellectual elite," the pragmatists of the coming "Post-Industrial Society," discuss the bombing of North Vietnam. Instead of concerning themselves with whether it is moral in principle to intervene in a foreign country and bomb, or whether these principles apply in this particular case, they are concerned with whether or not it can be successful:

"I believe we can fairly say that unless it is severely provoked or unless the war succeeds fast, a democracy cannot choose war as an instrument of policy."

Chomsky comments:

"This is spoken in the tone of a true scientist correcting a few of the variables that entered into his computations—and, to be sure, Professor Pool is scornful of these 'anti-intellectuals,' such as Senator Fulbright, who do not comprehend 'the vital importance of applied social science for making the actions of our government in foreign areas more rational and humane than they have been.' In contrast to the anti-intellectuals, the applied social scientist understands that it is perfectly proper to 'rain death from the skies upon an area where there was no war,' so long as we 'succeed fast.'"

The social scientists whom Chomsky is referring to are the "New Mandarins," or the new class of intellectuals who tend to accept the assumptions and ideology of the status quo and then apply themselves to ameliorating its conditions. Their weak determinism consists in accepting the overall system, whatever it might be, and then applying their very real expertise to technological problems, to making the system more efficient, or humane, or smooth-running. Thus they are ready to make their peace with whatever system happens to be extant—whether it be a dictatorship, capitalism or Socialism claiming, in Daniel Bell's famous terms, "the end of ideology" and the fact that social problems are physical and technical rather than ideological.

The most extreme statement of this view and its consequences for the future comes from Buckminster Fuller:

"It seems perfectly clear that when there is enough to go around man will not fight anymore than he now fights for air. When man is successful in doing so much more with so much less that he can take care of everybody at a higher standard, then there will be no fundamental cause for war ...

Within ten years it will be normal for man to be successful—just as through all history it has been the norm for more than 99 per cent to be economic and physical failures. Politics will become obsolete."¹⁰

Aside from the naivety in assuming that most, if not all, wars are caused by a scarcity of material wealth, the most dubious part of Fuller's prediction consists in assuming that if man gave up his political power and turned the whole world over to administrators then all would be well. At best we would have well-fed sycophants; at worst we would live under the most successful form of Totalitarianism ever known, where no one was responsible for anything, where all tensions could be blamed on the system and where political action, or shaping collective destiny, had been perverted into occasional outbursts of violence. For, as shown in the study of past government and revolutions, when men hand over their political powers to a party or government which is not directly responsive to their will, they give up their fundamental right to shape their destiny and alternate between passive submission and violent aggression. 11 In politics, as in an individual's way of life, there is no such thing as efficiency or specialization. To say there is would be as absurd as saying that an individual is a specialist at living.

Nonetheless, weak determinists and pragmatists assume this when they accept the present situations of politics. They assume that whoever holds political power at a given time is fated to hold it and that, in any case, the political problems will "wither away" as the increases in production make plenty for everyone. It is therefore not surprising that the advocates of this view, let us call them "service intellectuals," will sell their services to whoever is in power.

For instance, when the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, many modern architects such as Gropius, Wassili Luckhardt and Mies van der Rohe made many pragmatic attempts to achieve conciliation. ¹² Gropius justified

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\$\fig. 3\$ Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Reichsbank, Berlin (elevation), 1933. The combination of "modern" and classical architecture in connection with the building of a national bank anticipates the analogous trends of many modern architects in the 1950s.



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fig. 4 → Guerrini, Lapadula, Romano, Palazzo della Civiltà Romana, EUR, Rome, 1942.





 $\mbox{\it fig.}\mbox{\it 7}$ Minoru Yamasaki, Northwestern National Life Insurance, Minneapolis, 1965.

1 fig. 6 Oscar Niemeyer, Palace of the Highland (seat of the president), Brasilia, 1961.



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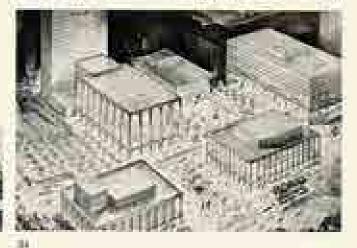


fig. 9 →
The architects of
Lincoln Center for
the Performing Arts
in New York.
Left to right:
Wallace Harrison,
Philip Johnson,
Pietro Belluschi,
Eero Saarinen,
Max Abramovitz, and
Gordon Bunshaft.



modern architecture in nationalistic terms, that is in terms of its "Germanness." Mies van der Rohe went so far as to sign a racist appeal from Schultze-Naumburg, an architect who was fascist enough to have dissenting artists "bludgeoned" by stormtroopers when he gave lectures on racist art. In fact as Sibyl Moholy-Nagy has written:

"When he (Mies) accepted in July 1933, after the coming to power of Hitler, the commission for the Reichsbank he was a traitor to all of us and a traitor to everything we had fought for. He signed at that time a patriotic appeal which Schultze-Naumburg had made as Commissar to the artists, writers and architects of Germany to put their forces behind National Socialism. I would say that, of the leading group of the Bauhaus people, Mies was the only one who signed. And he accepted this commission. This was a terrible stab in the back for us." 13

But Mies was hardly the only "pioneer of modern design" who made his private peace with the dominant power structure. Le Corbusier spent part of the year 1941 in Vichy trying to persuade the puppet regime to give him work.¹⁴ Frank Llovd Wright toured Russia at the invitation of the Soviet government at a time when one and a half million Bolsheviks were falling victim to the waves of purges. Philip Johnson, who supported one demagogical group after another, paid a visit to Hitler in Danzig just after the latter had invaded Poland to start the Second World War. 15 The case of the modern architects in Fascist Italy was even more conflicted, in part because Futurists such as Marinetti were fascinated by the aesthetic of power (he even wrote a Futurist pamphlet full of praise for the "aesthetic of war" after Ethiopia had been bombarded in 1934), and because Mussolini's Fascism concealed a decidedly rationalist and technicistic element ("he saw to it that the trains run on time"). Pier Luigi Nervi built plane hangars, and practically every "modern" architect of significance, from Ponti to Pagano and Terragni, worked for the regime in one way or another. 16 As so often in history, it seems that the architect—just like the banker and very much in contrast to the artist-must work for the ruling order if he wants to practice his profession.

The architecture commissioned by the Fascists (figs. 4, 8) has obvious formal parallels

to the later semiclassical modernism created under similar albeit somewhat more liberal social conditions. One could even speak of a classical style of repression, which can be found in Brasilia (fig. 6), Moscow (fig. 5), Minneapolis (fig. 7), and New York (figs. 10, 12), and which is so similar that it could suggest a natural connection between form and content, expression and social order—even if one knows that such deterministic connections are wrong in theory.¹⁷ The trend of classicism to ally with repression, and vice versa, almost seems to be an unalterable law or at least a matter of high probability. In any case, some architects got involved in a social order in the forties against which they had fought, more or less united, in the twenties.

The reasons why such incidents can occur among architects, who are otherwise rather uncompromising, remains obscure until we remember how explicitly "apolitical" they say they are. Their disdain or hatred for politics makes them all too willing to accept the political status quo—if only to pretend that it really doesn't exist and has withered away. Once we have realized this fatalism as well as its connection to pragmatism, several other structural connections become clear.

We see how Mies's statement "the individual is losing significance; his destiny is no longer what interests us," has parallels with Goebbels' "It is the most essential principle of our victoriously conquering movement that the individual has been dethroned." Or how Philip Johnson's defense of the "new craving for monumentality" under the Nazis is parallel to the "new craving for monumentality" in the United States thirty years later (figs. 7, 10, 12).18 These parallels can be drawn on social, psychological and formal levels. In fact they allow us to identify structural tendencies and thus in broad outline to predict the future. Thus one could point to the tendency for neo-classicism to recur, in America for instance, every twenty-five years, and its association with public building and communal design, and then predict that the next large revival will occur, significantly enough, around 1984 or so (see the self-conscious tradition). But here we come to the core of determinism and pragmatism, or the difference between an inexorable and inevitable trend.

In fact, it is a characteristic of all open or biological systems to become unbalanced. This is another way of saying that in all life there is always a trend toward something or other. The systematic pessimist about the future, for example, can collect all the negative trends, which he will have little trouble finding: the population explosion, the pollution explosion and the explosive growth of deadly weapons to take a few instances. Indeed, if things keep growing at their present rate, he can say that sometime in the twenty-first century there will not be any room to move in, everyone will be living in one, dense city, everyone will be wearing gas-masks when they leave their fallout shelters and all those people between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four who are not bureaucrats will be scientific hippies on a jag of LSD doing Research and Development for one large corporation, General, United Dynamics Inc. All the present trends show this to be inevitable; they are all growing at exponential rates. Thus the pragmatic thing to do would be to jump on all combined bandwagons at once—a recommendation that we actually hear from some architects such as Doxiadis.19 But, in fact, all trends do not continue indefinitely; they always reach a point of equilibrium either because counter-action is taken, because the environment is saturated or because of a counter-trend.

Counter-action depends on our knowing that a trend is inexorable, that if we do not decide to do something rather emphatic about it, it will continue into the future. Thus we may say, contrary to Marx and in accord with Islam, that the only social trends which are inevitable are those which we don't know about, and that the rest are inexorable and subject to our changing them. Fortunately, not all negative trends depend on our knowledge and desire for counter-action to disappear, but rather reach equilibrium because of an equal and opposite trend. For instance, the exponential growth of population, cities and pollution might be countered by a similar growth in contraceptive devices, decentralization, and exhaust converters. Any sophisticated accounting of trends will show how simple-minded it is to generate hysteria over any single trend such as the population explosion.²⁰ There are always enough balancing forces to make any particular

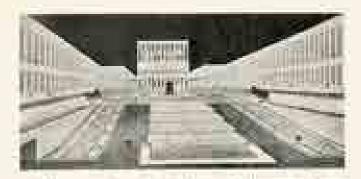
long-term imbalance improbable. Hence the characteristic S-curve of growth common to so many social and natural phenomena.

The importance for prediction of the S-curve, or Verhulst curve, cannot be overrated, as it represents the most typical and basic kind of force the forecaster tries to deal with. Essentially it is concerned with the growth of a force across time, or an imbalance or pressure within an open system. Often, as in the case of population growth, it is made up of many smaller growth forces which are usually misunderstood or neglected by initial assumptions. Thus many demographers predicted a population limit at too low a point because they did not assume large break-throughs in medicine, food cultivation and transport. Hence it is often safer to avoid specifying exact breakthroughs in advance and draw an hypothetical "envelope curve" over a series of superimposed S-curves and project this into the future. This method is used in predicting future transport speeds without predicting exact methods of vehicles to attain them.

However, the concept of the S-curve is introduced here not just to explain its general validity for prediction, but to emphasize the point that at any time there are always some imbalances in a system, which are felt as pressures. This overpowering feeling is probably as constant as the imbalances are perpetual. Since all open systems will remain inherently dynamic and unstable, it is quite likely that certain pragmatists and *weak determinists* will remain ready to exploit these changes without regard for their moral consequences. Thus one may postulate a perpetual "trahison des clercs" as long as their ideology persists.

Put in an entirely different way, we could say that there will always be "reasonable intellectuals" who regard systems as closed and deterministic, who say that given a trend X, certain consequences Y *must* follow. For instance, given our values of "liberty and equality" in housing, it must follow that we cannot achieve "fraternity." The anthropologist Edmund Leach has argued that the architect's desire to create "communities" based on kinship (or fraternity) naturally conflicts with the social values of democracy, liberty and equality.²¹ Thus it is eminently "reasonable" to argue as he did, that one may have either alternative but

↓ fig. 11 Luigi Moretti, Project for the Piazza Imperiale, EUR, Rome, 1941 (First prize *ex aequo*).



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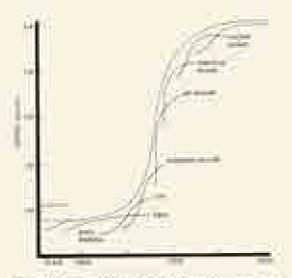


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If fig. 13 This S-curve (Verhulst curve) shows the growing speed of means of transportation over time. Frequently, exponential growth results from the sum of many individual growth trends that cannot be predicted. As a result, it often happens that the summarizing S-curve is placed too low.



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↓ fig. 14 The Flying Bedstead developed by Rolls Royce Inc.



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↓ fig. 15 Rocket Belt developed by Bell Aerosystems.



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← fig. 16 Hovercraft assault vehicle developed by Bell Aerosystems.

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"I Goess It Readly Is Time To Us Something About This"



† fig. 17 Surface-free vehicles have the obvious consequence that men can move anywhere independent of streets. This will entail legislation to control traffic and protect the private sphere.

not both. The problem with such thinking is that it does not allow for the fact that all systems can be dissected and restructured—or, in a word, transcended. The fatalism in this case consists in regarding all systems as wholistic rather than dissectible.

Dissectibility

Consider the tendency for all systems to form tightly interrelated wholes: in most societies, for instance, there has been a tight relationship between marriage, sexual pleasure and reproduction. In the large majority of cases, one could not have any part of the system without the whole. Now, however, because of changing values and increased technological control, it is possible to have sex without reproduction, marriage without reproduction and reproduction without sex or marriage. There are so many means at our disposal (including divorce and contraceptive devices),²² that we can dissect the related parts of the system and have those parts we desire in any new combination we wantfreed of the necessity of having them as a whole. This single example of dissectibility holds true for all wholistic systems, at least in principle; and its implications for the future are radically different from those put forward by most predictors. For it assumes that while there is a tendency for most systems to move inexorably in certain directions as interrelated wholes, it is always possible to dissect their positive from their negative consequences and, given sufficient effort, suppress the negative ones. To return to a former example, it was theoretically possible when the automobile came into use to foresee some of its negative consequences such as noise, congestion, and pollution. If these consequences had been predicted and if society had been willing to pay a certain price, we would not now be confronted with more costly alternatives.

The same ambivalence of forces confronts us at every moment. For instance, there have been under development for the last ten years various forms of vehicle which move independently of any surface, route, or road (figs. 14, 15). These vehicles are being developed, as Galbraith would predict, by the very largest corporations which can invest the necessary capital in specialist knowledge and production costs. Furthermore, they are being supported

by the military establishment as they have very obvious consequences for use in limited querilla warfare (fig. 16). If we apply the normal rule of thumb that "what the few have today, the many will have tomorrow" plus a sufficient time-lag between invention and mass-production of thirty vears—then we can see that by about 1990 we could have on a large scale the consequences that plague our airports even today (fig. 17). We have to dissect very consciously the obvious positive and negative consequences which these surface-free vehicles imply. On the positive side, they imply that men will be able to move over any surface they wish including ice, water and land and thus be able to cross all boundaries, which have hitherto divided vehicles into specialized types. This will have the effect of cutting some transit times in half, removing interchange points such as ports and stations and lessening such geographic obstacles as have previously constrained location. In short the trade routes will shift, along with political boundaries which are certified by natural obstacles. For instance, the political problems arising from the Suez or Panama Canal will have to move on to other constraints when hovercraft shipping becomes feasible. Cities will become more decentralized and location, due to economic factors, will take on a more even spread. As for the obvious negative consequences, they include the loss of visual and acoustic privacy, the invasion of secluded areas and the various forms of pollution with which we are already too well acquainted.

It is clear from this and other examples that to a large extent we are implicated with, and dependent on, very questionable forces and ideas. A large part of the hardware which we shall use in the future was used first in Vietnam, was developed for warfare by the largest monopolies in the world. Many of the ideas adopted here, such as the postindustrial society, come from those fatalists we have just criticized. The object of dissectibility is to take those consequences and ideas which we favor, cut away those we dislike and project forward the new combinations. This method avoids the either/or fatalism of accepting or rejecting wholistic systems the way they are presented to us. As a method, it is close to that natural evolution on which it depends; but as it demands the presence of human value and

intervention, it should be distinguished from the former concept as the idea of "critical evolution."

Critical evolution accepts—as the dualistic terminology already suggests—the tendency of inexorable trends to form a baseline for social coexistence; at the same time, however, it denies the fatality of these trends and confronts

them with the desires of society. It proceeds according to the usual scientific analytical method of dissecting an unmanipulable whole into manipulable components but then exceeds the purely scientific foundation in order to establish new combinations based on subjective and cultural values.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Julien Benda, La trahison des clercs (1927), an attack on those intellectuals who, leaving their traditional role of criticizing temporal power, have succumbed to various forms of nationalism and fanaticism because of their pragmatic philosophy.
- 2 For example, in structuralist terms the idea of the langue and in systems theory the idea of the "closed system." See Systems Thinking, ed. F. E. Emery (London: Penguin Books, 1969); Arthur Koestler, The Ghost in the Machine (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 197–221. Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology (New York: Basic Books, 1962), argues for "historical determinism" (240), but denies "mechanical causality" (233).
- 3 Preface to *Capital*, quoted from Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 51.
- 4 Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Massage* (London: Penguin Books, 1967).
- 5 Bertrand de Jouvenel, Forecasting and the Social Sciences, ed. Michael Young (London: Heinemann, 1968), 121; and Bertrand de Jouvenel, The Art of Conjecture (New York: Basic Books, 1967)—an excellent albeit somewhat conservative exposition of the philosophical problems underlying scientific prognoses.
- 6 For instance, by the year 2000 Herman Kahn predicts that per capita income in the USA will be about \$15,000 and in India \$200, compared to about \$4,000 and \$100 today (in 1965 US dollars).
- 7 The quotations are from Le Corbusier, Vers une architecture (Paris: Éditions Crès, 1923); Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Der Querschnitt (1924); Nikolaus Pevsner, Pioneers of Modern Design (1936); and Reyner Banham, Theory and Design in the First Machine Age (1960). Italics added by the author.

- 8 "The Tortured Role of the Intellectual in America," *Time Magazine*, May 9, 1969.
- 9 See *The New York Review of Books*, January 2 and 16, 1969. Chomsky's text was also published in his book *American Power and the New Mandarins* (London: Penguin, 1969).
- 10 See "2000 +," Architectural Design, February 1967, 63.
- 11 Hannah Arendt discusses the fact that when men hand over or lose political power they will resort to two species of violence: covert bureaucratic violence and overt coercion. In *Reflections on Violence*; see also *New York Review of Books*, February 27, 1969.
- 12 See B. M. Lane, Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–45 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 181.
- 13 Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, March 1965, 84.
- 14 See Stanislaus von Moos, Le Corbusier: Elemente einer Synthese (Frauenfeld-Stuttgart: Huber, 1968), 220, 236, 265–71. Le Corbusier's faith in authority cannot be discussed here; there are countless incriminating and extenuating arguments.
- 15 See William Shirer, *Berlin Diary* (New York, 1941), 213 (revealingly, this episode is not mentioned in the version of the book published in England).
- 16 See Giulia Veronesi, *Difficolta politiche dell'architettura in Italia* (Milan, 1958).
- 17 At least since Ferdinand de Saussure's first contributions to semiology (Cours de linguistique générale, 1915), the "random" or "unmotivated" nature of signs is generally known.
- 18 Philip Johnson, "Architecture in the Third Reich," *Hound and Horn*, 1934.

- 19 Indeed, Doxiadis uses the metaphor of jumping on a moving train of trends—a metaphor which is fatalistic and uncritical with respect to the "dissectibility" of forces
- 20 The following list of inexorable trends is divided crudely into those we might regard as positive and negative; some of them are mutually balancing:

Positive (?): exponential growth in scientists, intellectuals, universities, computers, education, students; information, knowledge, technology, Research and Development (3% of GNP), mass research, health, recreation, leisure; affluence, tertiary and quarternary services; discoveries, micro-miniaturizations, aerospace, speed, etc.

Negative (?): population, pollution, weaponry; bureaucrats, alienated, dispossessed, relatively poor; overcrowding, urbanization, suburbanization; fashion, pragmatists, middle class; centralization, loss of privacy, spying, waste, ugliness; small wars, change.

- 21 In a lecture at the Architectural Association, London, May 1, 1969. See *New Society*, May 9, 1969.
- 22 See G. R. Taylor, The Biological Time Bomb (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968). Whenever we do "dissect" holistic systems, we have to pay a very heavy price to make new combinations satisfactorily; another biological analogy of this "dissectibility" is transplant surgery in medicine (where the heavy price is immunosuppressive drugs).

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An earlier version of this essay was published in Charles Jencks's Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods (London, 1971). Studio Vista Ltd., London, has kindly granted permission to reprint large sections.

The Reconstruction of the Kornhaus in Freiburg im Breisgau

Author: Jürgen Paul

Source: *archithese*, 11 (1974): 11–19

Translated by: Steven Lindberg

and Several Observations on Architecture and Historical Understanding

In Freiburg im Breisgau, on the north side of the Münsterplatz, which had been completely destroyed during the war, the last remaining gap was closed with the reconstruction of the Altes Kornhaus [Old Granary] (fig. 1) in 1970–71. The building that had stood there until its utter destruction in 1944 had been built in 1497 as a municipal dance hall and granary. Despite several conversions of the interior, most recently into a concert hall, that had also caused changes to the exterior—on the ground floor and the sides—it had preserved its late Gothic form with a stepped gable and elaborate cross windows and was one of the outstanding historical architectural landmarks of old Freiburg (fig. 2).

After its complete destruction, its reconstruction was heatedly debated for years, for reasons of architectural principle and economics. A series of new uses of diverse cultural character were discussed until finally a private group of companies took the problem of its use and funding out of the hands of the city, the building's owner.

An architectural competition was announced to design a historically faithful reconstruction of the two gabled facades. The design, which was carried out with subsidies from the preservation authorities, fulfills this task but has

nothing else in common with the historical building's technique and interior subdivision.

Behind the gabled facades stands a six-story skeleton construction whose two main floors under the gable of the facade contain three interior floors and extends to three-fourths of the roof height. The roof slope up to that height is a concrete shell above which lies a small. doubled remnant of a roof truss that has been flattened on top and contains the ducts. The gabled facades, which were previously made of undressed stone with frames of hewn stone, were constructed from bricks, entirely independently of the structure of the skeleton. The stonemasonry is colored cast stone; the former corner ashlar was simulated with thin slabs. The form of the lower floors was slightly altered to accommodate three floors: the center arch on the ground floor was tripled in front and back. The side facades are modern in design with exposed concrete and washed-concrete infill.

The building, which receives natural light through elongated triangular openings that follow the vanishing lines from the cellars to the ceiling, is used commercially by restaurants, cafés, night bars, smaller shops and boutiques, and a few offices.

Der Wiederaufbau des Kornhauses in Freiburg i.B.

und einige Betrachtungen über Architektur und Geschichtsverständnis





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La reconstruction du «Korehaues à Tribourg en Bringas

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Although the reconstruction of the Kornhaus in Freiburg is a business venture in which every square centimeter has been filled to bring in profit, its purpose is to return to the city a historical building. But is this new "Altes Kornhaus" still, or once again, a historical building? It is futile to quarrel over the value of authenticity regarding building history. The Kornhaus is a historical building in its brief; to fulfill that brief, however, it is also a twentieth-century building. It belongs to that immense army of historical architectural landmarks that were rebuilt after the destruction of the last war. After the at times vehement debates of the early postwar years about whether to reconstruct them, we have in the meantime grown used to them and stopped thinking much about them and the motivations that led to their reconstruction. We always view them - both the single building and the restored historical image of the city, with its reconstructed cathedral and reused baroque facade, the Renaissance portal inserted into a new building, or the relocated half-timbered building-with very different eyes, sometimes as authentic documents of history, sometimes as a reflection of something lost, in isolation or as part of an urban-planning context, but always primarily as a historical object. They all have in common that they have not been removed as a worthless ruin but rather restored. As a result, even when their form has regained so very precisely the old image, as sociological products they are twentieth-century architecture. Even when we can scarcely see them as our era's legitimate contribution to the history of architecture, these reconstructed images of history are just as important as an expression of our time-of its self-image and its relationship to the present and to history—as is modern architecture.

The new Kornhaus is the late consequence of the general historical concept of the reconstruction of Freiburg's center. There are, however, fundamental differences between the one and the other in the concern with and criteria for historical architecture that reflect a crucial change in the relationship to history and the historical object in now nearly thirty years of postwar history. This example was chosen in order to make several observations on that subject.

The reconstruction of Freiburg's old town is based on then-municipal director of building

Schlippe's development plan of 1946, which countered the optimistic programs motivated by the impetus in the early days for a radical new order and total rebuilding of the cities on the basis of tabula rasa and principles of modern urban planning and modern architecture oriented around economics and technology with a compromise solution seeking to restore the old order. 1 Schlippe's plan for Freiburg represents with rare consistency (plans for nearly all blocks of the destroyed old town had, by that time, been carefully laid out) the attitude and objectives of the conservative side in the embittered conflict then being fought over the question of the reconstruction of historical cities in which both sides postulated their programs as an ethical mission: on the one hand, the requirement of the present and the necessity of vital self-confidence and historical honesty; on the other hand, the obligation to the everlasting, timelessly valid values of the past as a cultural mission.

Schlippe's plan for Freiburg set itself the task of restoring the character of the medieval look of the city by preserving the elements that were perceived as essential: preserving the planned lavout of this Zähringer town, which was recognized as an urban-planning work of art, with its lines of streets and facades; preserving a limited and uniform overall height subordinated to the dominance of the cathedral; restoring the small-scale structure of individual homes of burghers; retaining the local housing type on the eave side: steep roof, executed with appropriate masonry technique, coherent surface form, and large windows; restoration of the partially destroyed important architectural landmarks; and reuse of historical architectural parts that had been preserved (figs. 3, 4).

Our concern here is not an architectural or urban-planning assessment of this program, or of that which was offered as an alternative at the time, but rather the question of which principle of the theory of history and art it reveals. A reconstruction like that of Freiburg rejects the reproduction of the city that was destroyed. It was instead intended as a revival of a familiar architectural structure in which one saw not only an artistic value but the expression of a way of life; namely, that of the historical city as the visible and experienceable form of an unbroken historical and national continuity.

The reconstruction was thus justified as the fulfillment of an ethical requirement not to undo the destruction of historicity caused by the catastrophe of the war—as had been done in Warsaw—but to repair the torn historical thread. It was supposed to restore the unity of historicity and contemporaneity in the ideal image of a historical city that can also function as a modern city, as an architectonic image of a compressed historicity, as a historical novel, so to speak, built in a language that freely connects to the past—comparable to, say, Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*; and the spirit of the educated bourgeoisie à la Mann is in fact what was expressed here.

Reading the apologies for this and similar reconstruction programs, one encounters a wealth of biological and musical analogies in which the destroyed city is compared to a multicellular creature whose injuries are healed not by rebuilding the individual destroyed part as a dead backdrop, not by aping faded melodies, but by taking up the old rhythm again, so that the old harmony will resound again, by growing new tissue over the old bone. This vitalist metaphor reveals the antirational philosophy of life with romantic features that runs through the entire nineteenth century as an antithesis to positivism, materialism, and faith in progress and lives on unbroken in twentieth-century architecture alongside and opposed to functionalism and the aesthetic of technology. And the image of lebensraum that is recreated in this reconstruction—a medieval city of artisans and the bourgeoisie centered around the church corresponds to this movement's ideal image of a middle-class society opposed to the metropolis, industrialization, and technology (fig. 5).

Artistically, after all, this image of the city is a reformation of certain aesthetic categories of experience of a modern reception of historical urban planning and architectural history: scale, restricting dimensions and compartmentalization, irregular lines, limited individuality within a larger order, a self-contained structure of open spaces, and an organic ethics of materials. What is revealed here is the urban planning ideal of the aesthetic of empathy of Camillo Sitte and his followers and the principles of the traditionalist architecture movement in the manner of Theodor Fischer and Schultze-Naumburg, with their fierce rejection of functionalist urban planning, the

technological aesthetic, and the high-rise. With an awareness of an unbroken artistic tradition based on timeless values, this urban-planning synthesis of old and new is the model of a social utopia of the identity of history and present, that counters the relentless demands of the modern metropolis of capitalism. That this model could not get far, because it contradicts the social and economic preconditions and was therefore soon overrun by architectural developments, is demonstrated by what the city of Freiburg ultimately became with the increasing alteration of Schlippe's plan and is only too clear just as in all the other reconstructed cities.

The artistic program of Freiburg's reconstruction plan distinguishes, in sternly moral terms, between recreating and copying, between the repeatable and unrepeatable aspects of historical form. The artistic object is thereby divided into two formal spheres: an overall form and an individual form. This corresponds to a specific level of the theory of historical preservation as found, for example, in the statements of Paul Clemens. Very much in contrast to Dehio's positivist stance, Clemens postulates a symbolic value of the historical object that goes beyond its physical existence as an individual document of history. Clemens, who, as we know, lived to experience the destruction of the Second World War, also belongs to the theoretical advocates of a historical reconstruction in the form of a free recreation of specific values of formal structure.

The crucial problem with this concept, from the viewpoint of historical preservation, is defining the hypothetical line between the universal form of the symbolic value that is elevated over the decline of history and the individual form tied to a time. Famously, this line was drawn anew and differently over and over in debates of often moral and ideological vehemence, from the Prinzipalmarkt in Münster to the cathedral in Würzburg, from the Goethehaus in Frankfurt to the Marktplatz in Hildesheim. Several factors play a role in this, having to do with the understanding of style—that is, the aesthetic closeness to or distance from specific historical styles—with the problems of the theory of materials, and with the individual emotional value of the historical object. The most essential criterion was the distinction between architectonic form and decorative form. Despite its claim

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1 fig. 3 Joseph Schlippe, development plan for Freiburg im Breisgau (1946).





1 fig. 4 Typical street facade based on Schlippe's plan.

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Die feutige Nattalgieselle und die extetionale Rücklehr zu festprligten Formen ist eine Flachtbeseigung mit deren totales Konsequerren, das Embartiss, des in dieser zweiten Phase der Nochanlagsson brackstromen zeichnisuben Arbeitswolf eine zum undere schöhere Retervolmssit ordgegenzusterlen, doch micht als to historical absoluteness, this aesthetic dissection of the historical object is clearly a passive interpretation. The qualities of historical experience that underlie the simplified reconstructions of cityscapes and the sparsely re-Romanesqued cathedral of Hildesheim or the concrete patterns of the new vault of St. Michael in Munich amount to a reduction to the abstract basic structures of volume and space, line and outline, plane and proportions as modern art employs them. This becomes most clear in the decoratively simplified or completely undecorated reconstruction of baroque interiors, such as the sharp-edged, contour-like redesign in 1952 of the Heiliggeistkirche [Church of the Holy Spirit] in Munich, which at the time was considered an exemplary reconstruction solution (figs. 6.7).

How does the new Kornhaus in Freiburg relate to the historical reconstruction program for Freiburg's old town? The very fact that an architectural monument of which none of its original fabric remained to which it could be connected was nevertheless reconstructed decidedly violates the philosophy of life that the historical city should be organically healed like a living creature. In the first postwar phase, for example, the idea of reconstructing the Knochenhaueramtshaus [Butchers' Guild Hall] in Hildesheim was abandoned with heavy heart because neither its fabric nor its context existed any longer, and the reconstruction of the Goethehaus of 1949, which was vehemently attacked by preservationists and architects, was quiltily justified with decorations taken from storage and existing remnants on the ground floor.

Moreover, the reconstructed Kornhaus in Freiburg dispensed not only with an organic connection of "old" and "new" in its construction; the formal and material contrast of the directly clashing antitheses of copies of historical gables and modern side facades and the view through the undivided large panes into the modern interior were compelled as qualities of the design.

In the spirit of the original reconstruction concept, this new Kornhaus would have been seen as a dishonest, filled-in, historical mock-up—the exact opposite of what was wanted. Yet clearly the former ambition for the reconstruction of historical buildings was no longer relevant. The merely faked corner ashlar and the faux material of the decorative parts show that these

historical facades are not intended to be anything other than a stage set, a production achieved by economic means, attached to the front of a building of modern design that is displayed as openly as possible (the same thing has been practiced in recent years with existing facades).

One especially revealing motif is the long, unfolded triangles of the roof openings. In connection with the gables and the steep roof, they seem like a playfully defamiliarized paraphrase of historical dormer windows. Defamiliarized implementation of historical forms, literal copy, even using modern materials, and a recherché antithesis of old and new—these are the phenomena encountered today in a wide range of artistic contexts: in pop art as well as home decorating (Gothic Madonna in front of a white wall), in advertising, in fashion, in music (Kagel's Beethoven '70), and in the theater (The "Naked" Hamlet).

In architecture, the programmatic unity of old and new has broken down. The compromise architecture of the early postwar years has evolved, on the one hand, into an abstract, historicizing architecture of adaptation and allusion that is spreading especially in the context of renovating old towns. More and more, gabled house abstraction in concrete or grid curtain facades—a form in which all that remains of the former complex ambitions are the formal criteria of scale and outline (fig. 8)—are superseded by more imaginative, playful defamiliarizations and realizations of historical forms (fig. 9).

The willingness, on the other hand, to faithfully copy or reproduce details is also revealed in the suddenly universal, enthusiastic assessment of the reconstructions in Poland that were previously vehemently criticized, at least in the West, as well as in the high praise that the once equally vehemently rejected reconstruction of the Goethehaus in Frankfurt now gets from preservationists, and in the newer reconstructions of destroyed historical buildings and spaces. The Heiliggeistkirche, whose sparse form of 1951 was considered to be final, has recently been given a precise reconstruction of the details of its stucco and fresco decoration.

Famously, this is not an isolated case: the Erbdrostenhof [High Steward's Court] and the Clemenskirche [St. Clement's Church] in

Münster, the Würzburg and Munich Residences, and the Klosterkirche [Monastic Church] in Kreuzlingen, Switzerland, are just some examples chosen at random. The plans to reconstruct the Leibnizhaus in Hanover in another location and now to rebuild the Knochenhaueramtshaus, even though its place has long since been occupied, are particularly pronounced examples.²

The point of these observations is not to evaluate these things from the perspective of historical preservation or as artistic products. Rather, it is intended as an effort to say something about the motifs they produce and the needs they satisfy. Seen from that perspective, the defamiliarization and copying of historical forms go together as documents not of history but of our relationship to history. The unlimited freedom with which the historical object is used today is a logical continuation of the long process of art becoming autonomous and the ultimately excessive expansion of the artistic experience, which has now also discovered free play with historical form in the *musée imaginaire* of universal history as a new, additional aesthetic dimension. It is not, however, merely a new form of artistic or fashionable taste but rather a changed relationship to the historical object that lends it a new function, a transformation that has evolved in a slow transition from the early postwar period.

The use of the historical that we find today is anything but a total historicism and rather belongs to certain, demarcated spheres of life: the cultural scene, the worlds of leisure and privacy, but not to the everyday, the world of the economy and work. The fact that boutiques and chic stores were located in the Kornhaus in Freiburg and that one of them insisted on the name "Ratskeller" [Town Hall Cellar], which makes no sense at all there, is just as characteristic as the now fashionable style of decorating the interiors of restaurants with lots of wood paneling, wrought iron, and turned chair legs, as well as the forms of the exclusive vacation spots on the Côte d'Azur or the reconstruction of the Munich opera house, whose auditorium has been shifted several meters but reconstructed more faithfully than ever before.

The historical reconstruction of the early postwar period set itself the ambitious goal of creating a total unity of history and present as a universally valid way of living that unites culture and the work world. This romantic utopia, borne by the spirit of the educated bourgeoisie, has, where it could gain a foothold, been assimilated into the economic and technical requirements of the development that resulted from the postwar economic miracle, its social and economic changes, its optimism and faith in progress—and the architecture of the city that resulted from it.

Today's wave of nostalgia and emotional return to historical forms is a flight from its ultimate consequences, reflecting the need for a completely different, more beautiful reserve world to counter the technological work world created in this second phase of the postwar period—not as a total ideological antithesis but merely as a supplement.

The new emotional popularity of preserving old towns results not from a new interest in history that has suddenly seized all social strata. People today prefer to live in modern housing, but they prefer to see old buildings; people satisfy their practical needs with modern architecture, but they spend their leisure time and prefer to see themselves represented by historical architecture. Old towns and historical buildings derive their significance above all from their connection to this reserve world. The Kornhaus in Freiburg would not have been rebuilt so late if it had not been located on the tourist center Münsterplatz. Other historical buildings in remote locations of the same old town were being demolished at the very same time.

Nevertheless, we have begun to develop this sociologically constantly growing reserve world by, among other ways, the now popular use of historical forms for aesthetic appeals. Because the historical object is no longer identified as a document of history (being adopted free of content) and because formal affinities to specific historical styles have also become less significant as a result of aesthetic pluralism, the entire store of history is available for arbitrary use.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Joseph Schlippe, "Der Wiederaufbauplan für Freiburg," Die neue Stadt 1 (1947): 115–22; Joseph Schlippe, Freiburger Almanach 1 (1950): 13–47; Freiburger Almanach 10 (1959): 73–101; and Badische Heimat 39 (1959): 214–71.
- 2 See Deutsche Kunst und Denkmalpflege, 1965–68.





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History as a Part of Architectural Theory

Notes on New Projects for Zurich, Bellinzona, Modena, and Muggiò Authors: Bruno Reichlin Fabio Reinhart

Source: *archithese*, 11 (1974): 20–29

Translated by: Steven Lindberg

the following convictions and insights: the conviction that the fundamental problems of restoring and building in the historical context are those of architecture as a whole. the insight into the need for an "operative critique" that tries to unite thought and action by basing historical analysis, architectural criticism, and design on the same criteria (an approach that has nothing to do, however, with the naive "imperialist" idea of fusing the historical and the architectural disciplines). These insights or hypotheses are based in turn on convictions: convictions, on the one hand, about the issue that is to be assumed as the specific significance of architecture and, on the other hand, about the consequences that result from the assumption that the semantic content of architecture is defined in each case only within the field of reference of architecture's own tradition. We understand tradition to mean

both the works and the understanding we have

of them. We refer to the more comprehensive

definition that H. H. Holz offers in "Tradition

und Traditionsbruch" [Tradition and Breaking

with Tradition]: "Tradition is ... an anthropological

The intent of this article is to roughly

outline an approach to architecture based on

category as much as an epistemological one, since we are only present to the extent we have absorbed the past into us, and we know only insofar as we absorb what we have not experienced ourselves in existing forms of thought and expand it."

These merely suggestively elaborated fundamental reflections on the problem of "significance" in architecture, which are far from forming a coherent theory, stand at the beginning of the studies and efforts that can be discovered in the work of Aldo Rossi (L'architettura della citta [The Architecture of the City]) and his circle, above all in the fields of semiological studies (especially those that appeal to Russian formalism or should be ascribed to structuralism of French influence), and finally in certain orientations of more recent American architecture.

These reflections will be briefly summarized in what follows. Subsequently, we will attempt at least to explain their operative scope for criticism and design in the discussion of designs and buildings.

The study of the architecture of the city, the analysis of modern buildings, and design activity itself represent structurally interrelated attempts

to understand architecture as a sign. Dealing with architecture in this way tends toward an operative discourse on the relationship—and on the nature of this relationship—that ties an empirical object (architecture) to the cognitive experience that belongs to it and that is developed from it. That means, in other words: this empirical object becomes the signifier of a sign that, on the one hand, finds its signified in the most general context of the social life and of the institutions of society in which it occurs. On the other hand, architecture creates its signified itself insofar as every example of architecture essentially reflects its own "nature" (the autoriflessività of the work of art). In this view, the significance (signified) of a work of architecture is providing an object with "meaning": a meaning that is inherent in social use in the broadest framework. In the process, the activities of design and of historical-critical analysis are assigned a categorically preferred role in that they try to capture the meaning of the history of the creation of architecture and the gene-specific significance of their object; that is, its particular quality as an architectural work of art. This significance refers to, on the one hand, a typological, morphological, technological-constructional, functional, iconographic, and finally ideological knowledge and, on the other hand, to the epistemology of architecture as a specific product according to the concepts and categories of the theory of architecture. The task of an architectural semantics would be to develop a terminology that would permit one to describe, study, and classify architectural significances abstractly defined in this way.

For us architects—and this will subsequently represent a necessary restriction—the activity of design stands in the foreground. We try to explain in the process that along with the architectural work its significance is created as well. The synthetic aspect of our study is thus the work, the design; this procedure, however, makes use of diverse, eclectic approaches that are continually modified and perfected as work progresses. This procedure is justified by the conviction (already expressed above) that the fundamental dimension of architectural significance lies in the reference of architectural language to itself (autoriflessività). That is, to the same extent that architecture develops on

its own foundation, it signifies its own logical construction. Aldo Rossi elaborates on this. commenting that historical works of architecture such as "Roman monuments, Renaissance Palazzi, Gothic cathedrals, constitute architecture and are part of its construction. As such they will not only come back as history and memory, but as elements of design." In this view, then, the history of architecture is not an enormous field of stored experiences, design results, and attempted possibilities but the site where the significance of architecture is defined according to our interpretation. Every work refers conversely to the history of its own type, to the relevant reference to technology, to nature, to related figurative phenomena, and so on. Understanding the significance of an architecture work thus means situating it in a dense network of relationships, assigning it a place in a value system. Under such conditions, the concept of context takes on a new, more comprehensive dimension. We can speak of a context in presenza (the architecture of the place, the usual "historical" context); we can also supplement this by the context in assenza and by that mean, roughly, the architectural imagination that produced a project by way of manifold associations, the formative energies that emerge from grappling with the history of architecture, and so on. Building is thus always a building in context, even if the latter is not physically tangible.

Architectural significance is understood in a way similar to that of a language: it is a system—albeit one that is constantly evolving a coherent whole of parts whose generative rules have to be learned arduously in practice. We speak this language and are spoken by it. A study that attempts to inventory the typological, morphological, technological-functional norms that are defined by a historically datable collective use obtains an exact meaning in this way. For the design, these insights make possible the articulation of an exact and intelligible discourse insofar as the various codes are updated in an acte de parole. This updating is unique and unrepeatable because it is also tied to a specific site and to the architect's will to express. Given the self-referential, "self-reflexive" language of architecture, it is necessary to explore how this "self-reflexivity"

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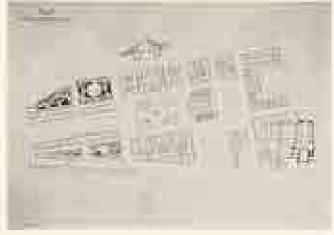
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 $\rm I$ fig. 1 $\,$ Reichlin / Reinhart: Project for developing the Kratz neighborhood in Zurich. View from Fraumünsterstrasse (1973).

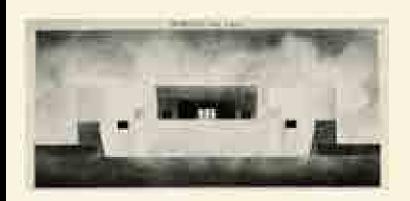


← fig. 2 Model seen from above. Left: the lake; below: Limmat River with the Bauschänzli [artificial island].



← fig. 3 Gottfried Semper, Project for a new neighborhood in Kratz (1858).

↓ fig. 4 Reichlin / Reinhart: View of the complex of new buildings seen from the lake.



→ fig. 5 Project for a design of the lakeshore in Zurich, 1926.

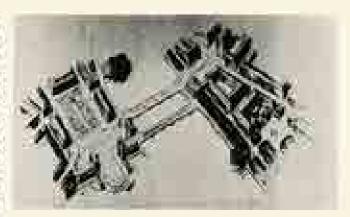
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reveals itself. It is like the postulate of an architectural poetics; that is, like a theory immanent to architecture that works out categories that are suitable to grasping simultaneously the unity and difference of all architectural works and hence the poetic procedures that can be found there.

The systematic analysis of works of architecture must lead to the determination of poetic structures and at the same time verify whether concepts such as homology between different systems (typological, distributive, static, constructional, and so on), comparison, norm and the violation of norm, alienation, and so on, are suited to describing the nature of architectural discourse.

Zurich

The first design we introduce was worked out especially for an exhibition of design studies for the international architecture section of the fifteenth Triennale di Milano. The hypotheses put forward with it were used as an operative model: from the choice of site to the typological form to the morphological and detailed decisions, the project intends to spark a discourse on architecture, on the image of the city of Zurich and, in particular, its built and conceived architectures. We will describe the design from this viewpoint.

If in Zurich, as someone once incisively remarked, culture and bustling public spirit have lent the city, with its Bahnhofstrasse and lakeside quays, an ideological visage, these two elements have also decisively shaped the individuality of the city. In one instance, however, the stubborn will to self-celebration did not provide an architectural solution. Despite repeated attempts, the seam between Bahnhofstrasse and the lakeside quays has remained an unresolved point in the nineteenth-century system for the city.

The difficulties have left their traces in the contradictions of urban planning, in a series of design ideas, and in the unique topographic features of the place.

Indeed, this zone, created largely by a series of land reclamations (from 1834 to 1885) has inspired entire generations of architects to interpret and develop an idea from Gottfried Semper. In a competition in 1858, he had

proposed opening up the city to the lake and freeing it of its traditional orientation toward the river. Although the neighborhood today has preserved Semper's schema in broad outlines, the creation of the quay—by orienting all of the buildings equally toward the lake—deprived it of the significance Semper wanted to give it. Today's modest panorama terrace is merely a stopgap that betrays the embarrassment over this unresolved conflict.

The later proposals explain the nature of the architectural problem. In the competition of 1924, several designers proposed a scenographic doubling of Semper's structure in the lake on the other side of the quay, albeit taking into account the axial structure of the arrangement of the neighborhood. Other designers, in contrast, revealed a greater distance from if not already a misunderstanding of—the cityscape until that point, seeking the point of departure for their composition solely in the topographical feature—for example, one project would have constructed a seam (caesura) between the river and the lake and completely altered the entire neighborhood with a "romantically" autonomous composition of volumes.

The public spaces facing the lake find their point of reference in the typology of the Kappelerhof and the Zentralhof. The urban and semipublic character of these courtyard structures (in their day, they were called "squares") is radicalized and fused with the image of a rationalist development whose basis is ambivalently assigned a place between nature and architecture. This image has remote but not coincidental points of reference in the ideal construction of the Temple of Solomon by Fischer von Erlach but also in Hilberseimer's concept of the vertical city. Although from the city the project still looks like a large palace closely related to the architecture of the neighborhood, the interior design prefigures an autonomous section of city, with apartments, public buildings, and squares—a city typologically so very different from Zurich that the iuxtaposition results in a valid paradigmatic reference. The effectiveness of this synoptic account of the city is sought in a typological and iconographic-emblematic reference: the rationalist development stands for residential architecture; the architecture of the Enlightenment, tempered by a Swiss rationalism that strives for a neoclassicism, stands for public buildings.

The juxtaposition of architecture versus nature finds its continuation in the transformations of the *basamento* [base] that develop the "naturalist" connotations of this element. Already on the street facades, the *rustico* character of the *basamento* is emphasized more than on the buildings in the neighborhood.

Where the building extends to the lake, this element takes on increasingly clear topographical connotations and ends at a steep terrace sloping down toward the water.

The rowhouses of the development are organized on three floors. The drawing of the prospects reveals the analytical nature of the rationalist methods and results to which they refer. The form is supposed to adapt to the trace of the sense—as a paraphrase of Pope's advice to the poet: "The sound must seem an echo to the sense."

In the design, we find two inclined levels: the first connects the development and the city by overcoming the height of the base; the other opens the development to the lake. The drawing of the latter—an enlarged fragment of the piazza adjacent to Canova's temple in Possagno—emphasizes the oriented character of the square.

This project derives its form from the discussion of the previous designs. And by taking up these designs, it ultimately provides an assessment of them. Semper's idea of an architectural park projecting like a wedge into the lake is achieved by the inclined level, just as it is situated outside the quay, at the fulcrum between the lake and the river; as in Semper's design, a public building is standing on the main axis of the panoramic terrace.

The design comprises two elements that extend the slightly converging lines of Bahnhof-strasse and Fraumünsterstrasse out to the lake and demarcate, with the short sides where the public buildings are located (the covered square and the pavilion above the lake), an inner, open courtyard. The long, ribbon-like building volumes are divided vertically into two zones: the lower one, accessible from the level of the city, has retail stores on the ground floor and mezzanine. The upper zone, accessed via a

loggia six meters above street level, comprises primarily three-story row apartments and, in the section above the street, office and commercial spaces, as well as, in a small courtyard on the top floor, small apartments.

Corresponding to the hypothesis based on architectural language relating to itself is the will to determine exactly the object and the way of addressing it in one's own design. The design includes, at least as an objet trouvé, the context of reference that it established for itself and that it sets as an example: context *in presenza*—the architecture of the place—and context *in assenza*—the designs and buildings evoked by association (in an iconographic montage). We will go into somewhat more detail about that.

The vertical division of the design into two parts has its precise correspondence in the architecture of the nineteenth-century neighborhood: the Zentralhof and the Kappelerhof with their upscale businesses on the ground floor and mezzanine and prestige apartments on the upper stories propose as models the design of a conflict that emerged along with the capitalist city: the separation of the place of work and that of living. This distributive separation into two relates analogously to the stylistic differentiation of the exterior. Iconographically, the rustic wall assigns the role of the base to the ground floor and mezzanine. The column orders, which are often reduced to ciphers even on main facades, are, as a rule, limited to the upper stories. A revealing juxtaposition in the distribution systems: apartments versus commercial spaces. And iconographic juxtaposition in the system of styles: naturalistic versus nonnaturalistic architectural elements correspond to one another in a "unity of two."

Few requirements of the nineteenth century could be expressed in as unmistakable a building type as the gallery, a creation of private speculation in the retail trade. That a place of honor is granted to this building type in the unbuilt parts of Zurich is no coincidence. One is almost tempted to attribute the later designs of a gallery in the form of an autonomous building on the quay, between cultural institutions, more to a sense of incompleteness than to a real need. A gallery—significantly at the opposite end of Bahnhofstrasse from the train station—completes as an equal element the iconographic





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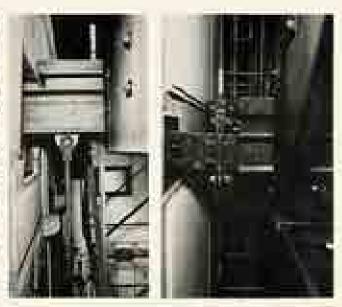
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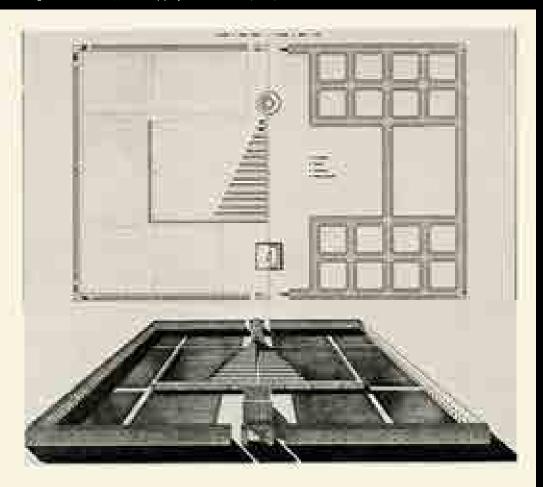


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↓ fig. 11 Aldo Rossi, Cemetery project for Modena (1971).



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outfitting of the nineteenth-century city, which even today offers the flaneur the deceptive image of the metropolis, of cosmopolitan generosity and liberalism. In correspondence with the canonic description of the type, it is connected by two streets, which seem equals on the map but not in actual use: Bahnhofstrasse and Fraumünsterstrasse. The latter remains a torso despite plans proposing to continue it through the entire historical center in parallel with the former.

The insertion of a round element between two slightly converging, tangential volumes, following the arbitrary geometric form of the property, enriches the plan with the compositional complications that yielded many bravura works of nineteenth-century architecture.

Bellinzona

In the second example presented here the restoration of the Castello di Montebello in Bellinzona—the old Visconti fortification and the new structures seem to be in a relationship of morphological, technological, and static inequality. On closer inspection, these contradictions can be traced back to deliberately calculated analogies in the form of antitheses. The first concerns two static principles (tension and compression): a metal structure is suspended on the thick walls of the tower. The second concerns different technological conceptions: a minimum of differentiation (functional morphology of the rough stone construction of the castle); highest degree of differentiation of the new construction in metal and wood (joints, gears, plates, bolts, double-T profiles, and so on), which are, however, also to be understood as a conscious thematic choice that integrates the overall design. The uniformity of the treatment of the details in the joint areas and the profiles also contrasts with this discontinuous assemblage. The third antithesis concerns the different morphologies: geometric indifference in the irregular old building; perfected geometry with the square as a basic form in the new construction.

In view of an architecture richly laden with meanings, as represented precisely by a medieval castle with all its fabulous backgrounds, the restoration of the Castello di Montebello seeks to bridge the distance between old and new based on the principle of the antithesis (*figure de style par rapprochement*) and at the same time tries to overcome the limits of a historicizing, adapting restoration that neither leaves free play for the imagination nor believes in the possibilities of a genuine integration. The old and the new structure correspond perfectly in the definition of the common place as a vertically determined, dynamic unity. Accordingly, the entire museum becomes a continuous sequence of spatial cells that follows rhythmically from half-landing to half-landing and avoids the brutal subdivision into one floor boringly stacked above another.

Modena

Few works of architecture mirror so directly and with such great intensity the historical meaning of architectural forms as does Aldo Rossi's project for the San Cataldo Cemetery in Modena. The image evoked is very closely tied to the typological tradition of the cemetery: the city of the dead as the correspondence to the city of the living. Let us follow the architect's description: "Together, all of the buildings read as a city in which the private relationship with death happens to be the civil relationship with the institution. Thus the cemetery is also a public building with an inherent clarity in its circulation and its land use. Externally, it is closed by a fenestrated wall.

The elegiac theme does not separate it much from other public buildings. Its order and its location also contain the bureaucratic aspect of death. The project attempts to solve the most important technical issues in the same manner as they are solved when designing a house, a school, or a hotel. As opposed to a house, a school, or a hotel, where life itself modifies the work and its growth in time, the cemetery foresees all modifications; in the cemetery, time possesses a different dimension. Faced with this relationship, architecture can only use its given elements, refusing any suggestion not born out of its own making; therefore, the references to the cemetery are also found in the architecture of the cemetery, the house, and the city. Here, the monument is analogous to the relationship between life and buildings in the modern city. The cube is an abandoned or unfinished house; the cone

is the chimney of a deserted factory. The analogy with death is possible only when dealing with the finished object, with the end of all things: any relationship, other than that of the deserted house and the abandoned work, is consequently untransmittable. ... Death expressed a state of transition between two conditions, the borders of which were not clearly defined. The urns, shaped like Etruscan houses, and the Roman Baker's tomb express the everlasting relationship between the deserted house and the abandoned work."

Muggiò

Aldo Rossi's design for the town hall in Muggiò in the province of Milan shows how architecture can find its points of reference in other artistic genres as well, in the realm of the figurative. Because an image in its selective-synthesizing character represents a conscious cultural choice, it can function as a decided point of reference and paradigm in the construction of meaning.

In a context lacking in individualizing architectural and urban planning elements, such as that of a small town on the periphery of Milan, the reference to the Italian squares portrayed by the painter de Chirico can lend individuality to an anonymous urban planning site.

A Side-Glance at Ernst May and the "Römerstadt" Housing Development

Our final example demonstrates impressively how even the works of modern architecture—that is, a trend with a decidedly antihistorical gesture—obtain their significance through direct and indirect engagement with tradition.

Ernst May's "Römerstadt" is based—in terms of its rational solution to access and other functional problems, which cannot be misled by any specious, pseudopsychological argu-

ments—on the same typology of the development and the building that we know from countless historical developments.

The concise, precise morphology of modern architecture describes the type and lends it the impressiveness of an example. But where the housing development was at risk of being broken up by the intended organic embrace of the topography, Ernst May employed a classic urban planning element: a quay promenade extending toward the Nidda Valley. By doing so, he gave Römerstadt its unmistakable individuality and distinguished its urban character—something that could never succeed in our much more densely built developments. In Römerstadt, the housing development and the quay promenade follow the topography and trace it, but a classical architectural element in the sense of an *embellissement de la ville* draws a precise line between the development and nature, between inside and outside.

These few examples, which are, however, representative of many, should have demonstrated how every example of architecture—the author's conscious intention is not decisive here—and every design expresses a judgment about the architectural tradition, a historical knowledge or ignorance.

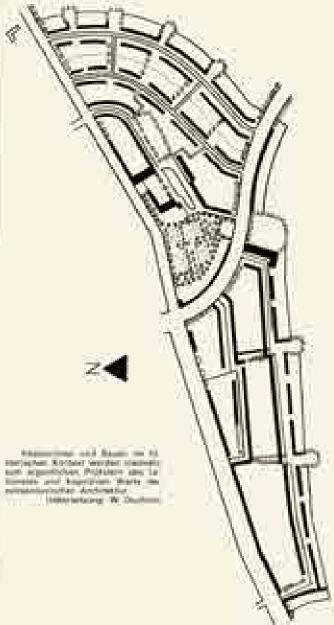
Accordingly, restoration and building in the historical context are merely striking aspects of a broader problem: no work can be seen and understood separate from the tradition of architecture.

Restoring and building in the historical context become rather the genuine touchstone of the rational and cognitive value of contemporary architecture.

[Editor's note: For the non-referenced citations, see Aldo Rossi, "Architecture for Museums," in *Aldo Rossi: Selected Writings and Projects*, ed. John O'Regan (London: Architectural Design; Dublin: Gandon, 1983), 21; and Aldo Rossi, "The Blue of the Sky," in ibid., 47.]

↓ fig. 13 Giorgio de Chirico, "Semantic reference point" for the design of the center of Muggiò.





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← fig. 14 Ernst May, Site plan for the Römerstadt housing development, Frankfurt (after 1926).

Phasenverschiebungen



Kly Minimpsirel

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Phase Shifts

Author: Stanislaus von Moos

First published in: archithese, 16 (1975): 26–36

Translated by: Steven Lindberg

Background

The present essay takes America as an excuse to speak somewhat more frankly about the obvious; that is, the situation at home, in Switzerland. Albeit going against the trend, it focuses on outward appearance and personal impressions. They can perhaps be subsumed in three loosely connected propositions, which may serve as a background to what then follows.

1.

The notion of America as the "New World" no longer concurs with our experience; it has become outdated. Everything may be bigger and mightier across the Atlantic, but not newer. Not to mention the urban degradation: Today, America's big cars, skyscrapers, freeways, and billboards are scattered around like colossal pieces of junk. We have those things in our country, too, by now—though in general they come in an impeccably crafted form, solid, modern, tasteful, and "clean." In a word: new. The boom started later and appears to have benefited from greater know-how. Is Europe (or at least its highly industrialized parts) now the "New World"?

2.

"Modern architecture" in America mainly established itself as part of the New Deal (triggered by the "purgative" shock of the 1929 crash) and primarily so in the tertiary sector (office buildings). The big housing projects followed later—particularly so after 1948—and they did much to seriously damage modernism's popular reputation. In the meantime, the sentiments of the "common man" continue to cling to bourgeois ideas of sensual gratification (see the furniture ranges in any big department store). Modernism, affiliated with the world of business, bureaucracy, and schools—as well as, more recently, with "urban renewal"—largely remains a concern of the intellectual elite; it appears to be unattractive to the majority of people.

The situation is different in industrialized postwar Europe, and particularly in Switzerland, where modernism (i.e., the reform movement that emerged roughly during the Bauhaus period and was supported by the Werkbund) has managed to gain a foothold in the middle class. As a result, and rather unlike his American counterpart, the Swiss petit bourgeois appears to feel at home with "functional" graphics

(compare MIGROS or CO-OP advertising with campaigns by A+P and FINAST). "Modern design" thus appears as an equivalent to a puritanical preference for "tidy solutions" as well as to an equally visceral delight in the orderly; in short: a rationalized everyday where the average standard is high but outstanding achievement is rare.

3.

The American city gives architecture a leeway that was lost long ago in Europe—if it ever existed in the first place. Office buildings are part of the corporate identity of leading interest groups and trusts. Thus, the nonconformity (with respect to the historical and topographical context), overwhelming scale, and design originality are perceived as desirable, since they contribute to the "visibility" of the respective corporation or patron. Unlike Europe, with its restrictive roof lines, and so on, American zoning regulations encourage the staging of particular achievements.

Thus, architects have "more say" in the USA. They have a greater chance of slipping into positions with *plein pouvoirs* [complete authority]. Although only a few manage to do so, once that status has been reached fewer design boards tend to "meddle" with their work, and the architects are not continually called upon by a grumbling environment of professional jealousy and parochial politics to scale down their dreams. That explains the enthusiasm of many European architects for what they primarily perceive as genuine openness toward imagination and creative endeavor. From a sociological perspective, such generosity, after all, indicates nothing so much as a surviving distribution of roles in society that respects the "master" in the architect. In that sense, too, the New World appears to be functioning as a hothouse for upholding the "old" social order.

Be that, as it may: time and again, the American experience forces one to recognize that the "old" in America—that is, the jungle of laissez-faire—produces a vibrancy and a freshness that makes the "newness" in our much more controlled Swiss reality look stale. Such "oldness" enables adventure, while our "newness" merely ensures decency and mediocrity.

"Environmental Destruction"

What I mean by "phase shifts" can be illustrated by two books. The first of the two is Peter Blake's God's Own Junkyard (1964). Blake was editor of Architectural Forum at the time. The title is a mocking allusion to the notion of the United States as "God's Own Country." Architects will be familiar with some of the book's imagery, though most likely via Venturi, who used them in some of his own worksalbeit in miniature format—the best known being the picture of a duck restaurant (figs. 1, 2, 3).2 The text is worth recalling, both for its content and its rhetoric. The book's subtitle castigates "The planned deterioration of America's landscape." Blake compares the campus of the University of Virginia (which was built by President Thomas Jefferson around 1820) to Canal Street in New Orleans as follows:

"Jefferson's serene, urban space has been called 'almost an ideal city'—unique in America, if not in the world. Canal Street, one fervently hopes, has not been called anything in particular in recent times. It is difficult to believe that these two examples of what a city might be were suggested by the same species of mammal, let alone by the same nation. Jefferson called his campus 'an expression of the American mind'; New Orleans' Canal Street, and all the other dreary Canal Streets that defile America today, have not been called 'expressions of the America mind' by any but this nation's mortal enemies."

Other outbursts of rage spice up the text. Blake's indignation reaches biblical heights when he speaks of the "Moloch" of vehicle traffic:

"Most of them [Blake is referring to 'highways'] are hideous scars on the face of this nation—scars that cut across mountains and plains, across cities and suburbs, poisoning the landscape and townscape with festering sores along their edges."

Filtering out some of the tirade's undisputed journalistic verve and pepping up its apocalyptic fervor with a shot of parochial stubbornness, one finds oneself at about the level of Rolf Keller's successful *Bauen als Umweltzerstörung* [Building as environmental destruction] of 1973, which, revealingly, was published in Switzerland nearly a decade after Blake's book. The same themes, the same tacitly accepted concept that the environmental disaster is basically a "moral" issue, and the same angry urge for a change from within, always dangerously close to the involuntary humor of a penitentiary sermon to Boy Scouts, yet this time dressed up in a

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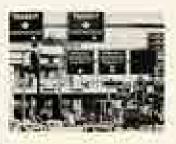
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† fig. 14 Dolf Schnebli, Catholic church, Oberentfelden, Aargau.





Töss-Zentrum, Winterthur. fia. 20 ⇒

fig. 19 →

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Ernst Gisel, School in Engelberg, 1965–67.

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tabloid genre that borrows its rhetoric from *BLICK* headlines.³

Indeed, Keller's book was necessary and useful. The situation it flags is alarming; it needs to be discussed. Often enough, Keller's observations hit the mark—as do Blake's. Nevertheless, in the end both authors' outrage sounds somewhat hollow. In hindsight, and measured against the real challenges at stake, the heroic posture and the apparently irrevocable belief that people's happiness or distress depends on architecture is simply grotesque. Granted the relevance of the issues raised, more often than not the arguments thrown into the debate are based on gross generalization and platitudes. To present a randomly chosen American "Strip" (Blake, 1964) or an ordinary Swiss road junction (Keller, 1973) as an epitome of "environmental pollution" is just too easy (figs. 5, 6). You don't have to be a Touring Club fan to know that freeways not only disfigure landscapes and settlements but also provide access to them. Similarly, road signs are neither good nor bad; as to traffic signs in particular, they are an indispensable means of organization and information along streets and freeways.

Nor are the famous pictures documenting the demolition of new housing blocks in St. Louis, Missouri, the decisive evidence of the "perversity" of modern planning principles (fig. 7).4 Anyone with a modicum of impartiality can see that what failed in Pruitt-Igoe was not so much architectural principles as the administration's ability to coordinate those principles with sociopolitical measures. Had Yamasaki's blocks been cut half in scale and erected in a European suburb such as Schwamendingen, rather than in an especially neglected black ghetto in St. Louis, who knows whether they might not be regarded as a particularly successful component of Zurich's cooperative housing program.

Luckily, Americans tend to treat false pathos with a healthy skepticism. And indeed, Blake's cry of alarm has by no means been this critic's last word. Nor did all his American colleagues choose to move out to Las Vegas to study the landscape that Blake had just labeled as America's junkyard. Meanwhile, in Switzerland, when it comes to architecture,

"progressive" journalism still considers it appropriate to discuss its problems and challenges in terms of moral indignation and metaphysical disgust. When will reporters and critics take the time to open their eyes? What will be the Swiss Las Vegas, the Swiss "mirror on the wall"? Will it perhaps be the Bürgenstock, that elegant retreat for private weekends and well-sponsored congresses in the very heart of Switzerland?⁵

"Architecture" and Architecture

The hotel landscape of the Bürgenstock has at least two things in common with the entertainment resort in Nevada (though Miami or any other American leisure landscape might also serve as a paragon): it caters to a clientele with a high age profile, and it pampers its customers with architecture and interior decoration capable of pandering to their secret social aspirations. And it does so all the more successfully the more consistent it is in avoiding outré "modern" design. This is how the authors of *Learning from* Las Vegas investigated the architectural symbolism of Caesar's Palace, one of the major casinos in Las Vegas (fig. 8).6 In its ground plan, the colonnade, which opens out in a large, enveloping gesture toward the car park, recalls Bernini's St. Peter's Square in Rome. In elevation, however, it makes one think of Yamasaki. The main building behind it is a kind of Gio Ponti baroque. The sculptures standing between the columns are reminiscent of the Canopus in Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli, although in this case they are made of plaster and papier-mâché and represent imitations of Renaissance originals rather than examples from antiquity. The four fountains seem to want to outdo St. Peter's Square in Rome (where there are famously only two). Thus, amid a sea of parked cars, an image of late Roman opulence is created with the help of eclectic borrowings from both the Renaissance and modern motel glitz.

What we are dealing with is an architectural environment that fulfils its task not via abstract criteria of "quality" but based on figurative symbolism. The *cour d'honneur* at the core of the Bürgenstock hotel complex basically does the same thing (figs. 9, 10). The reception building (the top station of the funicular railway) flaunts a Lucerne barn roof. As to the windows

beneath it, they are large and modern, because what counts in the hotel business is not the "antique" or the "local" as such but its combination with modern comfort. The guarry-stone wall on the ground floor is part of this architectural combinatorics. Quarry-stone walls do not merely refer to Ticino folklore. They are also expensive and therefore give us a clue as to the status of the establishment. Finally, the coquettish, kidney-shaped border with its fountain, surrounded by a pool—a somewhat meager echo of baroque garden art—invites the passersby to linger. The border is modern. Its kidney shape, a 1950s cliché, recalls the Brazilian landscape gardens designed by Roberto Burle Marx. At the same time, its indentation and bulging force visitors driving past to travel at a pedestrian pace. That, in turn, increases the thrill of driving there to begin with—as it is only in this way that you are seen in your car. The car, after all, being the ultimate accessory, especially on holiday; it enhances and dramatizes personality (of course, if you are not driving a Lamborghini or a Mercedes, you are more likely to park outside the hotel precinct).

Nobody will claim that this "spa square" is good architecture (apart from perhaps the Bürgenstock's owner himself). It is as boring as any banker's villa on Zürichberg or in the Ticino region. But then, first, isn't unpretentious boredom less annoying than noisy bumbledom? Second (and more important): Why can't a complex, multifaceted iconography such as the one displayed here be brought together into a convincing formal whole? —To date, I (still) cannot name a single such Swiss example. Tidy solutions remain the trump cards. Such buildings want to be seen as a triumph of pure form over complex program and fuzzy symbolism.

The (No Longer Completely) "New Monumentality"

There are many examples in Switzerland of well-planned urban or village squares that can be juxtaposed to the arbitrary eclecticism of the Bürgenstock "plaza." Design and orchestration of public space enjoy a high status among Swiss architects, especially since the 1950s, and the same applies to the United States. In his small book *Architektur und Gemeinschaft* (1956)

[published in English as Architecture, You and Me (1958)] Sigfried Giedion outlines a number of ideals that appear to have spawned a global fascination with squares:

"Sites for monuments must be planned. This will be possible once replanning is undertaken on a large scale which will create vast open spaces in the now decaying areas of our cities. In those open spaces, monumental architecture will find its appropriate setting which now does not exist. Monumental buildings will then be able to stand in space, for, like trees and plants, monumental buildings cannot be crowded in upon any odd lot in any district. Only when this space is achieved can the new urban centers come to life."

Boston City Hall and the huge public plaza at its foot are not merely an archetype of 1960s urban design but a key example of the "New Monumentality" that Giedion and others had launched as a concept in the 1940s (architects: Kallmann, McKinnell & Knowles). Unfortunately, the sacrifice to be made for this celebration of the idea of "community" was the de facto eradication of the *real* community that previously occupied this space—in fact, the ruin of an entire neighborhood. Such sweeping measures would be difficult to carry through in tiny Switzerland, given the grassroots culture of direct democracy practiced there. Hence it was in the format of small public spaces in some well-to-do Swiss towns and villages that the "regeneration of public life" was tested as an architectural theme (figs. 16, 23)—to be further refined in church centers, where Boston with its large piazza, "humanized" by cobblestone paving and steps, with a "monument" grimly peering down upon it from behind, is echoed in miniature format (figs. 13 to 16). Elsewhere, the American "civic centers" - or rather "plazas" and (exotic) "piazzas" have been downsized to the more congenial Swiss village square. Or into "Stätten der Begegnung" [sites for encounters], as developers of downtowns and shopping centers like to call them—now that they, too, have discovered the theme of community.

What distinguishes the ecclesiastic or civic "piazzas" just referred to from the Bürgenstock patchwork is the fact that they focus on abstract qualities of space, form, and construction. The spectrum goes from carefully scaled solutions—an example is Dolf Schnebli's beautiful church forecourt in Oberentfelden, Aargau (fig. 14)—

↓ fig. 26 Polynesian restaurant on an arterial road of Boston.



↓ fig. 24

Holiday Inn, sign.





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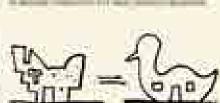






↓ fig. 33 R. Venturi, "The Duck," from *Learning from Las Vegas*.





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to examples of singular banality, such as the recent high court building in Aarau, which functions as the backdrop to a mini civic center. What a glorious spectacle that is: the boldness of a concrete pillar driven into the coattails of a curtain wall. Sure, Boston City Hall, too, is first of all a demonstration of static forces—a highly controlled one in comparison (figs. 22, 23).

Both examples play with architectural themes that are basically unrelated to the function of the given building and even more so to its "significance." In doing so, they, too, become symbols—whether intentionally or not: first, for dramatizing load-bearing performance; second, for celebrating an architectural aesthetics that has severed its ties to the simple, undramatic, and friendly aspects of everyday life.

What is questionable with buildings like these, however, is not that they are "modern" (whatever that may mean) but that they strive to achieve heroism and originality at any price, where a more obvious solution, perhaps laced with a little humor, would have sufficed. In an industrial suburb like Muttenz, the obvious might have been to highlight the town's smoothly running administration by way of an elegant curtain-wall office building as would be done in nearby Basel, rather than to drape it as a pepped-up post-Ronchamp-style concrete village (figs. 15, 16).

Swiss Duck Architecture

In the meantime, the Swiss landscape has been enriched with buildings of the heroic kind, some of considerable design quality. Many of them boast of a massive volume containing one or more floors and placed on supports that allow for generous public space below. Slatted profiles at times dramatize the spectacle, hanging from the upper floors like inverted crenellations. That order seems to have become a universal pathos formula for public buildings. The designers of Boston City Hall derived it from Le Corbusier (La Tourette). Its message is almost as universally understandable as a Holiday Inn sign: it says something like "Attention: Here comes serious architecture." In such buildings, construction itself becomes ornament. If, as Venturi has done, the field of contemporary building were divided into structures with applied decoration and ones

that are themselves sculpturally staged decoration, then the legendary duck-shaped duck restaurant in Long Island can't help ending up in the same category as a brutalist monument—be it a city hall, a high school, or a church (fig. 33).

Churches as ducks? Could it be that much of the work produced in the name of creativity and originality in Swiss church building is ultimately to be ranked as a religious subspecies of restaurant and exhibition architecture? — Was good old Peter Meyer ultimately right?

"Technical forms, the *chichi* of exhibition architecture and the *haut-goût* of the graphic designer are applied to the church, which has now become an exhibition pavilion of the Lord, a tasteful travel agency to the beyond—with free brochures presented at the entrance. It fidgets in a permanent St. Vitus dance of architectural geniality and 'waywardness,' equipped with super-archaic or infantile sculptures, mosaics, paintings ..." ⁸

Of course, he is right, except for telling only half the truth. Not only do churches resemble exhibition pavilions; it works the other way around too: shopping centers present themselves as prehistoric sanctuaries with divine thrones and tabernacles in the form of enormous menhirs. Some Catholic churches in Switzerland. if they stood along Route 1 north of Boston, could easily be mistaken for a Polynesian restaurant (figs. 25, 26). Nor is that a coincidence, since the architect in question is famous for the magic of the gastronomic and entertainment resorts he designed. And there are gas stations in the Grisons where the benefits of their border location and the resulting high gas sales are transfigured into secularized bell towers: gasstation chapels, with tabernacles offering supplies for the journey (figs. 30, 31). Not that the Grisons gas station deliberately intends to resemble a sacred building, or that rural churches in the Zurich region mean to look like nightclubs. Clearly, the intention in these cases is nothing but semantically unburdened "artistic quality." However, the aim of avoiding symbolism does not prevent it from actually happening. Hence, it would be worth attempting to regain an element of control over that phenomenon—at least so long as architecture is thought to express values relevant to and shared by its users.

Granted that today, with the oil crisis, the luxury rhetoric of bunker sacredness and other less pompous fashions of the sixties may have

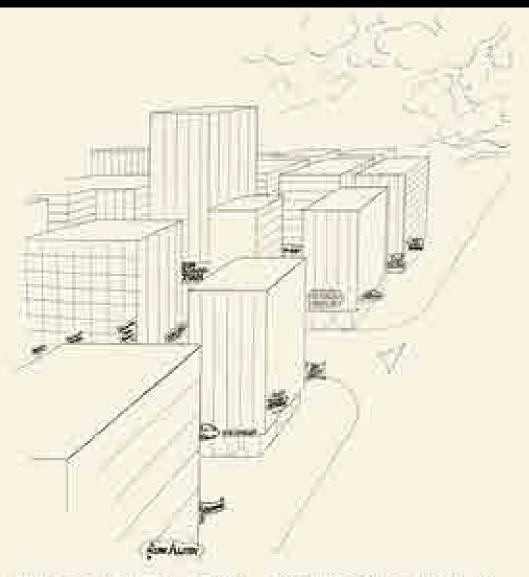
to face much more trivial challenges. The system already appears to have initiated a much tougher approach to expenditures altogether. Spreitenbach, just outside Zurich, may be one of the locations where the moment of truth appears in its most naked fashion. Ten years ago, a large shopping center was built there, packed and plastered in a great deal of architecture: with a curved, Moorish envelope in concrete, a piazza as well as a fountain in the atrium (fig. 35). Ten years later, a new version of a shopping center is being erected directly beside it (fig. 36). Architectural packaging is no longer thought to be essential. In the days of discount retailing, design costs are radically

skimmed down. A simple container will do—one of those boxes lying around along our freeways in all colors and sizes. The savings in architecture are canceled out by the additional energy costs: such boxes are completely sealed, both visually and climate-wise. And they are tidy (fig. 37). Architecture, design, form, and symbolism are suddenly reduced to the "cheerful" coloring of facades and the eclectic decor inside: the familiar folklore of good old Swiss graphics and the cool magic of neon light will do the job. The tone has been set: Switzerland is about to show its big brother how to do things better with "ducks and sheds."

ENDNOTES

- 1 Grumbling about Swiss "thriftiness," "lack of courage," and a general feeling of cultural gridlock as opposed to the dynamism of life and art in America is a recurrent theme in statements by returning "expatriates." See for instance Max Frisch, "Cum grano salis," Werk (October 1953): 325–29.
- 2 Robert Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture (New York, 1966), 103; and R. Venturi, D. Scott Brown, and S. Izenour, Learning from Las Vegas (Cambridge, MA, 1972).
- 3 In the meantime, Blake himself has turned the tables on modern architecture, in whose name he castigated the vulgarity of the "Strip" in 1964. His article on "The Folly of Modern Architecture" was even published in *Reader's Digest* (May 1975) (orig. pub.: "The Folly of Modern Architecture," *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1974)).
- 4 The Pruitt-Igoe project is a 36-million-dollar social housing project consisting of 33 eleven-story housing blocks (architect: Minoru Yamasaki; construction began in 1955). In 1969, an average of one murder a week was committed in the new public housing project. As a result, four of the blocks were demolished by the Army Corp of Engineers, and the remaining buildings were evacuated.
- 5 Bürgenstock was chosen as an example after the present considerations were presented as a conference paper at an FSAI [Fédération Suisse des Architectes Indépendants] seminar held at the Grand Hotel Bürgenstock, June 1975.
- 6 Learning from Las Vegas, 48–51.— See also archithese, 13 (1975).
- 7 Sigfried Giedion, *Architecture, You and Me* (Cambridge, MA, 1958), 50.

8 Peter Meyer, "Lourdes-Grotten und Verwandtes," Schweizer Monatshefte (October 1974), 463ff. The art and architectural historian Peter Meyer was editor in chief of the Swiss architectural journal Das Werk from 1930 to 1942.



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D'autre part les effets douteux et même permicieux de le construction de gratic-ciel commençaient à se faire sentir pour les activitectes américains. Même et ces derniers socreptaient et anéoutaient des commissions pour des gratte-cret, ils manifestalent une cefaire américalisme au tajet d'un développement apparentent magnifile, influence plus pertes factuurs economiques que per la plunifipation problecturale. L'impression que l'arghalecture n'étair plus contrôlée par la profession problecturale est réflécée dans le livre de Edwin Avany Pers. New Bacagnocets for a New Ade, parv en 1927, dans inequal il declare.

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Shrunken Metropolis

Author: Rosemarie Bletter

Source: *archithese*, 18 (1976): 22–27

Translated by: Brett Petzer

"New York's skyscrapers are too small." Le Corbusier, 1935 (from *When Cathedrals Were White*)

When one considers the reactions of European architects to the American skyscraper phenomenon of the 1920s, one gets the sense that American architects looked on complacently as this new building typology proliferated. Others—for example, Le Corbusier—held that it might have benefited from further refinement. Of course, these reactions date from a time when Europe had yet to be confronted with the reality of skyscraper construction. For someone like Le Corbusier or Erich Mendelsohn, the American skyscraper became an object of envy and derision alike, because nothing in Europe compared to it, and because European architects felt they could have made rather more of it.

On the other hand, the questionable, perhaps even harmful effects of skyscraper construction were beginning to be felt by American architects. Although they accepted and carried out commissions for skyscrapers, they displayed a certain ambivalence toward what seemed like unstoppable growth influenced more by economic factors than by architectural planning

considerations. The impression that architecture was no longer under the control of the architectural profession is reflected in Edwin Avery Park's 1927 book *New Backgrounds for a New Age*, in which he writes:

"The architect might as well never have wasted his time learning to design. His job is now that of a financial engineer, his time spent cutting, scraping and shoehorning, trying to produce something, without time to worry too much how that thing will look. ... Art and architecture no longer function upon a basis of patronage. Architecture is competing in the great modern struggle to survive through fitness."

The idea that the architect had become a mere technician in the service of property speculators was expressed even more bluntly by Sheldon Cheney in *The New World Architecture* in 1930:

"Perhaps Commercialism is the new God, only too powerful and alluring, to Whom men are building today their largest, costliest, and most laudatory structures. In this service they are building higher and ever higher, concentrating more and more activity in less ground space, stealing light and air from their neighbors, piously recording in their structures the exploitation that is [the] right-hand attribute of Commercialism.

At any rate, the skyscraper is the typical building of the twentieth century. New York City, to be sure, ... sees the rise of scores of business buildings larger, more honest in methods of construction and in purpose ..., and more expressive of contemporary living. Business rules the world today, and as long as

business can best be served where many offices are concentrated in one small area, in buildings designed as machines for the efficient discharge of buying, selling, trading, banking, law disputes, gambling, and exploitation, business architecture will be supreme."2

American architects were caught between the realities of the market and a cultural mythology that favored agrarian ideals, the notion of a limitless countryside, and Rousseau's belief in the superiority of rural life over city living. The resulting uncertainty found its strongest expression not in the general appearance of the skyscraper but in its architectural ornamentation, an area more likely to escape the kind of control that owners exercised over the building's marketability.

For example, in William Van Alen's Chrysler Building (1928–30), the very elaborate painted ceiling just over the threshold of the lobby depicts a scaled-down Chrysler Building. The lobby of the Empire State Building, by Shreve, Lamb & Harmon (1930–31), includes a metal relief of the building (fig. 1). And above the entrance to 60 Wall Tower by Clinton & Russell and Holton & George (1930–32), one sees a sculpted model of the building itself (fig. 2).

The placement of these miniaturized replicas near street or lobby entrances has an obvious purpose: to give employees a clear understanding of the form of the building they are entering. This is because the general form of the large buildings erected in the 1920s could be appreciated only from a considerable distance. Seen up close, their silhouette is impossible to read due to the effects of foreshortenings and obstructions. From the sidewalk, moreover, everything above the first setback in the facade is generally lost to view. Architects were clearly also invested in maintaining the "legibility" of their buildings despite their immense size. This concern with making architecture tangible was articulated in the nineteenth century by John Ruskin and reworked for the American context by Louis Sullivan. However, while Ruskin's and Sullivan's intention had been to make the overall outline of a building more readily discernible, only in the New York building boom of the late 1920s was it deemed necessary to provide every skyscraper with a diminutive version of itself.

There may be a second reason for these efforts to diminish the scale of the building, one that has nothing to do with a concern for legibility. These scaled-down projections may well reflect the architect's true ideals. That is, this may be a curious reversal of the old convention by which a scale model served as a standin for the larger structure that was wanted. Here, the small-scale replicas of these buildings that seemed so colossal at the time may well be closer to the intentions of the architects, who were discomfited by the construction of buildings they saw as oversized.

The 500 Fifth Avenue Building (1930–31) by Shreve, Lamb & Harmon offers one more example of this reduction in scale. In a bas-relief above the entrance, a kneeling figure wearing a peplos presents a model of 500 Fifth Avenue, possibly serving as a kind of Tyche, or protector of the site (fig. 3).3 In this example, where the architectural model appears alongside a human figure, the building's proportions are even more readily measurable, scaled down to less than human height. If Tyche were standing, 500 Fifth Avenue would reach to about the height of the reeds. The same can be said of the Fuller Building by Walker & Gillette (1928–29). In the presence of two athletic male figures, the stylized "skyline" is reduced to the dimensions of a small decorative balustrade (fig. 4).

These miniature replicas can thus be regarded as commentary on the buildings they decorate. They retain a sense of the human scale that no longer exists in the skyscrapers themselves. Many skyscraper architects seem to have shown some hesitation in taking on the design of mammoth office towers. However, the romantic power and visual drama of the skyline that was starting to emerge in the 1920s still made a deep impression on most American artists, photographers, and filmmakers. For example, in 1922 the artist Charles Sheller and the photographer Paul Strand made a film dramatizing the skyscrapers of Manhattan. Entitled Manhatta, after a poem by Walt Whitman, it almost never shows skyscrapers from street level. Instead, the camera is either aimed at the summit, or, for even greater dramatic effect, placed on the roof, plunging straight down to the streets below. Here, human beings are mere minutiae in the cityscape.4 The exaggerated





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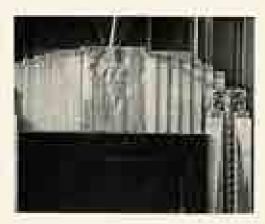
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↓ fig. 4 Walker & Gillette, Fuller Building, 1928–29. Detail of the entrance.



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perspective used by Sheller and Strand became even more overwhelming in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926–27), for which the Manhattan skyline was also a primary inspiration. Lang arrived in New York in 1924, and, while waiting on board for permission to disembark—Germans were then still viewed as the enemy—he watched the city from his ship, at anchor in the Hudson River, and

"looked out into the streets at the dazzling lights and the slender buildings—and there ... conceived *Metropolis*." 5

The same dehumanizing, melodramatic perspective used by Sheeler, Strand, and Lang can still be seen in Berenice Abbott's photographs of New York City in the 1930s. For everyone not directly involved in their construction—whether European architects or American artists and photographers—the skyscrapers thus retained an image of lyrical and spectacular power into the 1930s.

One more element of the architectural decoration of buildings in the 1920s, in addition to the miniaturization of skyscrapers, raises doubts about architects' acquiescence to the building boom. For example, Churchill & Lippmann's Lowell Building (1926) has an octagonal mosaic above its entrance, depicting a landscape of skyscrapers dotted with greenery, with trees in the foreground (fig. 5). This image, suggestive of Manhattan seen from the middle of Central Park, is a nostalgic reference to nature, since the skyscrapers are much less distinctly rendered than the trees. Similarly, the large bas-relief above the entrance to Raymond Hood's Daily News Building (1929–30) employs a screen of clouds to obscure a skyscraper panorama that would otherwise be very striking (fig. 6). Moreover, tennis players and horse riders rise surreally from these clouds in a sort of Nirvana of outdoor pursuits. The ambivalence between the man-made and the natural environment is resolved here by superimposition [collusion].

One can likewise discern an element of nostalgia for a preurban community, or at least an inability to choose between town and country, in the drawings of Hugh Ferriss in *Metropolis of Tomorrow*, published in 1929. Here, the Manhattan skyline is often rendered in a way that evokes rocky peaks and high mountain

ranges, so that mountains and skyscrapers become interchangeable images, obviating the need to choose between them. The Rockefeller Center, begun in the late 1920s but not completed until the 1930s, also featured in this urban/exurban schizophrenia, at least in its early incarnations. In one of the first models produced by Associated Architects, the setbacks on the lower levels, as well as on the roof, were to be used for hanging gardens connected by bridges and open to the public. The largest urban complex of its time was thus also intended to take up its place in paradise. However, this proposal by the architects was rejected by Depression-era developers as too costly.⁶

After the 1920s, when architectural ornament began to be used less and less frequently. visual commentary on the skyscraper and the city continued mainly in film. Filmmakers built on earlier work by artists and photographers to create a mythology around these exaggeratedly spectacular representations. As a result, depictions of New York in the 1930s are rarely realistic. Manhattan is presented as a place of underground night clubs and millionaires' lofts. The city is hardly ever shown at street level, at the level of everyday life. On the contrary, many films suggest dramatic hyperbole and escape from the city. A typical film from 1930, Cecil B. DeMille's Madam Satan, culminates in a masked ball aboard an airship hovering over Manhattan. The script summarizes the plot in these terms:

"Wealthy socialite Angela Brooks finds she is losing the love of her husband, Bob, to a wild young showgirl named Trixie; ... she sets out to recapture her husband by taking on the personality of the mysterious 'Madam Satan.' At a costume party given aboard a giant dirigible, Angela entrances her husband by her modish vamping, amidst a spectacular electrical ballet in which characters simulate everything from sparkplugs to lightning bolts. After she has successfully ensuared him, the dirigible is struck by lightning, and the guests are forced to parachute from the ship, Angela giving hers to the distraught Trixie. Realizing his love for Angela, Bob gives her his parachute and dives from the ship, suffering only minor injuries by landing in the Central Park Reservoir."7

While the architects introduced an element of the human scale into the imagery of architectural ornament, filmmakers had developed a vision of New York as a place where you never have to come down to earth.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Edwin Avery Park, New Backgrounds for a New Age (New York, 1927), 141–42.
- 2 Sheldon Cheney, *The New World Architecture* (New York, 1930), 120.
- 3 This figure, although seemingly ancient in appearance, is not really Tyche, as it does not wear the usual mural crown; instead, it holds something resembling a winged solar disc. The figure therefore suggests the eclectic interests of architects educated in the Beaux Arts tradition more than any specific model.
- 4 The implications of Paul Strand's imagery are discussed in detail in an unpublished study of Paul Strand by Maria Morris, Department of Art History, Columbia University, 1975.
- 5 Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America* (New York, 1967), 15.
- 6 A good summary of the history of the Rockefeller Center and images of this project can be found in William H. Jordy, American Buildings and Their Architects: The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-twentieth Century (New York, 1972).
- 7 American Film Institute Catalogue of Feature Films 1921–1930 (Los Angeles, 1971), 471. This information comes from an unpublished study of American cinema in the 1930s by Maite Chaves, Department of Art History, Columbia University, 1975.





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