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archithese as a platform of critical reflection

Gabrielle Schaad, Torsten Lange (eds.)
archithese reader.
Critical Positions in Search of Post-modernity, 1971–1976

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With contributions by:
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March 26, 2024, 6.30 pm, Never Stop Reading, Zurich, with Irina Davidovici, Torsten Lange, Gabrielle Schaad, Marie Theres Stauffer, Stanislaus von Moos and Andrea Wiegelmann.
May 2, 2024, Museum im Bellpark, Kriens, details will follow on → triest-verlag.ch/news

→ The journal as a platform where different attitudes and perspectives meet – what role did archithese play in its time, what role does it play today?

→ A critical look at current and historical topics in architecture

This publication presents a selection of ground-breaking contributions, grouped thematically in a new way, which originally appeared in the journal *archithese*, accompanied by critical essays by contemporary authors.

Located in its specific context – the heterogeneous and turbulent landscape of debates in the years after 1968 – *archithese* did not only give local protagonists a voice, but it also established a transatlantic dialogue amongst architects, critics and spatial scientists. Among them were influential figures such as Rem Koolhaas, Aldo Rossi, the architecture collective Superstudio, Alan Colqhoun, Charles Jencks, Denise Scott Brown, Manfredo Tafuri and even Henri Lefébvre.

The positions gathered here are exemplary for the pluralist approach and thematic openness characteristic for the way in which the art historian Stanislaus von Moos compiled the journal in its founding phase.

The thematic spectrum ranges from historicism, realism concepts in architecture, urbanism, user-oriented approaches to interest in informal and spontaneous building.

Arranged in five thematic chapters, the articles illustrate, in different ways, the examination of the incipient postmodernism and, due to their richness of facets, point far beyond a pure concept of style.

I HISTORICITY
AND MEANING

About the editors

Gabrielle Schaad is an art historian and postdoc at the Chair of Theory and History of Architecture, Art, and Design, TU Munich. She coordinates the study program Exhibiting and Making Public at the Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK, where she is a Lecturer and Curator in the Bachelor Fine Arts. Her doctoral thesis received from the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta), ETH Zurich, focused on techniques aimed at emancipation in art and architecture and their pitfalls, transforming space-time in Cold War Japan ["Performing Environmental Textures – Intersected Bodies of Gutai and Metabolism (Japan, 1955–1972)"].
She has been awarded research scholarships by the SNSF, the MEXT Japan (2013–2015), and Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart. In addition to her monograph *Shizuko Yoshikawa* (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2018) and academic contributions, she recently co-edited *Care: gta papers* 7 (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2022).

Torsten Lange is Lecturer in Cultural and Architectural History at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Switzerland. He studied architecture as well as the history and theory of architecture at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar and The Bartlett School of Architecture in London, where he received his PhD in 2015.
His work focuses on the conditions underpinning the production of the built environment during late socialism and on writing histories of queer spatial practices.
He is co-editor of *Re-Framing Identities: Architecture's Turn to History* (Basel, Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2017), the special issue "Architectural Historiography and Fourth Wave Feminism" of *Architectural Histories* (8/2020), and of *Care: gta papers* 7 (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2022), and published several essays and articles.

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Contents

The Reconstruction of the Kornhaus in Freiburg im Breisgau

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.

Jürgen Paul
Der Wiederaufbau des Kornhauses in Freiburg i. B.
und einige Betrachtungen über Architektur und Geschichtsverständnis

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↑ fig. 1 Freiburg im Breisgau: the Altes Kornhaus [Old Granary] as reconstructed in 1970–71.

↑ fig. 2 The Altes Kornhaus (1497) before its destruction in 1944.

From Idealism
to Disenchantment

Realism in and beyond
archithese

Irina Davidovici

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

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Roxy, Noah, and
Radio City Music Hall

The New York of the 1920s
and the Search for Americanism

"I grow so sentimental when I see how perfect perfection can be …"
Top Hat

"What are those little mice doing on the stage?"
— "Those aren't mice. Those are horses!"
Visitors to Radio City Music Hall

Dream

"I didn't conceive of the idea, I dreamed it. I believe in creative dreams. The picture of Radio City Music Hall was complete and practically perfect in my mind before architects and artists put pen on the drawing paper."
Roxy

In the congestion of hyperbole that is Manhattan, it is relatively reasonable for Roxy, the animator of Radio City Music Hall, to claim a crypto-religious revelation as inspiration for his amazing theater. The parthenogenesis of architecture—that is, the creation of buildings without the assistance or intervention of architects—is one leitmotiv in the history of the architecture of Manhattan.

Roxy—real name Samuel Lionel Rothafel of Stillwater, Minnesota—is the most brilliant showbiz expert in the hysterical New York of the twenties. After abandoning the ideal of the new Metropolitan Opera as cultural epicenter of his complex, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., buys

Roxy away from Paramount and gives him carte blanche to create instead a "Showplace of the Nation" at the Center.

Five Layers

Against the background of an unwritten theory of Manhattanism, the conceptual organization of Rockefeller Center (and the secret of its success) would have to be traced back to the overlapping of five layers, each of which embodies a different architectural philosophy. Indeed, Rockefeller Center consists of five different projects that somehow coexist at the same address, provisionally held together by such infrastructure as elevators, heating and ventilation shafts, and so on.

The O level of the present Rockefeller Center, dominated by the RCA lobby and Radio City Music Hall, is a drastically reduced version of much more daring alternatives that were projected and even almost built. Although plans for the new Metropolitan Opera had been discarded, the Associated Architects continue to consider theaters. They design versions of a fantastic ground floor entirely occupied by more and more theaters: a three-block ocean

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Rem Koolhaas

Rem Koolhaas

ROXY, NOAH UND DIE RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

"Ich grow so sentimental when I see how perfect perfection can be …"
Top Hat
"What are those little mice doing on the stage?" — "Those aren't mice. Those are horses!"
Besucher der Radio City Music Hall

Traum

«Ich habe die Idee nicht konzipiert; ich habe sie geträumt. Ich glaube an schöpferische Träume. Das Bild der Radio City Music Hall war in meiner Vorstellung vollständig perfekt lange bevor Architekten und Künstler zur Feder griffen . . .»
Roxy

In Anbetracht der Anhäufung linguistischer Hyperbeln, welche Manhattan darstellt, ist es beinah logisch dass Roxy, der Animator von Radio City Music Hall, die Geburt seines erstaunlichen Theaters in Begriffen Mariens ansieht – d. h. die Entstehung von Bauwerken ohne Mithilfe oder Dazwischentreten von Architekten – das ist ein Leitmotiv in der Baugeschichte von Manhattan.

Roxy — sein ganzer Name lautet Samuel Lionel Rothafel und sein Herkunftsort ist Stillwater, Minnesota — war der intelligenteste und glamouröseste Bonz im New Yorker Show Business der hysterischen Zwanzigerjahre. Rockefeller hatte Roxy von Paramount weggekauft und gab ihm «carte blanche», um innerhalb des Rockefeller Centers den «Showplace of the Nation» zu schaffen — nachdem der Bau einer neuen «Metropolitan Opera», welche die ursprüngliche *raison d'être* des Centers gewesen war, angesichts der Depression fallengelassen werden musste.

5 Schichten

Vor dem Hintergrund einer noch ungeschriebenen Theorie des «Manhattanism» müsste man die konzeptuelle Organisation des Rockefeller Centers (und das Geheimnis seines Erfolges) auf die Ueberlagerung von 5 «Schichten» zurückführen, die eine je verschiedene architektonische «Philosophie» verkörpern. In der Tat besteht das Rockefeller Center aus fünf verschiedenen Projekten, die irgendwie an derselben Adresse koexistieren, notdürftig zusammengehalten durch Infrastrukturen wie Lifte, Heizungs- und Lüftungsschächte, usw.

Das 0-Niveau des heutigen Rockefeller Centers ist eine drastisch verkleinerte Version von weit kühneren Alternativen, die jahrelang ausgearbeitet wurden und beinah auch verwirklicht worden wären. Obwohl der Plan einer neuen «Metropolitan Opera» fallengelassen

←fig. 1
Model of
Rockefeller Center.
View from the
northwest;
the RKO Building
(foreground /
premier plan) and
the RCA Building
(from behind).

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Collective Housing

Theories and Experiments
of the Utopian Socialists
Robert Owen (1771–1858) and
Charles Fourier (1772–1837)

Authors:
Franziska Bollerey
Kristiana Hartmann

Source:
archithese, 8 (1973):
15–26

Translated by:
Steven Lindberg

Utopian designs for collective housing developments reflect the urban planning practice of their time and at the same time anticipate new social conditions. It is in keeping with the self-image of the utopians not to present their architectural ideas in an isolated space; their planning concepts are instead part of general proposals to restructure the entire society. The urbanistic reflections of the advocates of utopian socialism—Owen and Fourier—differ from those of the utopians and planners of ideal cities of antiquity and the Renaissance in their relationship to the changed conditions of production. Owenite activity and the theoretical and practical models of architecture to be described here fell in the era of the Industrial Revolution and the establishment of the industrial bourgeoisie. The concepts of Fourier and his disciples emerged against the backdrop of postrevolutionary events, the Napoleonic era, the Restoration, and the period after the July Revolution.[1]

The proposals for reform resulted from analyzing contemporaneous sociopolitical deficiencies. In the effort to redress those ills, two possibilities stood out. On the one hand, in the urbanist sector the old cities were countered with new forms of living together;

on the other hand, there was an effort to resolve partial aspects of the problem in a kind of pseudo-redevelopment. In the process, however, they lost sight of the connections and, unlike the utopian socialists, did not come up with overall conceptions for a new urban organism.

Robert Owen (1771–1858) and Charles Fourier (1772–1837) shared with the utopians of antiquity and the Renaissance an opposition to the apologists for existing conditions and the insight that in the bourgeois order, despite the liberation of the individual from feudal society, true misery is not and cannot be eradicated.[2] Like the former, they assumed that the society they designed could be established at any time and in any place. This overestimate of the field of influence of ideally conceived housing developments provoked the critique of the representatives of scientific socialism. For the utopian socialists, therefore, it was "necessary, then, to discover a new and more perfect system of social order and to impose this upon society from without by propaganda, and, wherever it was possible, by the example of model experiments."[3]

"Periods of development that are supposed to redesign what exists from the ground up [are]

Atelier 5: 1955–1975

Experiments
in Communal Living

Author:
Jakob K. Blumer

Source:
archithese, 14 (1975):
37–44

Translated by:
Steven Lindberg

That form reflects contents seems self-evident to us. And that contents should result in special forms is a postulate well-known and almost venerable in architecture. It is much the same with the statement that the form of a settlement reflects a certain form of society or class of society. The proof of that is easy to offer and can also be extensively illustrated. One need think only of the villa neighborhoods and working-class housing developments of the nineteenth century or of medieval forms of buildings and cities and the associated feudal society of estates. A congruence between the nature of a settlement and its social content can thus be noted.

On closer inspection, however, deviations are revealed in specific cases. The social content of cities surely influenced their form, but the forms of the past have also continued to be used for new social contents. We must even recognize that explicit alternative proposals for a social order have adopted a traditional form of expression for their habitat. The congruence between the form and the social content is thus not always absolute. Such reflections are important today in the practical debates over housing development. They helped clarify the efforts of Atelier 5 in this area.

One of the tasks given to the architect, and in which he can develop and expand his ability as an architect, is the design of housing developments. To conceive an inhabitable structure that allows one to live well. The task he sets himself is to answer the question of "well-being." He can do so only if he sets out from hypotheses that he must often formulate as assertions, since they are not always supported by the existing social reality. If we consider, for instance, the professional situation of the medieval carpenter or master builder and his relationship to the form of his own work, the parallel phenomenon for us today is not the so-called good architect but, say, the "National Association of Home Builders" in the United States, *Haus und Herd* [Home and Hearth] in Switzerland, and similar phenomena. That is, somebody who is in tune with their work, with widely accepted social behavior and the associated ideas of taste, form, and organization. The "medieval carpenter" today would help shape an image of the housing development centered on the individual as a mobile, interchangeable, transforming, but also isolated element. Single-family housing developments, disjointed apartment blocks, shopping
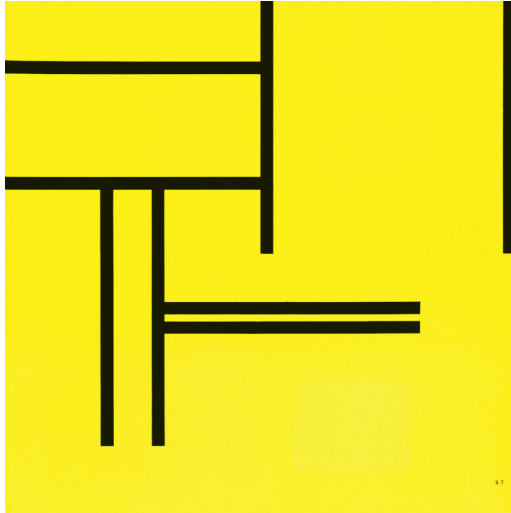
Fig. 19—*spirale: Internationale Zeitschrift für Konkrete Kunst und Gestaltung* 6/7 (1958);
Cover design by Marcel Wyss, 35 × 35 cm.

Neueste Nachrichten (Lucerne latest news, LNN] around 1961 (Figs. 11–19).[15] But all this certainly stood behind my fascination with those Italian magazines.

GS: But then, your friends from the FSAI didn't like your first design proposals for *archithese*.

SvM: No, no, they decided to hire a professional designer, Paul Diethelm, who translated my minimalist and deliberately "ascetic" proposals into something that had the allure of a design brochure or a product catalog. I was not too happy with the compromise, but then, while the typeface for "archi / these" (on two lines) looked too bombastic for me, at least it was consistent with the lowercase dogma (Fig. 20).

GS: After just one year, however, *archithese* was taken over by Arthur Niggli, an internationally known publisher of architecture and art books working from Teufen, near Appenzell in remote rural Switzerland. He dropped both the graphic formula and the French-speaking coeditor (Fig. 21).

SvM: Alas, the first year had resulted in an economic fiasco. It had become clear that the formula we had agreed upon— every issue covering a somewhat arbitrary range of approaches and subjects—failed to trigger both the advertisements and the subscriptions needed to keep the magazine above water. Also, working with a print shop that was not itself involved in marketing the magazine (in our case the Imprimeries Réunies in Lausanne) and with a professional graphic designer proved too heavy a burden on the budget. What ultimately saved the project was the generosity of the members of the FSAI who agreed to cover the accumulated debts and to try a fresh model.

GS: But how did the collaboration with Arthur Niggli come about? I understand you had known him before.

SvM: I had never met him personally, but he knew of my earlier stabs in the field of publishing and magazine making.
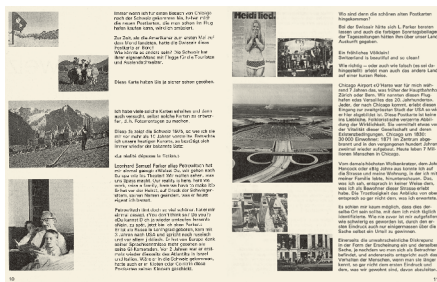
Fig. 27—Double spread from Niklaus Morgenthaler, "Amerika–Schweiz: Mutwillige Vergleiche," in "u.s.a. – switzerland," special issue, *archithese* 16 (1975), 10–11.

Fig. 28—Peter Blake, *God's Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape,* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964).

Fig. 29—Rolf Keller, *Bauen als Umweltzerstörung: Alarmbilder einer Un-Architektur der Gegenwart* (Zurich: Verlag für Architektur Artemis, 1973).

Fig. 26—Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).

surprise (Fig. 27). As to your essay "Phase Shifts," it, too, is based on the talk you gave on this occasion.[24] Blatantly inspired by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), you were trying to analyze the Bürgenstock resort as well as similar locations in terms of architecture as a "language of signs."[25] You also took advantage of the occasion by reflecting critically architect Rolf Keller's book *Bauen als Umweltzerstörung* [Building as environmental sack] (1973) and his very striking and figurative accusations of the "monotony" and "chaos" in 1960s urban development (Figs. 28–29).[26]

SvM: The essay in fact reflects my perhaps rather naive curiosity for an ethnographic or socio-anthropological reading of architectural form—or rather, for everyday "architectural semiotics" (though I never used the term). I am still struck by how this approach has hardly been implemented in the European context.

TL: How do you explain this paradox? You once mentioned that, while attempting to implement Venturi/Scott Brown's tools, you found that their method's usefulness turns out to be rather limited in a European situation, particularly so in Switzerland.

SvM: I think it is because the local culture does not yield the same extremes as the U.S. The settings here seem to be both more complex and more nuanced than along the American "Strip," where Venturi's and Scott Brown's "pop-theorizing" originated and to which it is so easily applicable.

GS: And yet, as reflected in "Phase Shifts," I think your stance does reveal an interest in semiology—albeit semiology understood as a way of recovering the "meanings" architecture can embody, be they intended by the designer, attributed by the public, or arbitrarily aggregated by circumstance—including metaphor, ambiguity, rhetorical nuance, and metonymy, as they inevitably occur in the production of space, in design,