

Dietrich Erben,
Carsten Ruhl (eds.)
Reference and
Contemporaneity
in Architecture

Techniques for Designing
the Present Needs

Architecture

[transcript]

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Dietrich Erben is a Professor of Theory and History of Architecture, Art and Design at Technische Universität München. His research focuses on the history of art and architecture since the early modern period, with special consideration of political iconography, architectural theory and the history of international art relations.

Carsten Ruhl is Professor of Architectural History at Goethe University Frankfurt, a founding member of the Center for Critical Studies in Architecture (CCSA) and one of two Directors of the DFG research cluster Organizing Architectures.

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Reference and Contemporaneity

Introduction

Dietrich Erben and Carsten Ruhl

Contemporary Relevance and Historiological Framework

Contemporaneity is once again in high demand. Together with its dialectical counterpart—reference to the past—it has moved to the center of debates that concern both politics and society, as well as historiological theory. Since February 2022, the history of Russian expansion has become a prominent case study in how ideology shapes historical interpretation.¹ Following the occupation of Crimea in 2014 and Russia's expanded invasion of Ukraine in winter 2022, several prominent Eastern European historians and political scientists have called for a fundamental reassessment of Russian history. They trace today's imperialism back to the Moscow Tsarist Empire in the mid-sixteenth century and even further to the Mongol Empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This extensive historical framework, they claim, enables us to explain Russia's "special path" of development. The present thus serves as an impulse for reevaluating the past. In opposition to this historical reinterpretation is a perspective strictly focused on contemporary factors. Advocates of this view argue that when analyzing the Russian invasion, a historical timeframe of merely two to three decades—roughly one generation—is sufficient. They maintain that Putin's imperial practices are retroactively justified through historical rhetoric that ultimately has a fictional relationship to the past, while being entirely oriented toward present

1 On the debate see Gerd Koenen, "Anmerkungen zu Putin", in *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* 16, no. 4 (2022), 67–82.

concerns. They caution against rewriting history without new source materials to support such revisions.

The history of colonialism and the systems of slavery entwined with it is another area where debates about contemporaneity and historical reference have intensified in recent years. These discussions extend beyond how we understand the past to more complex questions: Do the descendants of those who were colonized and enslaved—people who have been or continue to be subjugated—have a privileged position in historical discourse today? Furthermore, can these individuals—as people who remain actively or structurally oppressed—access and articulate historical truths that uninvolved contemporaries cannot?

There are many examples of such discussions, which concern fundamental issues and can naturally be applied to architectural history as well.² The core question is twofold: On the one hand, should history primarily serve as a commemorative political force for identity formation among various social groups? Under this view, historical research and criticism should align the past with the normative expectations of the present. On the other hand, an alternative perspective insists that history, as an enlightening force, should primarily illuminate historical contingencies and discontinuities. In this case, history should emphasize strangeness and alterity as distinct from the present and thereby evade the imperative of relating the past to present-day identity politics.

Historian Lynn Hunt has articulated the fundamental question of the relationship between normativity rooted in contemporary standards and interpretation of the past based on historical distance in these terms: “[P]resentism besets us in two different ways: (1) the tendency to interpret the past in presentist terms; and (2) the shift of general historical interest toward the contemporary period and away from the more distant past.”³ Both approaches involve the opposition of “strangeness” and “sameness”: Does his-

2 François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2003); Martin Sabrow, *Zeitenwenden in der Zeitgeschichte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2023), especially 78–87.

3 Lynn Hunt, “Against Presentism,” in *Perspectives On History* 1 (2002), <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/may-2002/against-presentism>. See also the further discussion by James H. Sweet, “Is History History? Identity Politics and Teleologies of the Present,” in *Perspectives On History* 17 (2022), <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on->

torical analysis still attempt to identify what distinguishes the past from our present, allowing the past to retain its foreignness? Or do we appropriate the past by aligning it with current normative standards, not only considering present-day normative values and ways of thinking in our analysis, but actually making them the primary focus of historical understanding? To use the terminology developed in this volume: Are we engaged in an incessant critical delegitimization of present-day identity politics through history when dealing with systems of historical reference? Or are we conducting an equally critical examination of the past that is largely committed to contemporary norms, but which risks contributing to a presentist erasure of history? Put differently, is it possible to make distanced reference to history, or is the past only available in the form of a contemporary culture of remembrance?

The essays in this volume demonstrate that, while we cannot escape the opposition between reference and contemporaneity, we need not stop at merely identifying it. One productive approach lies in making referential relationships historically concrete and naming them precisely—or acknowledging the futility of avoiding them. This process always involves interpreting entanglements between different media. Film and photo historian Siegfried Kracauer, who was also an important critic of architecture, discusses an early and remarkably complex example in his final book, *History: The Last Things Before The Last*,⁴ published posthumously in 1969. There, he explores the possible connections between the invention of photography in the 1830s and the simultaneous emergence of the ideal of objectivity in the historical sciences. The comparison between photography and historiography is only possible because both involve media. Moreover, Kracauer assigns historiography a decidedly “photographic” task: “The universe of the historian consists of the same stuff as our everyday world.” History is about life in the sense of every-day experience: “the life that lies on the path of our everyday experience.” Kracauer reports that many historians of the mid and late nineteenth century were aware of the parallels and differences between their work and

history/september-2022/is-history-history-identity-politics-and-teleologies-of-the-present.

- 4 Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before The Last* (1969; repr., Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995); the following quotations and paraphrases are from pages 45–48. On Kracauer as an architecture critic, see Carsten Ruhl, *Kracauer's Architecture: The Ornamental Nature of the New Capitalist Order* (Weimar: M Books, 2022).

that of photographers. Heinrich Heine already referred to his Paris reports, published in 1854 under the title *Lutezia*, as a “history book like a daguerreotype, in which each day captures its own image.” It was a commonly expressed idea that both photography and historiography were concerned with capturing reality, be it contemporary reality or a distant past no longer directly observable but only imaginable through visual or written sources. Historians, however, saw differences between their methods of representation and those of photography. Johann Gustav Droysen dismissed the notion of turning historians into “cameramen”; rather, he saw them as narrators of the past. Lewis Namier saw the historian not as a photographer, but as a painter: it was important to compose and emphasize what was significant, not “to reproduce everything that the eye captures.”

The comparison between historiography and photography—which has been familiar since the middle of the nineteenth century and to which Kracauer draws attention—once again poses the question of reference and contemporaneity. For one thing, the then-modern medium of photography became a media reference that reshaped the prevailing understanding of the tradition-laden discipline of historiography. Moreover, the objects of the past that were referenced were themselves modernized within that contemporary context by being subjected to new scientific standards of objectivity and reality.

Methodical Considerations Concerning Reference and Contemporaneity in Architecture

As we can see, the relationship between reference and contemporaneity is inherently challenging. This applies to history in general and consequently to the history of architecture as well. The concept for this volume and the conference on which it is based⁵ thus begins with a working hypothesis: there exists a fundamental tension between these two concepts in the production of architecture.

5 “Referenz und Zeitgenossenschaft / Reference and Contemporaneity,” conference in Frankfurt am Main, Goethe Universität, 11–13.05.2023. Organized by Dietrich Erben (TU München) und Carsten Ruhl (Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main).

Just as thinking in general relies on “varieties of reference,”⁶ architectural reflection depends on a variety of referential constructions: references are, we might say, a cognitive inevitability in both domains. The concept of similarity, which has been discussed across various disciplines in recent years,⁷ offers a particular way of understanding reference. Seen from a contemporary political perspective, this discussion stems partly from the search for a compromise-oriented path through today’s intensifying identity politics. The concept of similarity responds to the relentless confrontational emphasis on differences, the mutual boundary-drawing between identity groups, and action within strictly binary frameworks by offering a “both-and” alternative: “The focus on similarity and its associated concepts of cohesion and contiguity attempts to account for instances of interconnection, overlap, and gradation in cultural contexts. Similarity is an intentionally imprecise concept, a relational concept.”⁸ Moreover, the references established through similarity are not necessarily historical, but can equally signal strong connections to the present and what is currently relevant.

Following this paradigm, architectural references can only be understood through relationships of similarity. References do not stand in a relationship of identity with their models, but one of resemblance. Unlike copies, quotations, and mimetic adaptations of source material, references are not true to detail; rather, they modernize their source material and adapt it to contemporary contexts. Sociologist Gabriel Tarde recognized this as early as 1890 in *Les lois de l’imitation*, identifying similarity relationships as a logical principle of cultural evolution. For Tarde, the reference frame of his era was,

6 Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

7 On the approach see Gerald Funk, Gert Mattenklott, Michael Pauen, eds., *Symbole und Signaturen. Charakteristik und Geschichte des Ähnlichkeitsdenkens, Ästhetik des Ähnlichen. Zur Poetik und Kunstphilosophie der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), as well as the research report for a Konstanz project and the publications of the project participants: Anil Bhatti, Dorothee Kimmich, Albrecht Koschorke, Rudolf Schlögl, Jürgen Wertheimer, eds., “Ähnlichkeit. Ein kulturtheoretisches Paradigma,” in *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 36 (2011), 233–47, <https://doi.org/10.1515/iasl.2011.018>; Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich, eds., *Ähnlichkeit. Ein theoretisches Paradigma* (Konstanz, 2015); Dorothee Kimmich, *Ins Ungefähre. Ähnlichkeit und Moderne* (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2017).

8 Bhatti et al., “Ähnlichkeit,” 245.

of course, historicism, which continuously invoked various historical styles. Yet even within historicism, he claimed, evolution occurred not through repetition but through variation: “We do not demand the expression of fleeting impressions from architecture or music, impressions that are borrowed from foreign or from dead and artificially restored civilisations; we demand from them a vivid expression and reproduction of the impressions that are wrought into our life.”⁹ Tarde distinguishes between “fashion” and “custom”: while fashion displays little formal variation because it relies on established, proven functional solutions, custom exhibits continual variation and accelerates formal change. Even fashions, however, involve reference-making and create similarities. According to Tarde, the Renaissance was a special form of “re-birth”: “Greek and Latin antiquity was strongly Italianised. Besides, this innovation was only a fashion following, like any other, in the tail of certain discoveries, namely, the archaeological discoveries resulting from the diggings in the sacred soil of antique Rome or in the libraries of the monasteries.”¹⁰

The concept of reference—understood broadly as ways of invoking other things—proves robust and readily applicable. The contributions collected here examine a broad spectrum of intermedial, interdisciplinary, and intercultural references, confirming both the cognitive necessity of references and referencing’s status as a ubiquitous cultural technique.¹¹ The reference system of language generally operates through a triad of word-object-meaning: a word refers to other words, establishes a relationship to an object it denotes, and ultimately points to a concept it represents. The word “house” denotes the physical reality of a house and conveys its meaning as a place of human habitation. Beyond this, references as cognitive phenomena can be categorized as temporal, spatial, object-based, or event-based. Possible ref-

9 Gabriel Tarde, *Les lois de l'imitation. Etude sociologique* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1890); Gabriel Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation* (1903; repr., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962), 354.

10 Tarde, *The Laws*, 363.

11 From the interdisciplinary (and therefore difficult to survey) literature, see, from a linguistic perspective, Mark Textor, ed., *Neue Theorien der Referenz* (Paderborn: Brill, 2004) and, more generally, Philipp Wolf, entry on “Referenz” in *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie: Ansätze – Personen – Grundbegriffe* (1998), ed. Ansgar Nünning, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013), 642–43, which includes a further bibliography.

erence objects can also include mental models, conceptual images, or theories. These classifications require further specification in particular contexts. For instance, when discussing the “Gothic cathedral in France,” time, place, object, and model are invoked in equal measure. Similarly, characterizing a building as “functional” often references scientific ideals such as objectivity, rationality, and progress. The linguistic reference system becomes particularly complex with metaphors. It is even possible for a specific meaning to be obscured or undermined by the linguistic term used to express it, as studies of metaphor have demonstrated.¹² At the same time, however, metaphors—like references in general—can serve to legitimize concepts and confer authority.

Unlike the concept of reference, the concept of contemporaneity, as far as we can see, has yet to be methodologically clarified. We will therefore outline some considerations regarding its theoretical scope based on individual examples. Firstly, contemporaneity should be distinguished from the concepts of modernity and actuality (*Aktualität*—which can be understood as relevance in the immediate present). According to its conceptual history, which reaches back to antiquity, modernity refers to the relationship between old and modern (*antiquus/modernus*). This distinction continued for centuries until “modern” itself finally became an attribute of the modern epoch.¹³ Actuality, by contrast, refers to the relevance of a phenomenon primarily in its temporal dimension. In art history, the concept has been viewed ambivalently. From the perspective of the philosophy of art, George Kubler observes: “Yet the instant of actuality is all we ever can know directly. The rest of time emerges only in signals relayed to us at this instant by innumerable stages and by unexpected bearers.”¹⁴ Carl Einstein, on the other hand, commenting

12 Petra Gehring, “Erkenntnis durch Metaphern? Methodische Bemerkungen zur Metaphernforschung,” in *Metaphern in Wissenskulturen*, ed. Matthias Junge (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2009), 203–20, and more generally Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, commentary by Anselm Haverkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013). See also: Ruhl 2022, chapter “Metaphors and Territories,” 45–55, and Sarah Borree et al., *Metaphorical Practices in Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2023).

13 Cornelia Klinger, “Modern/Moderne/Modernismus,” in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Studienausgabe*, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al., vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2010), 121–67.

14 George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 17.

in the context of his materialistic and socially committed art historiography, views actuality as a problem of entangled interests: “It is understandable that the modernists do not represent actuality broadly; for such an undertaking would in itself have limited & refuted their unrestrained individualism. – *Actuality is collaboration*; for the present consists of manifold elements and forces.”¹⁵

The question of positioning oneself within one’s own present also relates to the concept of contemporaneity. The word initially refers to the simple fact that contemporaries, as members of a specific group, live at the same time. They share a common biographical horizon of years they experience together.¹⁶ This biographical connection allows a contemporary to declare about certain historical events, “and you can say you were there”—as Goethe famously put it in the context of the Franco–German wars during the Cannonade of Valmy on September 20, 1792.¹⁷ Like the concept of *Zeitgeist*, the German terms *Zeitgenosse/Zeitgenossenschaft* (contemporary/contemporaneity) also trace back to the transitional period of the Enlightenment and the historical acceleration following the revolutionary era after 1789. Heinrich Heine, for example, used the term “poetic contemporaneity” (*poetische Zeitgenossenschaft*) in the early nineteenth century to characterize the literary ambition of combining poetry with political commitment and an explicit address to a contemporary audience.¹⁸

By the mid-nineteenth century, critique of the present had established itself as the primary goal of art. This applied equally to realism and historicism. The phrase “il faut être de son temps” originated in French romanticism, but

15 Carl Einstein, *Werke*. Berliner Ausgabe, vol. 4: *Texte aus dem Nachlass* vol. 1, ed. Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (Berlin: Fannei und Walz, 1998), 243. See also the commentary by Olga Martynova, “Über die Dummheit der Stunde,” in *Über die Dummheit der Stunde*. Essays (Berlin: Fischer, 2018), 108–14, and the discussion in Wolfgang Knöbl, “Beobachtungen zum Begriff der Moderne,” in *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 37 (2012): 63–77, <https://doi.org/10.1515/iasl-2012-0004>.

16 The catchy title of Peter Rühmkorf’s autobiography captures this sense: “The years you know.” See *Die Jahre die Ihr kennt. Anfälle und Erinnerungen* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1972).

17 On this connection see Lucian Hölscher, *In Zeitgärten. Zeitfiguren in der Geschichte der Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020), 224–29.

18 Renate Stauf, *Poetische Zeitgenossenschaft. Heine-Studien* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2015).

it was only during realism that it became a demand.¹⁹ The graphic artist and caricaturist Honoré Daumier used the formula as his artistic motto. For the philosopher, historian, and art critic Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine, the demand for contemporaneity was already tautological, as he considered it both inevitable and self-evident. In his *Philosophie de l'art*, published 1865–1869, he viewed the development of art through his milieu theory as determined by both historical and contemporary conditions. For Taine, a work of art becomes more meaningful the more fully it embodies the character of the era in which it was created.²⁰

Within the history and theory of architecture, the *Revue générale d'architecture et des travaux publics*, published between 1840 and 1888 and edited by the architect César Daly, exemplifies this “realistic” agenda. The monthly journal’s objectives are explained by its editor in the first issue.²¹ At the very beginning of the introduction, architecture is defined as a “construction” that serves to accommodate people in dwellings, animals in stables, and plants in greenhouses; architects and engineers are further responsible for erecting factories and manufacturing buildings and planning infrastructure for cities and the countryside. For Daly, architecture is always situated in the tension between tradition and innovation; on the one hand, it is always based on the “expérience des choses faites,” while on the other, its aim is the “possibilité d’applications nouvelles.” In terms of the journal’s content, its structure includes “Histoire” as well as “Théorie” and “Pratique,” and it is aimed squarely at the country’s administrative and property-owning elites:

C’est donc une Revue que nous voulons fonder, une Revue générale de l’Architecture et des Travaux Publics, qui s’adressera, par son objet, à la

19 George Boas is still a bedrock of this conceptual history: see “Il faut être de son temps,” in *Journal of Aesthetics* 1 (1941), 52–65. See also Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (1971; London: Penguin, 1990), especially 103–4, and for the broader context Michael Brix and Monika Steinhauser, eds., *Geschichte allein ist zeitgemäß. Historismus in Deutschland* (Gießen: Anabas, 1978), as well as Helmut Pfeiffer, Hans Robert Jauß, and Françoise Gaillard, eds., *Art social und art industriel. Funktionen der Kunst im Zeitalter des Industrialismus* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1987).

20 Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine, *Philosophie de l'art*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1865–69), new ed.: *Philosophie de l'Art*, ed. Jean-François Revel (Paris: Hachette, 2009).

21 For what follows, see César Daly, “Introduction,” in *Revue générale d'architecture et des travaux publics* 1 (1840), cols. 1–7.

fois aux ARCHITECTES, aux INGÉNIEURS, aux ARCHÉOLOGUES, aux INDUSTRIELS, aux PROPRIÉTAIRES, et enfin aux GOUVERNEMENTS, dont l'intérêt et le devoir sont de veiller en même temps sur la prospérité, le bien-être et la gloire des pays qu'ils administrent.

The *Revue générale d'architecture et des travaux publics* is dedicated to the needs and interests of the present. If at the same time it remains linked to historical references, this is due to its instrumental relationship to history as a repository of experiences useful for the present. Here, at the early historical hour of the mid-nineteenth century, we see both a departure from idealistic aesthetics and a turning toward a “realistic” understanding of architecture. Both of these tendencies would later be further developed and radicalized in the modernist movements under the auspices of functionalism.

Looking back at what was likely the decisive formation of the idea of contemporaneity during the nineteenth century, it becomes clear that the term does not merely—and certainly not primarily—denote belonging to one's own time and observing it. Rather, it signifies active participation in the present and interest-driven involvement. Understood in this way, contemporaneity is not just a biographical state, but an agenda. This point is also explicitly addressed by the contributions presented here.

Architecture's Reference System: The Subject and Theses of this Volume

Following these methodological considerations, architecture can be described as a reference system based on allusions and similarities. This applies both to the fundamental concept of architecture itself and to its media (including the actual buildings constructed), as well as to the conception of the architectural subject in modernism.²²

22 Here we take the liberty of referring to texts by the editors of this volume: Dietrich Erben and Tobias Zervosen, eds., *Das eigene Leben als Ästhetische Fiktion. Autobiographie und Professionsgeschichte* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018); Carsten Ruhl, “The Art of the Deal. Architektur im Zeitalter neoliberaler Selbstentwürfe,” in *Selbstentwurf. Das Architektenhaus von der Renaissance bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Dietrich Boschung and Julian Jachmann (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2018), 235–63; Ruhl, *Kracauer's Architecture* (2022), 11–19.

Architecture is generally conceived under conditions that are not its own and presupposes references to things outside itself.²³ These include basic external purposes like usability, construction, cost effectiveness, and aesthetics. More specifically, as discussed above, buildings double as references to places, objects, epochs, or events. These can be classes of structural elements (e.g. wall, roof, door, window), building typologies (e.g. office building, point tower), cultural topographies (e.g. Roman palace), architectural styles (e.g. the Gothic cathedral, New Objectivity). The symptoms of a conflict between style and form can be seen as early as the nineteenth century in the expression “stylistic shell and core” (Joseph Bayer, 1886), which, in distinguishing between formal appearance and construction, also identifies the difference between contemporary formal adaptations and physical building constraints.²⁴ Later, these symptoms manifested in the increasingly emphasized opposition between ornamental façades with relational qualities and the non-relational construction methods of mass production, as well as the functionalist programming of spaces.²⁵ Special buildings are almost always placed in a conscious relation to other buildings—for example, being particularly exposed in the competitive mechanism of “building and counter-building.”²⁶ Furthermore, fundamental concepts of architectural theory (planning, function, design, order, etc.), which have gradually been imported into architectural terminology from other cultural techniques, have by no means lost their original meanings, and have in some cases been re-imported back into other disciplines as metaphors. This occurs in politics, for example, when people talk about the “European security architecture” or the “Com-

23 Umberto Eco, *La struttura assente* (Milan: La nave di Teseo editore, 1968) (German: *Einführung in die Semiotik*, 7th ed. [Munich: Hanser, 1991]). The work appears not to have been translated into English.

24 Werner Oechslin, *Stilhülse und Kern*. Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos und der evolutionäre Weg zur modernen Architektur (Zurich: gta Verlag, 1994).

25 Anna-Marie Sankovitch, “Structure/Ornament and the Modern Figuration of Architecture,” in *The Art Bulletin* 80 (1998), 687–717; David Leatherbarrow and Mohsen Mostafavi, *Surface Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Antoine Picon, *Ornament: The Politics of Architecture and Subjectivity*, *AD Primer* (2013).

26 Martin Warnke, “Bau und Gegenbau,” in *Architektur als politische Kultur*. *Philosophia practica*, ed. Hermann Hipp and Ernst Seidel (Berlin: Reimer, 1996), 11–18; on referential “counter-concepts” see also Reinhart Koselleck and Carl Schmitt, *Der Briefwechsel 1953–1983 und weitere Materialien*, ed. Jan Eike Dunkhase (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019), 268–69.

mon European Home.” Last but not least, buildings that have been destroyed or modified can continue to exist as references if the meaning offered by the earlier building is deliberately rejected through the “acts of negation accomplished by demolition or conversion.”²⁷

When we speak of the “production” of architecture, we don’t mean merely the material construction of buildings, but also dominant historiographical, discursive, disciplinary, habitual, and institutional narratives. In a comprehensive sense, architectural production also encompasses the cultural post-production of architecture both in its use and criticism. It cannot exist without the two dimensions of reference and contemporaneity—and their dialectical relationship. How, then, do references—whether functioning as determinants or as opportunities for free choice—relate to contemporary demands for originality and innovation? Methodologically, reference and contemporaneity are introduced as two normative, contrasting concepts that can be related to each other from a critical distance: references only become problematic when they are orientated toward contemporary relevance, while contemporaneity comes into conflict with references that necessarily draw upon conventions and canonized knowledge. These concepts often evade a true dialectic in favor of radical opposition: while reference largely points to relationships with the past, contemporaneity primarily aims at the present and future values of originality, actuality, innovation, and problem-solving. Both concepts are embedded in justificatory frameworks with different rationales of narrative and legitimation. Referentiality, for example, offers the possibility of deriving design solutions from normative models, autobiographical references, or analysis of the *genius loci*. Contemporaneity, on the other hand, often serves to legitimize aesthetic preferences that themselves have no concrete function by appealing to non-referential, scientific, or purposefully rational objectivity. The French philosopher, literary theorist, and critic Roland Barthes explored this connection vividly in his essay on the Eiffel Tower. For Barthes, this spectacular building was the quintessential

27 Joachim Fischer, “Die Bedeutung der Philosophischen Anthropologie für die Architektursoziologie,” in *Soziale Ungleichheit, kulturelle Unterschiede: Verhandlungen des 32. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in München*, ed. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2006), 3417–28, here 3425; cf. Dietrich Erben, “Architektur in Transformationsgesellschaften. Überlegungen zur Theorie des Umbaus,” in *arch+*, special issue: “Umbau. Ansätze der Transformation,” no. 254 (2024), 10–19.

example of a uselessness that had been rationally justified: “These uses are doubtless incontestable, but they seem quite ridiculous alongside the overwhelming myth of the Tower, of the human meaning which it has assumed throughout the world. This is because here the utilitarian excuses, however ennobled they may be by the myth of Science, are nothing in comparison to the great imaginary function which enables men to be strictly human. Yet, as always, the gratuitous meaning of the work is never avowed directly: it is rationalized under the rubric of use.”²⁸

When discussing this dialectic in the present volume, we must ask whether we recognize in it a fundamental theoretical paradox, an ultimately unavoidable tension, or even a desirable compromise in a conflict of norms. A central starting point in thinking about this problem is the question of how references are selected based on interest—and thus ideologically constructed—to meet contemporary social demands on architecture. In architectural theory, we might consider modernism’s referential relationship between buildings and machines as an example. For architectural history, we should examine the role of canon formation, historiographical narratives, “regimes of truth,”²⁹ archives, museums, and exhibitions. For the history of architectural theory, it can be shown that every text refers to a specific typology of genres (treatise, manifesto, essay, exhibition catalog, etc.)—an institutionalized form of textual communication.³⁰

The inevitability of reference, however, seems to be a blind spot in architectural discourse. To put it more precisely: although references are frequently mentioned in practice, their systematic significance in the design process has not yet been described in detail. While in other cultural practices the idea of authorship has long been questioned and ideologically scrutinized, with discourse around intertextuality now commonplace, both architects’ self-perception and their public image, as well as the mode of architectural

28 Roland Barthes, “The Eiffel Tower,” in *The Eiffel Tower, and Other Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 3–17, here 6. The French original was first published in 1964 with photographs by André Martin: Roland Barthes, *La Tour Eiffel* (Paris, 1964).

29 Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” in *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 87–109.

30 Dietrich Erben, *Architekturtheorie. Eine Geschichte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2017); Erben, ed., *Das Buch als Entwurf. Textgattungen in der Geschichte der Architekturtheorie. Ein Handbuch* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2019).

historiography, largely assume that a design is the achievement of an individual. The jargon term “design approach” (*Haltung*)—which appears on the homepages of numerous firms as a form of self-promotion—perhaps most clearly expresses this gesture of asserting the isolated, individual, or even ingenious achievement of architects.³¹ Rehearsals for this role begin as early as an architect’s student days.³²

Current architectural discourse even plays with the possibility of “non-referential architecture.”³³ However, it is possible that the alternative—the referential use of models—not only calls into question the idea of authorial design, but in fact reinforces it. This occurs when authorship is glorified through rhetorical references to canonized sources such as the ancient architectural theorist Vitruvius³⁴ or Andrea Palladio.

Throughout the history of architecture, different weightings and evaluations have been given to the dialectic of allusions to tradition and the outside world (reference) and innovative achievements supposedly unencumbered by such allusions (contemporaneity). Even Renaissance culture exhibited an imperative of innovation that, somewhat paradoxically and with considerable tension, derived from another imperative of continuity primarily oriented toward antiquity.³⁵ Explicit references to style carried this dialectic forward through the Renaissance, classicism, and historicism—and it apparently became questionable only when modernism asserted an equally explicit autonomy of style. Beginning with modernism, the relationship between continuity and innovation has been radicalized into a contradiction between past and present, with autonomy, self-referentiality, and contem-

31 Dietrich Erben, “Haltung: Zu Karriere und Kritik eines Begriffs in der Architektursprache” (2014), in *Humanität und gebaute Umwelt: Essays und Studien zur Architekturgeschichte* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2023), 127–39.

32 See Christina Schumacher and Marie Antoinette Glaser, “Kreativität in der Architekturausbildung: Erkundungen zu einem disziplinären Mythos,” in *ZfK Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaft*, no. 1 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 13–30.

33 Valerio Olgiati and Markus Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture* (Zurich: Park Books, 2018). See also the contribution by Ole W. Fischer in the present volume.

34 André Tavares, *Vitruvius Without Text: The Biography of a Book* (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2022).

35 Odo Marquard, “Innovationskultur als Kontinuitätskultur. Überlegungen zur Renaissance” (1996), in *Skepsis in der Moderne. Philosophische Studien* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007), 83–92.

poraneity being the key concepts. Since then, different modes of temporal consciousness have stood in conflict in architectural production: a historicist consciousness centered on reference, and a modern consciousness that understands itself as a logic of problem-solving and design that is active in the present.

For architecture, this relationship of conflict can be concretized on various levels. At the *theoretical* level, it concerns the understanding of “contemporary architecture” and of “contemporary” in contrast to other cultural techniques like the visual arts.³⁶ At the level of *ethics*, it involves the social responsibility of architects with regard to current problems and courses of action for the future.³⁷ At the level of *aesthetics*, the focus is on concepts of architecture that are decidedly non-historicizing and aesthetically autonomous.

Such a discussion of referentiality, developed from its conceptual antithesis of contemporaneity, should make it possible to examine architectural practices grounded in these two concepts more precisely than was previously feasible across the various fields of architectural theory, history, criticism, education, and design. In all these areas—and this is the basic idea of this volume—the dialectic of reference operates both as a system for creating models and as a claim to contemporaneity in the sense of engagement with the present. The aim of the volume is to discuss this issue by integrating aspects of theory, history, and architectural practice. First of all, the project takes a critical distance from existing texts on explicitly referential theories of design. These legitimize referencing as a design technique while simultaneously leaving the procedure entirely obscure in terms of its aesthetic design intentions, the mechanisms by which mostly canonical references are selected, and, in particular, the interests involved in positioning

36 Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex* (London: Verso, 2013); Frédéric Döhl et al., eds., *Zitieren, appropriieren, sampeln. Referenzielle Verfahren in den Gegenwartskünsten* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013); Juliane Rebentisch, “The Contemporaneity of Contemporary Art,” in *New German Critique* 42, no. 124 (February 2015), 223–37; Annika Haas et al., eds., *How to relate. Wissen, Künste, Praktiken* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2021).

37 Jens Balzer, *Die Ethik der Appropriation* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2022).

architectural projects in the market.³⁸ While recent research has provided relatively general information about the concepts of contemporaneity³⁹ and imitation-based referentiality, a systematic and critically distanced engagement with these concepts is still lacking for architecture. Referentiality in architecture seems to have been discussed as a necessary preliminary in numerous studies on historicism, modernity, and, more recently, the basis of mimetic design processes⁴⁰—primarily in a variety of individual observations regarding the question of “models” and “influences.”⁴¹ However, such a methodical emphasis on references to the past is opposed by the factual primacy of contemporaneity, which aims functionally at the relevance of the built environment, aesthetically at the self-referentiality of architecture, and socially at the habitus of architects. This manifests in a concept of autonomy that encompasses the design as well as the creativity of authorship, the claim to innovation in the built environment, and the idea of direct participation in the present.

Starting from the fundamental premise that references are essential for all cultural techniques, including architecture, this volume advances three key theses: First, architecture’s distinctive character lies in the particularly ambivalent tension between reference and contemporaneity that emerges from its resource-intensive and innovation-driven mode of production. Second, this previously unexamined ambivalence plays a guiding role in both architectural production and discourse. Third, the issues surrounding contemporaneity do not pertain to a condition, but to an agenda—one where references are selected according to interests and adapted to present needs. This perspective enriches existing conceptions of references as tools of de-

38 For example, Astrid Staufer et al., eds., *Ikonen. Methodische Experimente im Umgang mit architektonischen Referenzen* (Zurich: Park Books, 2018); Andreas Hild and Barbara Brinkmann, *Vom Suchen und Wiederfinden. Die Mechanik des Entwerfens. On Seeking and Rediscovering. The Mechanics of Architectural Design* (Berlin: Reimer, 2021). See also the contribution by Dietrich Erben in the present volume.

39 Verena Krieger, ed., *Kunstgeschichte und Gegenwartskunst. Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Zeitgenossenschaft* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), and the literature cited in note 36.

40 Eva von Engelberg-Dočkal et al., eds., *Mimetische Praktiken in der neueren Architektur. Prozesse und Formen der Ähnlichkeitserzeugung* (Cologne: arthistoricum.net, 2017).

41 For a recent critical view of the method, see Ulrich Pfisterer and Christine Tauber, eds., *Einfluss, Strömung, Quelle. Aquatische Metaphern in der Kunstgeschichte* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018).

sign economy, imitation, and historicization by tying them far more explicitly to contemporary agendas than has been done before.

Finally, we should note several topics that could not be explicitly addressed, primarily owing to the scope of this volume and difficulties in finding suitable contributors. References to natural-material realities relevant to both past and present are a key issue for architecture, as recently explored within “geo-sociology” (encompassing earth territories, flora and fauna, atmospheric, geological, and hydrological systems, etc.).⁴² Other important areas include references to general conceptions of space (universal space, systemic space, ecological space, lifeworld space, etc.)⁴³ and references to the currently resurgent category of the vernacular.⁴⁴

42 Markus Schroer, *Geosozologie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022).

43 Katrin Klingan and Christoph Rosol, eds., *Technosphäre* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2019).

44 See Anita Aigner, ed., *Vernakulare Moderne. Grenzüberschreitungen in der Architektur um 1900. Das Bauernhaus und seine Aneignung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011).

Production - Disruption

The Permanence of Pattern Books

On the Production of Architectural References

Dietrich Erben

The following argument concerns matters both obvious and simple: references are not encountered or discovered as references, but are produced. They are created through a more or less methodical process of selection from existing materials and are subsequently processed using different media. References are, in fact, made through communication. This communication is active both in what is already materially present—like individual buildings, building typologies, or documented theoretical principles—and current demands for utilizing references in the design process. Indeed, references require such communication as a necessary precondition: if it is not communicated that this or that building or this or that theory is a reference, then it will not be one. References thus only come into being in response to a present demand. In this respect, they resemble experiences, with which they bear some structural similarities. Just like experiences, references are only really “made” in new functional contexts. Before experiences or references are “made”—that is, before they are consciously available and relevant to the present—they exist simply as vague personal memories of the past, or unstructured acquired knowledge. The historian Reinhart Koselleck summarizes the difference between these forms of knowledge by contrasting two modalities of “active memories.” On the one hand, memories can be based on concrete lived, historical experiences; on the other, they can come about through “secondary acquired or compiled knowledge.”¹ Likewise, references

¹ Reinhart Koselleck, “Primärerfahrungen und sekundäre Erinnerungen,” in Geronnene Lava. Texte zu politischem Totenkult und Erinnerung, ed. Manfred Hettling, Hubert Locher, and Adriana Markantonatos (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2023), 335–45.

can be composed from primary experience or the secondary acquisition of knowledge. In either case, they necessarily require knowledge.

It is a further self-evident truth that all these operations involved in producing references occur self-referentially within the architectural system. In what follows, I will therefore focus on a specific line of thinking relating to self-referentiality: juxtaposing it with referentiality. The questions I will address are how self-referentiality is represented in architectural production and how it is inscribed in the contemporary. The immediate starting point for my reflections is a group of recent theories of architectural design in which historical buildings are reprocessed as references in a strangely alienated, pale, and blasé form. From here, we can also ask about older approaches that use pattern collections.

The answers I will propose consist primarily of three observations: 1) Architects have, in their profession, created institutions for a kind of in-house production of architectural references and established themselves in these institutions largely to the exclusion of the public. The professional self-referentiality of architectural production consists in the fact that architects themselves create their references for colleagues. Their interests here are promoting themselves, stabilizing discourse, and making discourse exclusive. I outline how these references are produced by examining published theories of architectural design and juxtapose them with other architectural publications, in particular architects' catalogues raisonnés. 2) This field of publications creates a self-referential canon whose forms of representation change historically. I propose that it operates in four different modes: the pattern building as reference; diagrammatic reference; systemic reference in the modernist period; and the blasé references of the present. 3) All these modes erase history. They de-historicize connections to the past and with them original, complex contexts. In this way, they make references available for the value chains of architectural production in the present.

Self-referentiality is at the center of my considerations. Following Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, I understand this to mean that certain practices

On the concept of experience, see also Dietrich Erben, "Erfahrung als Argument in Berufsautobiographien. Der Kunsthistoriker Michael Baxandall und der Architekt Louis Sullivan," in *Das eigene Leben als ästhetische Fiktion. Berufsautobiographien und Professionsgeschichte*, ed. Dietrich Erben and Tobias Zervosen (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018), 23–38.

generate themselves out of themselves, that they essentially refer to themselves, and that those involved in these practices largely only communicate with each other and observe themselves.² In the case of natural science, for example, self-referentiality consists in the fact that scientists cannot appeal to the authority of external references from other subsystems to justify their claims; they cannot refer to religion (e.g. holy scriptures, collections of rules), politics (e.g. constitutions, party platforms), justice (e.g. laws, court rulings) or public media (journalism, television). In the case of architectural production, the “self” of self-referentiality is the architectural system. This subsystem is concerned with operations for producing references that remain within the profession of architecture and which are also communicated almost exclusively within this domain. At the same time, however, self-reference always means self-reflection, as Luhmann also emphasizes. For it is only when a cultural practice, in this case architecture, is able to refer to itself that it develops its own characteristics and its own jurisdiction. In the end, we must ask what this ambivalence—of self-isolation on the one hand, and self-reflection on the other—means for architecture.

The Pattern Building as Reference

If we consider self-reference across the history of architecture, it quickly becomes clear that it is a process of appropriation with considerable historical depth. Looking back over the past five centuries or so of modern architectural theory, we immediately encounter published pattern collections. These collections contributed significantly to the stabilization and globalization of architectural knowledge. I will briefly explain these two aspects using the example of Palladianism.

The founding work of Palladianism is, of course, Andrea Palladio's *I quattro libri dell'architettura* (1570).³ These four books are inconceivable without Vi-

2 Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 57–65; Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); Giancarlo Corsi, “Selbstreferenz,” in *GLU. Glossar zu Niklas Luhmanns Theorie sozialer Systeme*, ed. Claudio Baraldi, Giancarlo Corsi, and Elena Esposito (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 163–67.

3 From the extensive literature on Palladianism, see only Carsten Ruhl, *Palladio bears away the palm. Zur Ästhetisierung palladianischer Architektur in England* (Hildesheim:

truvius and without the various treatises of Sebastiano Serlio that were published from 1537 onwards (including the *Regole generali*). Palladio's *Quattro libri* contain both a systematization of ancient architecture based on Vitruvius and autopsies of buildings and, in the second of the four books, a catalog of Palladio's own buildings. These two related fields—antiquity, on the one hand, and his own oeuvre, on the other—make the question of reference and contemporaneity immediately evident. In the conceptual framework of the High Renaissance, it can be formulated as the opposition of “antiquus” and “modernus” (or “hodiernus”, i.e. the contemporary).⁴

Behind this contrast of old and new lies a fundamental typological conflict: the simple question of which building typologies known from antiquity could be adapted for modern times. This conflict presents itself as a problem of interruptions in the continuity between antiquity and modernity. Some ancient building types completely lost their functional relationship with people very clearly and completely—for example, when temples, baths, arenas, and theaters were neither used for their primary purposes, nor reactivated, at least for a time, as modern building types. Yet even these obsolete ancient spaces continued to function as cultural resources, as references.⁵

In his *Quattro libri*, Palladio takes a further pioneering and resolute step by addressing the conflict between tradition and modernity in his own oeuvre. In the buildings presented in the *Secondo libro*, he essentially adopts the ancient building types of palatium, villa, and basilica. However, he transposes them into his own time and presents them as exemplary solutions to the construction problems they each pose.⁶ These references are produced

Olms, 2003); Werner Oechslin, *Palladianismus*. Andrea Palladio—Kontinuität von Werk und Wirkung (Zürich: gta, 2008); Charles Hind and Irena Murray, eds., *Palladio and his legacy. A transatlantic journey* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2010); Guido Beltramini, ed., *Jefferson e Palladio. Come costruire un mondo nuovo* (Milano: Officina Libraria, 2015); Barry Bergdoll, “Some notes on Palladio's reputation in France, Germany, and Britain in the nineteenth century,” in *Annali di architettura* 34 (2022), 161–82.

4 Cornelia Klinger, “Modern/Moderne/Modernismus,” in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al., vol. 4 (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2000), 121–67, especially 123–28.

5 Dietrich Erben, “Kommunikations- und Normenkonflikte in der europäischen Renaissancearchitektur—eine methodische Skizze,” in *kritische berichte*, special issue: *Architektur und Konflikt*, 51 (2023), 93–107.

6 Ursel Berger, “Palladio publiziert seine eigenen Bauten. Zur Problematik des ‘Secondo Libro,’” in *Architectura* 14 (1984), 20–40; Dietrich Erben, *Architekturtheorie. Eine Geschichte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2017), 11–16.

solely by means of an image–text scheme. Let me briefly illustrate this using a page from the book (Fig. 1). The Villa Barbaro near the village of Maser in Veneto is one of Palladio's famous mansions, combining the main house in the middle of the complex with its agricultural outbuildings, courtyard, and gardens to form a harmonious ensemble. A short explanatory text at the top of the page corresponds to the view of the building's façade at the bottom, and both visually reinforce the text–image unit. In the middle of the page, the floor plan of the villa spreads out in an almost majestic expanse. Along with the buildings, the plan also shows the enclosing walls of the courtyard and the semi-circular nymphaeum behind the house. The façade view and floor plan are precisely coordinated in their width and internal dimensions, which makes it easier for the reader to find their way around given the high degree of abstraction in the depictions. The plan and façade are to be understood together in a synchronized reading. They relate to each other precisely, yet float together like lines of text against the backdrop of the paper. Palladio refrains from any illusionistic effects: he does not give the woodcut a pictorial framing, nor include any topographical details. The text does indeed contain references to topography, but in the case of the images, the site of the building has been completely silenced. By stripping his buildings from their historical contexts in this way, Palladio makes them available to his contemporary readership as *exempla* and as model solutions for future clients.

This approach to presenting buildings set the tone not only for Palladianism, but also for further diffusion of the style around the world. Palladianism established itself as an international style within endless loops of reference reproduction. As is well known, important stages in this process were the reproduction and variation of typologies and formal repertoires by Vincenzo Scamozzi in Italy, as well as by Inigo Jones and Colen Campbell in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From there, they spread to North America and other British colonies. This globalization brought together a highbrow Palladianism on the part of the social establishment with a simple, lowbrow Palladianism that spread to some parts of the world through pattern collections, which flooded the market in a tidal wave of booklets.⁷

7 On the genre of the pattern collection, see most recently: Dal trattato al manuale. La circolazione dei modelli a stampa nell'architettura tra età moderna e contemporanea, ed. Aurora Scotti Tosini (Palermo: Caracol, 2013); on the more general context, see: Narrating the Globe: The Emergence of World Histories of Architecture, ed. Petra

The colonial interaction between builders, craftsmen, and architects in the construction sector is partly due to these English pattern books. For example, the original model of the one-story wooden suburban house and garden was first introduced to the American West Coast as a “cottage” or “bungalow,” and from there made its way to the colonies and overseas territories in the Pacific region, like New Zealand, through such pattern collections.⁸

In parallel to pattern books, another strand of pattern collections—again inspired by Palladio—unfolded in the context of communicating the bodies of work produced by particular architects. The German concept of “Werkpolitik” can be applied here. “Werkpolitik” refers to strategies of successive canon formation through the transmission of a “complete body of work,” which gains exemplary character through the authority of the author and the normative value of the work.⁹ A single body of work is thus made available as a reference. This can also be observed in the case of architecture, with the academic genre of the catalogue raisonné becoming established at the latest with Palladio’s *Secondo libro*—and in turn providing a pool of references. After Palladio, we should mention Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach’s inventory of works (*Entwurf einer historischen Architektur*, 1721). In the nineteenth century, Schinkel’s collection of architectural designs (begun in 1819) set the standard for works by Friedrich Weinbrenner, Leo von Klenze, Georg Moller, Christian Fredrik Hansen, Heinrich Hübsch, and Friedrich von Gärtner (among others). In the twentieth century, the spectrum extends from Frank Lloyd Wright’s *Wasmuth Portfolio* (1910) to Le Corbusier’s *Œuvre complète* (from 1929) and Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction* (1966). Today, catalogue raisonnés are not just published as books, but are also available on the homepages of architecture firms—and, more than ever before, the self-presentation of these firms for the purpose of acquiring further com-

Brouwer, Martin Bressani, and Christopher Drew Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023).

8 Ben Schrader, *The Big Smoke: New Zealand Cities 1840-1920* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016), 77–80, 88–90, 343–46.

9 Steffen Martus, *Werkpolitik. Zur Literaturgeschichte kritischer Kommunikation vom 17. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert. Mit Studien zu Klopstock, Tieck, Goethe und George* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007).

missions is converging with the provision of pattern solutions in a manner we might describe as loyal to the profession.¹⁰

After 1800: The Diagrammatic Reference

After the aesthetic reforms of the eighteenth century and with the various historicisms of the nineteenth, the architectural reference gained a new status. Rather than referring to individual, unique buildings, references took on a standard, anonymous form. This is exemplified by the design theory of Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand. In his publications, Durand thinks in terms of the scale of public buildings erected by architects and engineers in the civil service. Just as Durand's construction program is economic in nature, so is his method of representation: the diagram.¹¹ The images in Durand's publications serve to depict abstract, formal content, and he refuses to give them any of the pictorial aspects of traditional *scaenographia*. Instead, his *Recueil* and *Précis* are strictly limited to floor plans, elevations, and sections, which are presented comparatively in diagrammatic tables (Fig. 2). In *Recueil*, the synopsis, an older form of presentation, is developed further by arranging monuments of architectural history on the same scale and without any ranking in terms of historical importance.¹² Buildings from completely different eras and styles are placed together in objectivized constellations that no longer seem open to question. The reference takes on a scientific distance, and there is no normative preference for particular styles within the history of architecture. With his tabular arrangement of the material, Durand at

10 On the genre of the catalogue raisonné, see: Alexander Marksches, "Das Architektenwerkverzeichnis," in *Das Buch als Entwurf. Textgattungen in der Geschichte der Architekturtheorie. Ein Handbuch*, ed. Dietrich Erben (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2019), 260–81.

11 *Stil-Linien diagrammatischer Kunstgeschichte*, ed. Wolfgang Cortjaens and Karsten Heck (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2014); Hubert Locher, "Eine Wissenschaft der Schaubilder? Vom anarchischen Potenzial der Diagrammatik," in "Methodische Turns, Hypes und Trends in der Kunstwissenschaft seit den 1960er Jahren," ed. Dietrich Erben and Christine Tauber, special issue, in *Kunstchronik* 77 (2024), 468–78.

12 Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, *Recueil et parallèle des édifices en tout genre, anciens et modernes, remarquables par leur beauté, par leur grandeur ou par leur singularité* (Paris: 1801; repr., Nördlingen: Uhl, 1986).

tempts to tame the superabundance of monuments in all their stylistic diversity, which was first brought to light by the archaeology of the Enlightenment era. His synopses are an admission that the chronological and geographical diversity of architectural history can only be conveyed in the form of a diagram. This also has political implications, since the informational images in Durand's publications adhere to the law of "égalité" imposed by the French Revolution. This objective, systematic approach corresponds to Durand's design process, which consists almost exclusively of the addition and combination of spatial units according to the requirements of a building program.

In Durand's theory, architectural design becomes formally state-controlled in the most literal sense. His focus is exclusively on large-scale public structures—administrative buildings, educational institutions, barracks, prisons, market halls, exchanges, hospitals, and factories. Durand aligns historical references with contemporary construction needs to serve the rapidly developing modern industrial and administrative state. His visualizations take the form of diagrams where both historical buildings and his own design proposals appear as objectively standardized datasets.

Systemic Reference in the Modernist Period

The "classical" modernism of the early twentieth century, as it has been called since around 1970, gave reference a systemic character. This means that references and comparisons occur between different cultural techniques. The term "cultural technique" (*Kulturtechnik*), which originates in late-nineteenth-century Germany and is somewhat tautological, refers to those fundamental practices and technologies through which humans shape both their material environment and cultural systems. It encompasses symbolic operations such as writing, reading, calculating, the invention and use of machines, and drawing or designing and planning in other media.¹³ For modern architecture, the primary intention behind systemic reference is to

13 Harun Maye, "Was ist eine Kulturtechnik?," in *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 1 (2010), 121–35; on architecture, though without reference to the concept of *Kulturtechnik*, despite its presence in the title, see: *Kulturtechnik Entwerfen. Praktiken, Konzepte und Medien in Architektur und Design Science*, ed. Daniel Gethmann and Susanne Hauser (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009).

inscribe building with wood, brick, and concrete—materials still considered technically backward—into the canon of contemporary technical innovations.

This form of systemic referencing was prefigured in Louis Henry Sullivan's 1896 essay "The Tall Office Building Artistically Reconsidered."¹⁴ Sullivan explains the typology of modern skyscrapers as emerging from the specific environment of the American metropolis with its distinctive productive forces. He is not interested in thinking of an office building as an "individual solution," but instead as a "true normal type." This type is shaped by business requirements, local building codes, the new structural techniques of steel-frame construction, and the design logic of architectural expression. Crucial to Sullivan's essay and his theory of architecture is his adoption of ideas inspired by earlier American transcendentalism, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, and Hippolyte Taine's milieu theory. According to this theoretical framework, a building, like a living organism, is a product of its environment in both functional and formal aspects. By subjecting architecture to the laws of evolutionary and environmental theory, Sullivan provides a central argument for modernism. This conceptual bridge replaces history with evolution as an organizing principle. Modern architecture no longer legitimizes itself through references to contingent historical events, but through inevitable evolutionary processes.

References to other cultural techniques continue and evolve in Le Corbusier's architectural manifesto *Vers une architecture* (1923), where he develops comparisons to machines and illustrates them with well-known photographic juxtapositions (Fig. 3).¹⁵ However, systemic reference here is by no means limited to machine comparisons, but also takes place on the level of historical references. The collage of ancient Roman monuments (Fig. 4), for

14 Louis H. Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Reconsidered" (first published 1896), in *The Public Papers*, ed. Robert Twombly (Chicago, 1988), 103–12. On Sullivan's theory, see Narciso Menocal, *Architecture as Nature: The Transcendentalist Idea of Louis Sullivan* (Madison, WI, 1981); Lauren S. Weingarden, *Louis H. Sullivan and a 19th-Century Poetics of Naturalized Architecture* (Burlington, VT, 2009); Dietrich Erben, "Der Renaissancehumanismus und die Idee einer 'humanen Architektur'. Florenz als Gründungsort in der Architekturgeschichte seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg" (2014), in *Humanität und gebaute Umwelt. Essays und Studien zur Architekturgeschichte* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2023), 177–96, here 180–181.

15 Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris, 1923).

instance, demonstrates their rigorous abstraction into geometric stereometry: the hemisphere (Pantheon), the cylinder and cube (Castel Sant'Angelo), and the pyramid (Pyramid of Cestius). In this synopsis, Le Corbusier derives design principles for the distribution of mass by abstracting historical buildings to their basic geometric forms, thus overlaying historical reference with mathematical precision. A similar structural approach—this time derived from anatomy—appears in the chaise longue designed by Le Corbusier with Charlotte Perriand and Pierre Jeanneret in 1928, where the curves of the reclining surface inside the circular segment conform to the main joints of the human body (neck, hips, knees). In the fourth chapter of *Vers une architecture*, the machine comparisons ultimately unfold into an extensive systemic analysis, where Le Corbusier references three modern technological achievements through different architectural lenses: the ocean liner in terms of formal theory (ribbon windows, built-in furniture, minimal floor plans); the fighter plane in terms of material logic (with its non-tectonic outer skin); and the automobile in terms of standardization and industrial mass production. “Machines for living in must be mass-produced,” Le Corbusier concludes succinctly.¹⁶ He embraces contemporaneity through what he calls “l'esprit nouveau”—also the title of his magazine: “There is a new spirit: it is a spirit of construction and of synthesis guided by a clear conception. Whatever may be thought of it, it animates today the greater part of human activity.”¹⁷

I will only briefly note here that postmodern architectural theory also productively incorporated references to other cultural theories. Consider Aldo Rossi's adoption of “collective memory,” a concept popularized by Maurice Halbwachs, which Rossi uses to justify the citational reuse of building typologies like houses and towers, or the symbolic deployment of architectural elements such as windows, doors, and roofs.¹⁸ We cannot overlook, however, that Rossi's reference to Halbwachs is largely cursory, while simultaneously affirming his own ideas about the “memory of the city.” At the same time, postmodernism shifts reference back from the systemic and onto indi-

16 Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (1923), 102; cf. 167.

17 Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (1923), 77.

18 Aldo Rossi, *Architettura della città* (Padova: Marsilio, 1966); cf. Carsten Ruhl, *Magisches Denken – Monumentale Form. Aldo Rossi und die Architektur des Bildes* (Berlin and Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth, 2013).

vidual buildings drawn from architectural history. There is considerable evidence to suggest that this prefigures today's modes of reference production.

The Blasé References of the Present

After pattern buildings, diagrams, and systems, today's architectural discourse indulges in catalogs of images—an approach that, I suggest, reflects an attitude of indifference or blasé detachment. I have in mind here three recent theories of design published over the last two decades that explicitly invoke the practice of referencing. These books emerge from the pedagogical context of design departments at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK), TU Wien (Vienna University of Technology), and the Technical University of Munich (TUM).

All three theories of design share an exclusively immanentist approach—meaning that references remain entirely within the domain of architectural typologies and building element theory. The books mentioned here follow the trend of similar formalist design theories. Notable examples include John Hejduk's *Education of an Architect* (1971), Oswald Mathias Ungers's *Architecture As Theme* (1982), and Rem Koolhaas's *Elements of Architecture* (2014). The “varieties of reference” in these theories of design, to take Gareth Evans's phrase,¹⁹ never extend to the functional intentions and social dimensions of architectural production. In other words, their references do not engage with socio-political considerations, especially with regard to the everyday activities and uses associated with buildings as they materialize through building typologies and programs (dwelling, production, services, consumption, etc.). Instead, in these theories, architecture is emphatically reduced—in the literal sense—to “the building” as the ultimate focus of design intent.

In Alfred Grazioli's theory of design, historical references are deliberately formalized.²⁰ He provides two examples of Berlin apartment blocks (Alfred Messel, 1891/93 and an anonymous apartment building around 1900) and

19 Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

20 See Alfred Grazioli, *Der gedachte Raum. Methodik einer Architektorentwurfslehre*, ed. Antje Freiesleben (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 2013). In the following, page numbers from the theories of design are cited in the text, not in footnotes.

states that they are “based on different social and housing ideologies” (p. 58) without elaborating on what this means. Meanwhile, his proposed methods for processing these two references implicitly suggest that their historical “social and housing ideologies” are neutralized and erased. This is achieved through deliberate formal reduction: first, their historical floor plans are displayed symmetrically; second, they are standardized into grids across various layers. Rosalind Krauss’s observation about grids in modernism applies perfectly here: “The grid announces, among other things, modern art’s will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse.”²¹ In Grazioli’s approach to references, grid-making effectively rejects any broader functional contextualization.

Krauss’s description of the grid’s indifference to narration corresponds exactly to Grazioli’s explicit rejection of language as a reference system: “Associative images are permitted as explanations, but not verbal or textual explanations.” (p. 39) The images on the double-page spread shown here (Fig. 5), owing to their small size and fragmentary nature, are incapable of conveying any detail in an argumentative manner—and in the schemes, communication is reduced entirely to variations on the grid. These images affirm their message through schematism and serial arrangement. These observations relating to just one sample can be generalized for the entire theory of design. One double-page spread, an urban spatial configuration—it is hard to believe one’s eyes—is based on nothing more than “Inspiration: Rome, 1590” (pp. 78–79). Grazioli’s notorious fondness for small-format figure-ground plans stems from his reverence for Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter’s postmodern urban critique in their book *Collage City* (1984). On another spread, anonymous city buildings in the Palazzo style are extrapolated into grid patterns (pp. 100–101).

We travel now from Berlin to Vienna, where a theory of icon design, published in 2018, was developed at the TU Wien.²² The book’s title and subtitle reveal its agenda: the term “icon,” in its somewhat naive everyday usage, suggests that references have a sacrosanct, relic-like, and venerable status.

21 Rosalind E. Krauss, “Grids,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 9–22, here 9.

22 Ikonen. Methodische Experimente im Umgang mit architektonischen Referenzen. Mit Textbeiträgen von Adolf Krischanitz und Ivica Brnic. Technische Universität Wien, Abteilung für Hochbau und Entwerfen, ed. Astrid Staufer, Thomas Hasler, and Lorenzo De Chiffre (Zurich: Park Books, 2018).

Yet the subtitle promises a methodical-experimental approach to working with references, not entirely consistent with the concept of icons. So the supposedly sacrosanct can be appropriated after all! The authors aim to “introduce a coherent design methodology whose primary goal is not only to free us from stylistic categorizations, but to sharpen our awareness in decision-making.” (p. 19). If we understand “style”—as seems reasonable—to mean the style of an era in the sense of the uniformity of its expressions of life,²³ then we find here an unqualified argument for rejecting contemporaneity altogether. On the contrary, references serve to make architecture independent of both contemporaneity and the past. This is why the icons must be “dissected and transposed into the future” (p. 21). The authors refer to the building researcher Jan Pieper, claiming references should convey “the ever-constant elementary aspects of architecture”—meaning the “perception of light and dark, place and path, narrowness and expanse, above and below, etc.” In this capacity, references in the theory of design are regarded as a “stock of images, formulas and gestures . . . that organize every significant form of architecture across epochs and styles” and create a “system of what has become cultural and what is anthropologically given” (p. 21). The main part of the book is devoted to the steps involved in working with references. There are three stages: references are “excerpted”—that is, tested for their suitability for a particular theme—then they are adapted to the current design subject in terms of both construction and the scale of the surrounding urban space (p. 53).

The individual student design projects presented in the book also show that references are not handled as selectively as the term “icon” might suggest. After all, the book includes an impressive 67 reference icons. Each reference gets two double-page spreads. The source material, i.e. the “icon”, is presented on the first spread alongside a partial model that students recently produced and a short interpretive text. These text vignettes are always second-hand quotations—preliminary interpretations by fellow architects rather than expressions of the project authors’ own views and intentions.

23 Selected from the extensive literature: *Stil. Geschichten und Funktionen eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Diskurselements*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986); Dietrich Erben and Christine Tauber, “Politikstile und die Sichtbarkeit des Politischen,” in *Politikstile und die Sichtbarkeit des Politischen in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Dietrich Erben and Christine Tauber (Passau: Klinger, 2016), 1–16.

These quotations make the self-referential dimension quite obvious, as all the communication involved is circular, so to speak. The reference as a historical object is completely distanced and stripped of its historicity—both by the contemporary model and the textual interpretation. On the second double-page spread, two design projects are presented visually as studies exploring individual spatial themes (Fig. 6, Fig. 7). The projects' argumentation happens entirely on the visual level; while the reference building has been transfigured and given a special aura in preparation for the project—thanks to the model façade, which is always black and white, and shows a lifeless emptiness—the project images develop a life of their own, ultimately only asserting the practice of referencing, rather than making it comprehensible. The actual forms of reference are suspended in the images.

Let us now turn to the Technical University of Munich, the final stop on our brief design tour. The book discussed here was jointly developed by architects Andreas Hild and Barbara Brinkmann. Here too, the referencing process serves as the foundation for thinking about a “mechanics of design” that involves “seeking and rediscovering” references.²⁴ The self-referential nature of this project is immediately evident in the epigraph—a quotation from Fritz Schumacher about the Munich architect Gabriel von Seidl that concludes: “for the old motifs (in von Seidl’s case) always arranged themselves according to living thought, and in their execution they were created anew.” This sets a reverential tone that pervades the entire theory. The book is conceived as a text-image atlas with no intention of presenting its contents and arguments in a linear fashion (Fig. 8, Fig. 9). The presentation style prevents this by constantly interweaving short, aphoristic text blocks with an overwhelming surplus of images. The result is an entropy of images and texts across the book’s 456 pages. Text pages on the right consistently face plate pages on the left, where single illustrations alternate with multi-image plates. Shorter image sequences are also included. In total, there are nearly one thousand illustrations (937 to be exact). To put it simply, the book is quite entertaining to browse through precisely because it offers so many colorful images and surprising visual combinations. The methodological aspirations only become apparent in the second half of the book, which focuses on the

24 Andreas Hild and Barbara Brinkmann, *Vom Suchen und Wiederfinden. Die Mechanik des Entwerfens. On Seeking and Rediscovering. The Mechanics of Architectural Design* (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 2021).

“transformation” of references. As with the other two theories of design, several steps for working with references are proposed.

Even this brief overview should make clear that these design theories radically distance themselves from their historical source material. This occurs equally in the textual commentary, the visual presentation of objects, and, ultimately, in the objects that themselves adapt references. The material is engaged with strictly and exclusively at the level of form. This diagnosis could be extended beyond theories of design to contemporary architecture books dealing with historical material. Here too, we can observe what might be called a completely presentist approach to historical material.²⁵

The architectural historian Heinrich Klotz, in a critique of the architectural historiography of the time, sharply condemned the use of architectural images, and especially photographic images. This remains relevant to today’s theories of design. Klotz saw the isolated depiction of a building as a document of “relationlessness,” by which he meant that “the building’s relationship to people, environment, and society had been lost.” He argued that “the architectural image had been cleansed of all accoutrements, including people.”²⁶ Klotz was essentially concerned with this loss of social context, as a result of which the perception and communication of architecture unintentionally risk promoting the idea of a technocratic society free of social friction.

Overall, the referencing process apparent in these theories of design seems marked by a clear ambivalence. On the one hand, references are highlighted and canonized through methodical selection. On the other, their reality is diminished by the new representations produced by the authors (models, photos, drawings), and they are neutralized and made indifferent through a deluge of visual allusions. The flat style of representation evident in the publications could be described as blasé indifference. The historical progression from Durand’s diagrammatic approach through modernism’s

25 I refer here to *The Stones of Fernand Pouillon. An Alternative Modernism in French Architecture*. Texts by Adam Caruso, Jacques Lucan, Fernand Pouillon, Helen Thomas. Photography by Hélène Binet, ed. Adam Caruso and Helen Thomas (Zurich: gta, 2014), as well as to the book series *Materialien zu Geschichte, Theorie und Entwurf städtischer Architektur*, ed. Klaus Theo Brenner, Dietrich Fink, Arno Lederer, Carlo Moccia, Uwe Schröder, and Ilaria Valente (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 2015).

26 Heinrich Klotz, “Über das Abbilden von Bauwerken,” in *Architectura* 1 (1971), 1–14, quotations on 7 and 1.

systemic references makes such a developmental logic plausible. To stay within the architectural domain, we can turn to Georg Simmel's famous essay on urban sociology "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), in which blasé indifference is placed at the center of the metropolitan experience. For Simmel, such indifference is motivated by the social anonymity of mass society and the capitalist economy of money and commodities—to which architecture also fundamentally belongs. Simmel writes:

The essence of the blasé attitude is an indifference toward the distinctions between things. Not in the sense that they are not perceived, but rather that the meaning and value of these distinctions, and hence of the things themselves, are experienced as meaningless. They appear to the blasé person in a homogeneously flat and gray tone; no object deserves preference over any other. This emotional state is the faithful subjective reflection of a completely internalized money economy. When money, with its colorlessness and indifference, becomes the common denominator of all values, it becomes the most frightful leveler. It hollows out the core of things, their peculiarities, their specific values, and their uniqueness and incomparability in a way that is beyond repair.

Das Wesen der Blasiertheit ist die Abstumpfung gegen die Unterschiede der Dinge, nicht in dem Sinne, dass sie nicht wahrgenommen würden (...), sondern so, dass die Bedeutung und der Wert der Unterschiede der Dinge und damit der Dinge selbst als nichtig empfunden werden. Sie erscheinen dem Blasierten in einer gleichmäßig matten und grauen Tönung, keines Wert, dem anderen vorgezogen zu werden. Diese Seelenstimmung ist der getreue subjektive Reflex der völlig durchgedrungenen Geldwirtschaft (...); indem das Geld, mit seiner Farblosigkeit und Indifferenz, sich zum Generalnenner aller Werte aufwirft, wird es der fürchterlichste Nivellierer, es höhlt den Kern der Dinge, ihre Eigenart, ihren spezifischen Wert, ihre Unvergleichbarkeit rettungslos aus.²⁷

27 Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms, ed. Donald Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 324–339, here 329. For the original German, see Georg Simmel, "Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben" (1903), in Gesamtausgabe in 24 Bänden. Band 7: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901–1908, ed. Rüdiger Kramme, Angela Rammstedt, and OttheinRammstedt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 116–31, here 120. See also

Taking Simmel's argument further, we could say that architectural references have now become a factor in the creative economy and aesthetic capitalism. There is much discussion today of "aesthetic capitalism" following the end of "true" capitalism in the form of commercial and industrial capitalism alongside financial, digital, and knowledge capitalism. Contemporary architectural references fit squarely within this value-creation strategy. They generally follow aesthetic capitalism's market-oriented use of aesthetic materials and goods. References are deployed according to their "staging value" (Gernot Böhme), behind which utility value takes a back seat. They have to prove their effectiveness as "surfaces," as shown in their summary relationship to their historical models. Last but not least, the relevance of references stems from their communication within an inner circle: references serve to stabilize aesthetic networks, in this case the architectural community.²⁸ This happens materially in such a way that architectural references become subject to the automatism of an apparently unlimited availability of such references as images. One hallmark of the contemporaneity of these theories of design is their advocacy of an architecture free from social concerns—one that is presented in media as a triumph of the practicability of image processing and image entropies.

Conclusion

To summarize my argument: References point back to the problem of self-referentiality within the architectural system and may even be one of the primary mechanisms for establishing and maintaining this self-referentiality. They function as agents of self-referentiality—alongside architects' common educational pathways, collective professional identity, shared professional

Steve Baker, "The Sign of the Self in the Metropolis," in *Journal of Design History* 3 (1990): 227–34.

28 Gernot Böhme, *Ästhetischer Kapitalismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2016); also Michael Hutter, *Ernstes Spiel. Geschichten vom Aufstieg des ästhetischen Kapitalismus* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2015); for a critical commentary on the concept, see Jan Loheit, "Die Erfindung des 'ästhetischen Kapitalismus': Andreas Reckwitz und die Schicksale von Ästhetik und Sozialkritik," in *Das Argument* 58 (2016), 54–67.

interests, and organized professional associations.²⁹ This role of references can be illustrated within a broader historical framework extending from the sixteenth century through the reorganization of the entire building industry during proto-industrialization around 1800 and on to contemporary social formations (information society, media society, creative society, and more).

Self-referentiality, in turn, represents a kind of absolute state of contemporaneity: while references open connections to the past and the external world, these openings are at the same time closed again through a radically formalist appropriation of the historical material. This applies at least to the core business of architectural design within the system discussed here. As far as I can see, it also applies to broad areas of architectural theory, such as Aldo Rossi's *L'architettura della città* and the theoretical contributions of Bernard Tschumi and Jean Nouvel. Both Tschumi and Nouvel draw on film as an external media reference by implementing design concepts analogous to directing techniques, yet they continue to operate almost entirely without social perspectives.³⁰ It seems that explicit social reference points remain confined to those areas of contemporary architectural theory that lie outside the theory of design (i.e. architectural criticism). We might think of the critical works of Manfredo Tafuri, Beatriz Colomina, Sylvia Lavin, or Hal Foster.

In my view, the status of references remains a fundamental problem—both in terms of how architects work with references and their significance in the context of the architectural system. With regard to how architects work with references, it is often unclear how we should assess their status: Are the cited references an authentic driving force for design decisions or merely a ceremonial, self-dramatizing decoration? How do they guide design decisions in the creative process? This is even more difficult to determine as references often seem excessively abundant, eclectic, and peculiarly cobbled together. The architects responsible for these references certainly have a sense of history, but they have necessarily acquired their knowled-

29 On this topic see Dietrich Erben, "Warum Architekten nicht lachen," in *Eine Hülle der Vernunft? Witz, Komik und Humor der Baukunst in historischer und philosophischer Perspektive*, ed. Julian Jachmann and Petra Lohmann (forthcoming).

30 Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); Conway Lloyd Morgan, *Jean Nouvel: The Elements of Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998).

ge as autodidacts in historical matters—as enthusiastic amateur readers at best—or through travel and browsing publications.³¹

The systemic relevance of references also remains an open question. Niklas Luhmann offers an initially reassuring statement: “Self-reference is nothing bad, forbidden or to be avoided.” But a caveat follows immediately: “if self-reference leads to paradoxes, additional precautions must be taken to ensure connectivity (for further operations).”³² This dilemma clearly applies to the architectural system as well: here too, professional self-referentiality provides the foundation for self-organization and self-reflection within architectural production. This explains why architects deliberately avoid external references from other subsystems that might question or undermine their independence. If self-referentiality in architecture avoids “connectivity,” the costs will be considerable not just for the architectural system itself. Architecture then risks losing its connections to the problems of contemporary society—with all its needs, expectations, and emergencies.

31 See also the considerations in the introduction to the present volume.

32 Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 59.

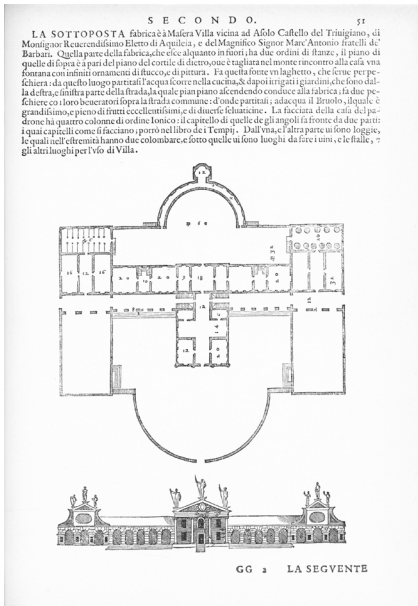


Fig. 1. Andrea Palladio, Villa Barbarigo in Maser. Textual explanation, floor plan, and façade. From *Quattro libri dell'architettura* (Vicenza, 1570), book 2, plate 51.

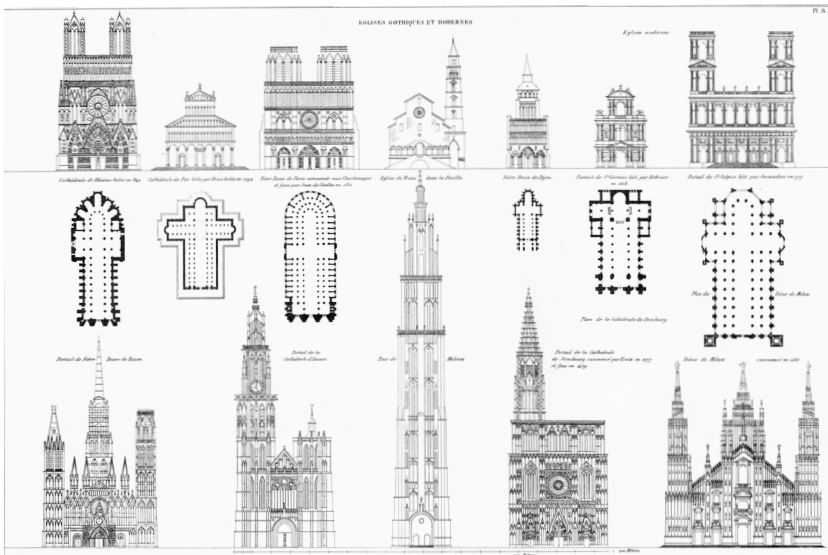


Fig. 2. Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, Synopsis of Gothic and modern churches. From *Recueil et parallele des édifices etc.* (Paris, 1801), plate 8.

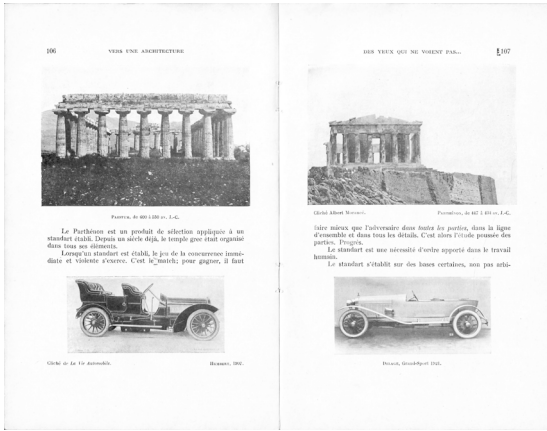


Fig. 3.
Le Corbusier, Machine comparisons. From *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Les Editions G. Crès, 1923), 106-107.



Fig. 4.
Le Corbusier, Stereometric reductions of ancient buildings in Rome. From *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Les Editions G. Crès, 1923), 128.

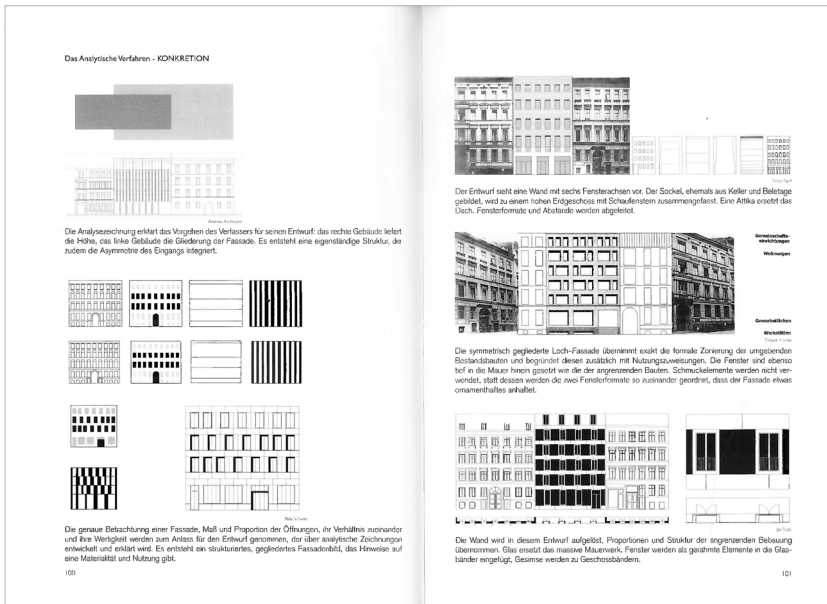


Fig. 5.
The analytical procedure – Concretion. From Anje Freisleben and Alfred Grazioli, *Der gedachte Raum. Methodik einer Architektorentwurfslehre* (2005) (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann Verlag, 2013), 100-101.



Fig. 6. Short text and model of the Habitations Rue Franklin in Paris by Auguste Perret. From Ikonen. Methodische Experimente im Umgang mit architektonischen Referenzen. Mit Textbeiträgen von Adolf Krischanitz und Ivica Brnic. Technische Universität Wien, Abteilung für Hochbau und Entwerfen, ed. Astrid Stauer, Thomas Hasler, and Lorenzo De Chiffre (Zurich: Park Books, 2018), 68-69.

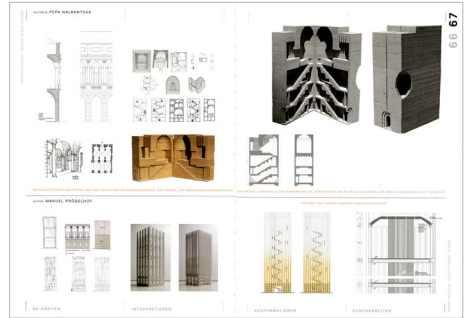


Fig. 7. Studies on the reference work of the Palazzo Thiene by Andrea Palladio (edited by Pepa Nalbantova). From Ikonen. Methodische Experimente im Umgang mit architektonischen Referenzen. (Zurich: Park Books, 2018), 66-67.



Fig. 8. Basic Operations of Referenciation. From Andreas Hild and Barbara Brinkmann, Vom Suchen und Wiederfinden. Die Mechanik des Entwerfens. On Seeking and Rediscovering. The Mechanics of Architectural Design (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 2021), 172-173.

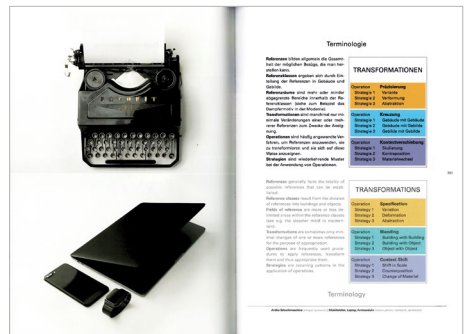


Fig. 9. Terminology of Transformations. From Andreas Hild and Barbara Brinkmann, Vom Suchen und Wiederfinden. (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 2021), 382-383.

Space (without) Time and (eventually) Architecture

The Darmstadt Conversation of 1951

Carsten Ruhl

The Historical Present

Reference and contemporaneity are impossible to separate neatly from each other. Nowhere is this more apparent than in modernist architecture. The relationship between the two is commonly perceived as becoming problematic during the modernist period; according to the prevailing narrative, functionalism, rationalism, the influence of science, and the rejection of ornament severely limited the possibilities for referencing in favor of a normative focus on the present. However, the assumption that there was a one-sided shift toward contemporaneity is actually a stereotype, largely popularized by postmodernist criticism. In reality, the architecture of the early twentieth century continued to progress within the logic of historical genealogies and the large-scale movements of the epoch. What distinguished the architecture of this era from earlier periods was its radical application of the tools of historiography to its own present. To write history, paradoxically, required a radical relationship to the present—one that eschewed accepted references as far as possible. The new no longer emerged from a long process of breaking away from the known, but rather replaced it abruptly and contrastingly. Radical disregard and even destruction of the old, however, was accompanied by an equally radical practice of preservation. To convincingly demonstrate the existence of civilizational progress through physical objects required a selection of historical artifacts that could be considered representative of their epoch. The schizophrenic attitude of this dialectic manifested, as

Latour observes, in the simultaneous manic destruction of historical continuities and the no less manic conservation of some of their remains in archives and museums.¹ Architectural modernism was thus steeped in its own kind of historical consciousness—precisely because it negated history. Accordingly, some of the movement’s principal figures saw themselves as witnesses to a “tradition” that, rather than having any historical origin, arose in the here and now. This model of a “history of the present,” however, came to an end after the Second World War. Faced with demolished cities and landscapes of rubble and ruin that remained for years as visible reminders of Nazi terror, any belief in a history that culminated in the present appeared fraught. But contemporaneity itself had also become fraught. Trust in a better present had no place in light of the collective trauma of the war. The future seemed more than uncertain. What could be seen in the cities of Germany were mountains of rubble and “ahistorical earth,” as architect and writer Max Frisch described his impressions immediately after the war. We shouldn’t set our hopes too high for the future either, Frisch wrote, for it would be “inhumane to expect a person to see beyond his own ruins.”² How, then, might we nevertheless discuss rebuilding cities, much less architecture? In an attempt to answer this question, a conference was held whose significance for the architecture of the twentieth century has not yet been fully recognized. This conference reveals the paradoxes of a grave crisis that would, I argue, continue to shape architectural discourse beyond the immediate aftermath of the war.

Humanity and Space

In 1951, the war-ravaged city of Darmstadt hosted an exhibition at Mathildenhöhe, an early modernist architectural development and site of a former artists’ colony. Entitled *mensch+Raum* (Fig. 10), the exhibition centered on the genesis of modern architecture between 1901 and 1951, alongside eleven *Meis-*

1 Bruno Latour, *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes. Essais d’anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991). Cited here according to the following translation: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

2 Max Frisch, *Stich-Worte*. Selected by Uwe Johnson (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 66–68. Thanks to Mike Bill for suggesting these passages.

terbauten—master works of architecture designed especially for the exhibition.³ The city intended to use the exhibition as a sort of bridge between its recent past and the magnificent future it anticipated;⁴ exactly fifty years earlier, the same location had played host to the legendary *Jugendstil* exhibition *Ein Dokument Deutscher Kunst* (*A Document of German Art*; 1901). As with that former exhibition, Darmstadt aimed to generate a significant impulse that would lead to groundbreaking modern concepts for reconstruction. This was not to take place in the realm of residential architecture, however, despite the severe housing shortage at the time. The original plan for 120 exemplary dwellings was quickly set aside in favor of an array of public structures. These were designed by eleven “masters” who, according to the selection criteria employed by the exhibition’s advisory board, were considered “distinguished figures of contemporary architecture.”⁵ The outcome of this initiative for architectural excellence was rather astonishing. While Hans Scharoun, Otto Bartning, Ernst Neufert, Max Taut, Rudolf Schwarz, Hans Schwippert, and Willem Marinus Dudok were all architects who did fundamentally adhere—if at times from a critical distance—to the “unfinished project of modernity,”⁶ the jury also inexplicably selected Paul Bonatz. As a member of the Stuttgart School and later of the architecture group *Der Block*, Bonatz vehemently opposed the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). And although Bonatz was at first thoroughly critical of the Nazi regime, he went on to become a compliant constructor of monumental bridges in the late thirties, alongside Friedrich

3 The following publications were released for the exhibition and the accompanying conference: Georg A. Neidenberger, ed., *Mensch und Raum. Ausstellung 4. August bis 16. September 1951 auf der Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt* (Berlin: Brüder Hartmann, 1951). Otto Bartning, ed., *Darmstädter Gespräch. Mensch und Raum* (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt GmbH, 1952). See also this reprint of the Darmstadt Conversation: Ulrich Conrads and Peter Neitzke, eds., *Mensch und Raum. Das Darmstädter Gespräch 1951, Bauwelt Fundamente 94* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1991).

4 Plans for the exhibition had begun in 1947. Considering the limited materials available after the war, they testify to Darmstadt’s massive cultural ambitions. See also Bärbel Herbig, “Die Meisterbauten. Renommierte Architekten planen für Darmstadt,” in *Architektur der fünfziger Jahre. Die Darmstädter Meisterbauten*, ed. Michael Bender and Roland May (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer Verlag, 1998), 10–23, here 10.

5 Herbig, “Die Meisterbauten,” 13.

6 Jürgen Habermas, “Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt,” in *Wege aus der Moderne*, ed. Wolfgang Welsch (Weinheim: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 1988), 177–92.

Tamms.⁷ Not until 1943 did Bonatz attempt an “escape from this insanity,” beginning a second (no less successful) career in Turkey before returning to Germany in his later years.⁸ Bonatz, of all people, was now to join the other architects in building a bridge to the city’s avant-garde beginnings while simultaneously orchestrating its departure into the new era.

From today’s perspective, it seems somewhat curious that the precarious composition of the master group did not cause more palpable tension, yet this was in keeping with the general tenor of Darmstadt’s anniversary exhibition. Exhibited alongside the master projects from August 4 through September 16 in the halls of Mathildenhöhe, the exhibition’s historical section, *Baukunst 1901–1951* (Fig. 11), intentionally omitted recent history, instead crafting a narrative of modern architecture untroubled by National Socialism that extended to the present time. The participation of *Neue Sachlichkeit* architects like Ernst Neufert, whose Nazi-era careers demonstrated beyond doubt that modern architecture and totalitarianism were mutually compatible, was apparently not viewed as contradicting this narrative.⁹ The exhibition’s three-day panel discussion left little room for controversy, however.¹⁰ As Otto Bartning, who chaired the panel, wrote in a letter to Scharoun, contributions to the discussion had to be written out beforehand and limited to ten minutes.¹¹ Aside from speeches by Otto Ernst Schweizer, Rudolf Schwarz, Martin Heidegger, and José Ortega y Gasset, the talks were pri-

7 See Werner Durth, *Deutsche Architekten. Biographische Verflechtungen 1900–1970*, 2nd ed. (Braunschweig: Vieweg & Sohn Verlag, 1987), 51ff. In his autobiography, Bonatz criticizes the regime exclusively for its megalomaniacal architectural ideas. Paul Bonatz, *Leben und Bauten* (Stuttgart: Engelhornverlag Adolf Spemann, 1950), 178–82. Also see Durth, *Deutsche Architekten*, 271.

8 Paul Bonatz, *Leben und Bauen*, 180.

9 Anna-Maria Meister, “Ernst Neufert’s ‘Lebensgestaltungslehre’: formatting life beyond the built,” in *BJHS Themes*, vol. 5 (2020), 167–85, here 169, <https://doi.org/10.1017/bjt.2020.13>. Meister points out that Neufert was one of the first professors to be allowed to resume work at a university following the war, despite the architect’s obvious collaboration with Speer and the regime.

10 Bartning, *Darmstädter Gespräch*, 33–48. Documentation of the Darmstadt Conversation also includes a section featuring the “master works” that were on display.

11 Bartning to Scharoun, May 22, 1951, Akademie der Künste, Hans Scharoun Archive, Nr. 4812 Bl.33-34.

marily “monadic mini-presentations”¹² read from a script. Spontaneous reactions and informal exchange were evidently unwelcome, in contrast to the first Darmstadt conversation of the year before.¹³ The rigid arrangement—featuring exclusively male guests and “masters” with table microphones in the foreground and a partially female audience in the background—evinced an intention to control the course of the conversation as much as possible (Fig. 12). Moreover, *Humanity and Space* was also an important media event, clearly intended to convey the impression that, despite all disagreements, there was a broad consensus on architectural issues. This time, the conversation was “lighter” and “more pleasant,” according to moderator Leo Maria Faerber in his introduction for Radio Frankfurt, which reported extensively on the discussion and broadcast it almost entirely.¹⁴

An open, unpredictable discussion might have touched on entanglements with the regime. Such a discussion was prevented not only by the rules governing the panel and the technical restrictions imposed by recording the dialogue, but also by the fact that two major figures who set the tone for the event were deeply implicated in the Nazi regime. Darmstadt’s director of city planning, Peter Grund, who organized and hosted the conference, had been a professor and director of the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and head of the Landesstelle der Reichskammer der bildenden Künste (regional branch of the Third Reich’s fine arts authority) in Düsseldorf beginning in 1933. From 1935 to 1937, he was urban development advisor to the Nazi Party.¹⁵ During this time, Grund designed city halls, military parade grounds, and exhibition spaces, as well as curating one of the largest propaganda exhibitions of

12 In the words of philosopher Ludwig Giesz, *Das literarische Deutschland*. Zeitung der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, August 5, 1951, 3.

13 See the documentation of the first Darmstadt Conversation: Hans Gerhard Evers, ed., *Darmstädter Gespräch*. Das Menschenbild in unserer Zeit (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt GmbH, 1950).

14 Leo Maria Faerber, “Die architektonische Bewältigung unseres Lebensraumes,” Radio Frankfurt, first broadcast September 4, 1951, minutes (6:05) and (7:31), Archiv Hessischer Rundfunk.

15 For more on these incongruities and the role of Peter Grund, head of the municipal planning office, see Bernd Krimmel, “Darmstädter Gespräch Mensch und Raum. 1951 gehört, nachgelesen 1997,” in Bender and May, *Architektur der fünfziger Jahre*, 28–34.

the Nazi era, *Schaffendes Volk* (A Creating People).¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, for his part, made quite an impression on the architects in attendance with his presentation “Bauen Wohnen Denken” (Building Dwelling Thinking)—despite the philosopher’s well-known close involvement with National Socialism, from which he did not distance himself even after the war. Heidegger’s ties to Nazi ideology, moreover, were in no way limited to opportunistic behavior as professor and rector at the University of Freiburg. His Nazi sympathies ran far deeper, profoundly shaping his philosophical thinking—including his concept of *Raum* (space), which was loaded with racial ideology.¹⁷

How was such complete disregard for the immediate present and its embedded history possible? How could Grund, in his introduction, have failed to mention any personal experiences from 1933 to 1945, to make any reference to the massive destruction, collective trauma, and privation of post-war society? These questions continue to evade simple answers. Pointing out that the post-1945 period did not start from a blank slate but was shaped by continuities only partially explains this amnesia regarding reality. In fact, the forgetting was quite deliberate, as was the flight from reality evidenced by the architectural history retrospective of the Darmstadt exhibition. Grund’s opening remarks portrayed the preceding fifty years exclusively as an emancipation process for the modern architect under the aegis of reason.¹⁸ This rationality did not, however, refer to concrete solutions like remedying the urgent housing shortage left by the war—far from it. Grund’s conception of

16 A 1952 monograph on Grund’s work barely mentions the political upheaval of the era. The book suggests in several places that Grund’s architectural approach persisted despite opposition from the Nazi regime. It argues that his concept of a “modern mason’s guild” couldn’t have been realized under the Nazis. *Schaffendes Volk* is referred to only as a “large exhibition in Düsseldorf.” See Paul Girkon, *Der Architekt Peter Grund* (Darmstadt: Eduard Roether Verlag, 1952), 19. See also the current research project: <https://www.fh-dortmund.de/news/architektur-projekt-peter-grund.php>. Thanks to Stephan Gudewer for providing helpful insights on this matter.

17 See Christoph Peter, “Martin Heideggers Rechtsdenken und der Nationalsozialismus,” in *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 104 (2018), 202–19, here 213.

18 Peter Grund, “Ansprache zur Ausstellungseröffnung,” in *Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch*, 27. “The architecture of the last 50 years has exhibited the ambition to free itself of excessive intellectual and formal attachments. With new building materials and modern technical achievements, a corresponding design vocabulary has been developed. Man, his dimensions and his needs have been of primary concern in spatial design.”

Raum referred neither to a temporally defined category nor to an environment shaped by political, social, or functional factors. The aim of the event, as Grund had it, was to “impart to the creators of architecture a glimpse into the deepest foundations of their work, which stretch far beyond technical skills, into regions where the human becomes a vessel for infinite powers in this finite world.”¹⁹ Making mention of the immediate past was evidently just as undesirable as addressing urgent problems of the present. Instead, the primary goal was to rehabilitate the architect as a philosophical interpreter of space. For it was the privilege of the architect—and not the philosopher—to seek the “myth of the infinite.”²⁰ Grund thus imagined the architect once again becoming the preeminent builder of worlds, a metaphysician, with spatial creation being the “enigmatic art of architecture.”²¹ That “space” as a term was so loaded with racial ideology played no role for Grund, not least because of his own connections to the Nazi regime. Rather, he attempted a timeless definition of space that excluded any consideration of its material or physical qualities and everyday lived realities. To that end, he employed philosophical concepts that led far away from contemporary traces of the recent past, and toward a maximally universal definition of space in human nature and perception.²²

Accordingly, Grund’s explanation of architectural production was equally generalized, made worse by his vague allusions to cosmological creation myths of classical architecture theory. “The artist inspired by space,” according to Grund, “expresses his vision through architectural form.” In “evaluating and interpreting architecture,” he believed, it was “decisively and cruci-

19 Grund, “Ansprache,” 25.

20 Grund, “Ansprache,” 26.

21 Grund, “Ansprache.”

22 Grund, “Ansprache,” 25–26. Grund is talking here about space as a basic structure of consciousness manifest in all its forms, from primitive awareness up to the “realm of higher intellectual culture.” In his further remarks, he appears to be paraphrasing Kant. For Kant, space was neither a concept nor an object external to human perception. Rather, he understood it as a form of pure sensory intuition within the subject—a principle according to which our perception of reality is constructed. Abstracted from the human subject, according to Kant, “the imagination of space has no meaning.” Grund carried this idea over, in an extremely abbreviated and distorted form, to architecture. Kant’s remarks on space can be found in the first paragraph of the *Transcendental Aesthetic*. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* [Critique of Pure Reason], ed. Raymund Schmidt (Hamburg: Kröner Verlag, 1993), 66–73.

ally important to understand it as an engagement with space. This creative engagement spills over into the two other intellectual modes of possessing space: the philosophical and religious views of space. In the beauty of architectural form, the artist fulfills the laws of measure and proportion, harmony and rhythm.”²³

Heidegger’s Foundation

Conference attendees may have expected deeper insights into those mysterious foundations of “the beauty of architectural form” from architects Otto Ernst Schweizer and Rudolf Schwarz, as well as philosopher Martin Heidegger. While Schweizer made the case for a balanced relationship between technology and aesthetics, Schwarz was the only speaker to address the historical reference point of the exhibition, the *Jugendstil* movement.²⁴ Already discernible in his talk was some of the criticism with which he would, just a few years later, set off the Bauhaus Debate.²⁵ In essence, he opposed the normative aesthetic ideas of architectural functionalism, but he also opposed the tendency to aestheticize architecture—a practice he observed among art historians, “aestheticians,” and photographers.²⁶ Schwarz was particularly annoyed by discussion of “modern architecture.”²⁷ He evidently associated this term with an ideological reduction of architecture to the current, present, and contemporary, whereas good architecture, in his view, could only arise by immersing itself in life and, from there, rising to a symbolic form oriented toward more extended timescales. Schwarz thus advoca-

23 Grund, “Ansprache,” 25–26.

24 Rudolf Schwarz, “Das Anliegen der Baukunst,” in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 60–71. Cf. Wolfgang Pehnt, “Eine Sache gelingt nie aus ihrer reinen Sachlichkeit.” Rudolf Schwarz im zweiten Darmstädter Gespräch,” in Bender and May, *Architektur der fünfziger Jahre*, 34–35.

25 Ulrich Conrads, Magdalena Droste, Winfried Nerdinger, and Hilde Strohl, eds., *Die Bauhaus-Debatte 1953. Dokumente einer verdrängten Kontroverse* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag GmbH, 2000).

26 Schwarz, “Das Anliegen der Baukunst,” in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 67.

27 Conrads et. al., *Die Bauhaus-Debatte*, 66. “The term ‘modern architecture’ is absurd in and of itself. There is no modern architecture, because architecture never operates on the scale of days or years, but only of epochs.”

ted subsuming historical time periods and present moments within cultural practices that remain untouched by the temporal frameworks imposed by historians and avant-gardists.

Martin Heidegger's highly regarded presentation appeared to offer approaches to an architecture developed out of life itself, beyond the periodization of art history or the normative dictates of the present. In his review for the newspaper *Das literarische Deutschland* (Literary Germany), the philosopher Ludwig Giesz lauded the "crystalline architecture of his thought process; the lapidary, solidly sculpted sentences." According to Giesz, it was only through Heidegger's overwhelming words that the Darmstadt Conversation first received a "foundation."²⁸ Indeed, Heidegger's speech did address fundamental issues—or rather, to stay within the metaphor, laid the foundations for a definition of space. Yet, contrary to the perception of the speech that has persisted to this day, the architecture within that space was not part of Heidegger's solution; rather, it seemed to be part of the problem. In a speech titled "Building Dwelling Thinking,"²⁹ he took the liberty of drawing attention to a few fundamental misunderstandings in architecture that he believed were manifested in the exhibition's title, *Humanity and Space*.³⁰ The title implied that space was an objective dimension outside of human *Da-sein*, yet space, Heidegger insisted, was inextricably connected to human existence. Against this background, Heidegger questioned whether architecture had truly grasped dwelling and building as a problem at all. Thus Heidegger's "foundation" already addressed concepts like dwelling, building, location, and space, connecting them to human existence. Without getting into the subtleties of these concepts for Heidegger, the essence of his message to the architects present was that locations, and therefore also spaces, are brought forth through—and not for—human existence. He occasionally

28 Giesz, *Das literarische Deutschland*, 3.

29 Martin Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken," in Bartning, *Darmstädter Gespräch*, 72–84. English translations by Adam Bobeck, "Building Dwelling Thinking by Martin Heidegger (Translation and Commentary by Adam Bobeck)," (unpublished paper, May 4, 2025), PDF, https://www.academia.edu/34279818/Building_Dwelling_Thinking_by_Martin_Heidegger_Translation_and_Commentary_by_Adam_Bobek_.

30 Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken," 11. "When we speak of humans and space, it sounds as though humans stood on one side and space on the other. But space is not something that stands opposite to people. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience."

illustrated this with concrete constructions, such as a bridge. As a structure, a bridge does not merely connect two already-existing banks; it identifies them as such, creating a location that did not previously exist: “The bridge gathers the earth as a landscape around the stream.”³¹ Only then, Heidegger said, did a space—a relationship created by humans between themselves and the “earth as a landscape”—come into being. Space, for Heidegger, was therefore not an absolute dimension, but rather a quality created by humans. It could not be extrapolated from rational architectural principles; it arose out of the customs of mortals as elements of the “fourfold” (*Geviert*). Provocatively, Heidegger illustrated this using an example with which he was intimately familiar: a *Schwarzwaldhof*, a farm in the Black Forest. “Here the insistence of the power to let earth and sky, the divinities and the mortals enter one-folded in things, brought the house into order.”³² Heidegger ended his remarks with an observation that must have sounded jarring given the postwar situation and the very real hardship people faced: “The crisis of dwelling,” he relativized, “is older than the world wars and their destruction, older than the increase of the population of the earth and the condition of the industrial workers. The real crisis of dwelling consists of the fact that the mortals always first search again for the nature of dwelling, that they must first learn to dwell. What if the homelessness of people consisted of the fact that people still do not even think of the real crisis of dwelling as the crisis? However, as soon as humans give thought to their homelessness, it is no longer a misery. It is, rightly considered and kept well in mind, the only summons that calls the mortals to their dwelling.”³³

Not only did Heidegger’s lecture implicitly question whether architecture and urban planning were necessary at all, but in discussing dwelling, he also broached a topic that remained nearly untouched during the conference. Moreover, his chosen example of a farm in the Black Forest neglected to respond in any way to the actual location of his reflections on location: the devastated city of Darmstadt. Heidegger’s foundation therefore remained ambiguous in two senses: neither the concrete location of the conference

31 Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” 7.

32 Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” 14.

33 Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” 15.

(in other words, the present), nor the past or future played any role in it.³⁴ The temporal situatedness of Heidegger's thinking thus disappeared from view—especially regarding his concept of space. In *Being and Time* (1927), as in his 1951 lecture, Heidegger was primarily concerned with defining space through individual human existence. However, after the Nazi takeover in 1933, Heidegger very clearly adapted his concept of space to the new political reality: the collective and the “*völkisch* [ethnic] community” took the place of the individual.³⁵ In his view, *Führer* and *Geführte* (the leader and the led) came to form a sort of fated community “fighting for the realization of an idea.”³⁶ At the same time, “the referentiality of space, i.e. mastery of space and being-shaped-by-space” no longer belonged to the “being” of the human, but rather to the “mode of being of a *Volk*.”³⁷ The territorial expanse of a *Volk* was determined by their effectiveness in projecting themselves into space. The Nazis could hardly have wished for a better philosophical legitimation for their ideology of expansion.

Heidegger avoided any *Volk*-based interpretation of space in his Darmstadt lecture. Nevertheless, his sympathies for the Nazi *zeitgeist* must have been known to most of the attendees. Moreover, reading “Building Dwelling Thinking” against the backdrop of Heidegger's own *Hüttendasein* (hut-*Dasein*, or hut existence) in the Black Forest, one is hard pressed to describe the passage on the “crisis of dwelling” above as anything other than a cynical trivialization of the catastrophe that the world had just lived through. Heidegger did in fact hold the opinion that—despite the millions of people killed, displaced, and made homeless by the war—the housing crisis was at its core a “philosophical crisis of *Dasein*.”³⁸ Moreover, this was at a time when Heidegger, newly reinstated with emeritus status, was able to make himself comfortable

34 Contrary to what some have claimed, Heidegger showed little interest in addressing the actual housing crisis of the 1950s. See, for example, Jürgen Raap, “Nestbauverhalten. Häuslichkeit als zentrales Merkmal menschlicher Existenz,” in *KUNSTFORUM*, vol. 182 (October–November 2006), 45–73.

35 Peter, “Martin Heideggers Rechtsdenken,” 207.

36 Peter, “Martin Heideggers Rechtsdenken,” 212.

37 Peter, “Martin Heideggers Rechtsdenken,” 213.

38 Ursula Pia Jauch, “Über den Raum des Denkens. Ein paar Bemerkungen, ausgehend von Heideggers Hütte und mit einem kleinen Holzweg zu Mies van der Rohes Villa Tugendhat,” in Salvatore Pisani and Elisabeth Oy-Marra, eds., *Ein Haus wie Ich. Die gebaute Autobiographie in der Moderne* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 63–83, here 72.

in his archaic hut in Todtnauberg and his Freiburg villa. He made himself comfortable in an intellectual sense as well: “Building Dwelling Thinking” craves “security in that which has been passed down, that which has long existed, and that which is grounded in the earth.”³⁹ What seems even more shocking from today’s perspective is how enthusiastically the lecture was received. After prolonged, approving applause,⁴⁰ the architects present eagerly took up some of Heidegger’s terminology in the ensuing discussion. Otto Bartning, for example, made use of the metaphor of the bridge and spoke of the “Heideggerian *Wendung* [turn].” Neither Heidegger’s support for the Nazis nor his conspicuous criticism of architecture itself was mentioned for the remainder of the event. In fact, his remarks were construed in the ensuing discussion as an argument in support of modern architectural aesthetics: for *Offenheit* (openness) and *Leichtigkeit* (lightness and ease).⁴¹ The way in which Heidegger tied “building” to the primordial meanings of words before their civilizational distortions in modernity evidently struck a powerful chord.⁴² This influence extended far beyond *Humanity and Space*; “Building Dwelling Thinking” is one of the most commonly cited philosophical references in architectural theory.⁴³ Furthermore, the way in which Heidegger philosophized about space even set a stylistic precedent—many have since attempted to imitate the erratic linguistic style that characterizes Heidegger’s writing in

39 Jauch, “Über den Raum des Denkens,” 70.

40 “Heidegger über Denken Wohnen und Bauen,” August 5, 1951, Archiv Hessischer Rundfunk.

41 Hans Schwippert, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 86–87. “If building evolves out of the feeling of dwelling, and if location evolves out of building, and space comes from location—following Heidegger—then something remarkable has happened to us: our spaces want to have *Offenheit*, *Leichtigkeit*, not the harsh, austere borders of dark caves.”

42 Philosopher Ursula Pia Jauch speaks of “long and murmured linguistic meanderings.” Jauch, “Über den Raum des Denkens,” 67.

43 Kenneth Frampton, for example, published an editorial statement in the journal *Oppositions* in 1975 on his reading of Heidegger’s lecture that barely engaged with the philosopher’s thoughts and their context. Instead, he focused on the power of language and its sometimes dire ecologic, social, and economic consequences for the built environment. In this interpretation, Heidegger is transformed into a pioneering thinker on the “sustainable” design of locations and places, both linguistically and architecturally. Kenneth Frampton, “On Reading Heidegger,” in *Oppositions*, 4, The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1975, n.d.

architecture and architecture theory.⁴⁴ The result has been an interpretation of Heidegger ranging from naïve to superficial, involving a simultaneous mystification of architecture and de-politicization of the concept of space.⁴⁵

But back to *Humanity and Space*. Above all, it was the theory of an architecture developed from the “feeling of dwelling”—that is, from human existence itself—that had the architects present literally dreaming of an existential re-foundation of their discipline. Some architects, like Hans Scharoun, even saw in this theory a direct affirmation of their own design practices. Heidegger, for his part, spoke years later of an “unspoken agreement between your [Scharoun’s] work and my essays.”⁴⁶ Scharoun, meanwhile, consistently referenced the “address given by Martin Heidegger during the Darmstadt Conversation of 1951” in his lectures at the Technische Universität Berlin (Technical University of Berlin).⁴⁷ Their mutual expressions of appreciation were not only based on a metaphorical foundation: Scharoun’s spectacular school design for Darmstadt can, at least at first glance, be interpreted as an architectural translation of “Building Dwelling Thinking.” Heidegger likely also appreciated the way Scharoun spoke about architecture in general. In his short contribution to the discussion, Scharoun noted that the “organizing principles” of architecture were not “abstract statutes,” but rather “living encounters with *Sein* (being) and *Tun* (doing)—that is, with spatiality and time, or, as Kant, I believe, said, with space as the *Bewusstseinsform* [form of consciousness] and with time as the *Anschauungsform* [form of intuition].”⁴⁸ For Scharoun, theoretical models needed to be replaced by a sensibility for spatial consciousness, and therefore a sensibility for the aesthetic interrelationship between architecture and observer, in order to engender a

44 See Peter Zumthor, *Architektur Denken*, 3rd expanded edition (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010). Peter Zumthor’s “magic of the real” is, especially from a linguistic point of view, an adaptation of the text it references.

45 Ullrich Schwarz, “Vom ‘Ort’ zum ‘Ereignis’: die irreführende Rezeption Martin Heideggers in der Architektur,” in *Werk, Bauen + Wohnen*, vol. 86, book 12 (1999), 50–57.

46 Heidegger to Scharoun, 18 October 1957, Akademie der Künste, Akademie der Künste, Hans Scharoun Archive, Nr. 424.

47 Hans Scharoun, reading at Technische Universität Berlin, June 23, 1952, Akademie der Künste, Hans Scharoun Archive, Nr. 4469 Bl. 97–110.

48 Hans Scharoun, Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 94.

specific spatial awareness.⁴⁹ In this sense, Scharoun's remarks somewhat aligned with Heidegger's assertion that building takes place on a foundation of cultural practices and subjective spatial perceptions, even if their respective justifications could not have been more different. While Heidegger had, in *Being and Time*, already rejected Kant's philosophy—with its assumption of transcendently grounded spatial perception—in favor of ascribing everything spatial to human existence, Scharoun referenced precisely the Kantian tradition that Heidegger had criticized. He did so comparatively unreflectingly, however, interpreting Kant's philosophy merely as a contribution to the psychology of space and not as a transcendental philosophical analysis of perception. Furthermore, he ignored the fact that Kant applies the term "architectonic" not to any cognitive instrument, but merely as a metaphor for his epistemological "art of systems."⁵⁰

Reference versus Existence

Architecture as cognitive instrument, expression of this cognition, and its physical implementation: Scharoun had ambitious goals for his school design in the Darmstadt exhibition. In his comments, he repeatedly emphasized that he had based his design not only on urban planning and functional requirements, but primarily on the spatial consciousness and presumed development of children. This would be the first time a school building would take into account the various phases of human cognitive development, from primitive spatial awareness to rational spatial consciousness. Scharoun illustrated his design using colorful exhibition panels (Fig. 13 and Fig. 14) that depicted not architecture, but various forms of social community. They suggested that these communities would naturally create their own distinct spaces without requiring architecture—from the intimate space of the family to the workplace and large public gatherings. While Scharoun, unlike Heidegger, did not describe dwelling as a condition inherent in human existence, his conception of classrooms as nest-like dwellings or cells that would fulfill children's needs in the various stages of their development did allow

49 Sep Ruf, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 89.

50 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, (Riga, 1787 [1781]) in Raymund Schmidt, ed., *Immanuel Kant: Die drei Kritiken* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993), 748.

for many points of connection to Heidegger's thinking. Heidegger could therefore feel validated in his belief that "building" as a marker of locations ideally emerged from lived practice rather than formal architectural training. While Scharoun aimed to contribute to the democratic upbringing of a new generation, Heidegger avoided any spatiotemporal concretization of his ideas about space.

Scharoun did not completely dispense with aesthetic references, however. Space as a form of consciousness and time as a form of intuition may have determined his architectural conception, but to visualize his idea, Scharoun used a comparison that was already well established in modern architecture. Just as Sigfried Giedion had done ten years earlier in *Space, Time and Architecture*,⁵¹ Scharoun juxtaposed his school design's new modernist conception of space with cubist painting. According to Giedion, cubism was the first movement to take into account that spatial perception is inseparable from time. Giedion's famous comparison of Picasso's painting *L'Arlésienne* (1912) with Gropius's Bauhaus building at Dessau (1926)⁵² aimed to suggest that modernist architecture and painting shared the same spatial principles. Giedion believed that Gropius's architecture, like Picasso's painting, could be described by terms like transparency, simultaneity, and interpenetration. Yet there was an obvious and sizeable gap between the photograph of the Bauhaus at Dessau and Gropius's architectural conception of space. What appeared in the photograph as a complex layering of time and space was actually based on an entirely conventional understanding of floor plans, as Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky concluded in their 1963 analysis of Giedion's analogy.⁵³ The impression of interpenetrating spatial layers was conveyed exclusively by the photographic construction of cubist architectural structures—not by the architecture itself. Nevertheless, Scharoun still saw in cubist painting a model of space that was exemplary for architecture. The paintings of Picasso and Braque, for him, clearly showed how "different temporal states are attuned to each other in a new concretization of time—such that different levels of consciousness are, so to speak, simultaneously active and effective, or bring

51 Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The growth of a new tradition* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Press, 1941).

52 Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 400–403.

53 Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal," in *Perspecta*, 1963, vol. 8 (1963), 45–54.

different circumstances into a single actuality.”⁵⁴ Yet Scharoun went much further than Giedion in this analogy. His adaptation of cubism was not limited to a more or less convincing visual comparison. As is clearly visible in his school design model (Fig. 15), Scharoun genuinely saw cubism as a productive principle for spatial organization. In his model, volumes appear very literally to fall into each other, creating a complex spatial relief whose form cannot be explained exclusively by insights from philosophy or progressive educational theory.

Scharoun’s unusual combinatorics of “extra-architectural” references did stir up controversy in the end, even if it was limited to aesthetic positions. The alleged divide between building and thinking only reinforced conservative architects like Paul Bonatz in their belief that nothing could be gained for architecture as they understood it using this approach. In his remarks at the Darmstadt conference, Bonatz cited the passage from Paul Valéry’s *Eupalinos: Or, The Architect* (1927)⁵⁵ in which Socrates concludes that the creative instinct, even if it rests on comprehensive knowledge, ultimately defies definitive conceptual formulation. Bonatz regarded neglect of intuition—by which he really meant historical architectural references—as an impermissible overthinking of the problem of art. This criticism was not leveled at Heidegger’s grand philosophical teachings, but at Scharoun’s school design. With evident satisfaction, Bonatz lambasted “this complicated organism” in which “so many intentions have been mysteriously incorporated.” The “child specimen is irradiated, first from the left, then from the right, vertically arranged, horizontally integrated, supplemented and treated according to a strictly scientific system—I can only imagine that the end result of it all is nothing more than a homunculus.”⁵⁶ As an extreme counterpart, Bonatz compared it to Hans Schwippert’s design for a *Realgymnasium* (secondary school), saying, “Here the classes are lined up in uniform rows on four floors like in a Siemens factory, with students being carried along the conveyor belt in absolute anonymity, until they hit the final wall—the graduation exam.”⁵⁷ For Bonatz, important tendencies in modern architecture were thus exposed

54 Scharoun, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 95.

55 Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte* [*Eupalinos: Or, The Architect*] (Gallimard, 1923), transl. William McCausland Stewart (Oxford University Press, 1932).

56 Bonatz, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 91.

57 Bonatz, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 91.

as extremes: on the one hand, superficial rationality and transparency, and on the other, an organic architecture of unnecessarily complex “overthinking.” He offered colleagues the well-intended advice to “not always start by making these things your worldview and war cry.”⁵⁸ This was not meant as a commentary on Nazi ideology, however. The ambivalent nonchalance with which he used such terms demonstrates once again how he unreflectively maintained his pre-war attitude toward the *Neue Sachlichkeit* in the years between 1933 and 1945, and beyond. As before, Bonatz implied that such theorizing proved senseless in architecture, which ultimately made a mockery of the conference’s ambitious premise. Matter-of-factly, he concluded, “I do not believe that we will achieve our goal through scientific and intellectual contemplation; instead, there must be practical consequences.”⁵⁹ The “practical consequences” that resulted from the conference primarily consisted in Scharoun’s school not being built while Schwippert’s was. But Bonatz’s design for a Darmstadt masterwork—a concert hall on the site of the burned-out Neues Palais, which had housed the Gestapo headquarters from 1942—also went unrealized. His proposal—with its openly classicist architecture referencing the “theater of antiquity” and the “classical,” along with his advocacy for a ceremonial setting that would preclude any use beyond high culture—failed to win approval at this time and in this place. Bonatz’s talk of “maintaining style” (*Stilhaltung*) and architectural “schools” was, as the saying goes, behind the times. Scharoun, on the other hand, did manage to build two schools a few years later, both based on his Darmstadt model. They are still considered some of the most successful school structures of this period (Fig. 16).⁶⁰ At the same time, Scharoun repeatedly addressed school

58 Bonatz, in Bartning, *Darmstädter Gespräch*, 91.

59 Bonatz, in Bartning, *Darmstädter Gespräch* 92.

60 These are the Geschwister-School-Gymnasium in Lünen (1955–1962) and the Volksschule in Marl (1960–1970). The latter was threatened with demolition in 2004, despite having been granted protected landmark status a few years earlier. The author of this essay advocated for preserving the building. See Carsten Ruhl, “Unterlassene Hilfeleistung—Pflegefall. In Marl droht einer Scharoun-Schule der Abriss,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 Dezember 2005, 34. All of Scharoun’s school designs from 1927 onward were shown together for the first time in an exhibition co-developed with students at the Ruhr University Bochum’s Institute of Art History, entitled *Andere Räume. Hans Scharoun’s Schularchitektur* (Other Spaces: Hans Scharoun’s Architecture for Schools). The exhibition also featured his entry for the international competition for Marl’s new city hall, which was ultimately won by the

design issues in his lectures, including theoretical questions. The question of “how democracy, as a universal principle, might realize a way of life” was at the heart of these reflections, being of vital importance in the post-war era. Scharoun clearly distanced himself from “representations of power and politics” and “ideological thinking,” believing that “today, the people [*Volk*] must themselves be sovereign.”⁶¹

From the Absolute Present to the End of History

Humanity and Space marks an important turning point in the history of architecture. In view of the traumatic experiences of the Nazi era, the idealistic transformation of history and present in early modernism did not prove a viable model for the future. Even continuities between pre- and post-war architectural positions—historical references to typologies on the one hand, and functionalist or organic contemporaneity on the other—could not disguise this fundamental inadequacy in the modernist attitude. In general, concrete temporal references—the recent past, present hardships, and the uncertain future—gave way to more universal, philosophical reflections that centered on architectural space. These reflections were characterized by misunderstandings, escapism, hubris, and repression. Above all, they revealed what Ulrich Conrads, who took part in the Darmstadt conversation as a young architect, described as the Adenauer era’s “factual restoration” and “intellectual restriction.”⁶² Yet even from a distance of forty years, Conrads found no reason to criticize this remarkable self-conception of an entire architectural generation. On the contrary: in *Humanity and Space*, Conrads saw “hope for construction motivated by human love”—a hope he saw as more relevant than ever amid contemporary crises such as the Gulf War (1990–1991). Thus, *Humanity and Space* took on a completely new meaning beyond the “presence of memory” suggested by the title of Conrads’s short intro-

Dutch firm Van den Broek and Bakema. The school underwent repairs in accordance with its historically protected status until 2015.

61 Hans Scharoun, “Raum und Milieu der Schule,” lecture of October 14, 1960, International Conference on School Building in Milan, (Akademie der Künste, Hans Scharoun Archive, Nr. 4812 Bl. 336–345).

62 Ulrich Conrads, “Präsenz des Erinnerten,” in Conrads and Neitzke, *Mensch und Raum*, 7–8.

duction. In Conrads's reading, the Darmstadt Conversation stood for a sort of universal pacifism that resisted the "monstrous defeat of enlightenment, of human dignity, of love" that he observed in his own time. Such an interpretation was only possible, however, by ignoring the historical context of *Humanity and Space* and its evident absence of memory. At any rate, the conference did not provide an architectural impetus for the present—and likely could not have on such a foundation. "The gentlemen of 1951 are beyond a doubt master architects of outstanding merit, but their personal styles generally lack forward-looking qualities,"⁶³ was the withering verdict of art historian Hans Maria Wingler. The sole exception, as determined by outside observers, was Hans Scharoun's "overthought" architecture, which received an extensive review in the journal *Rassegna Critica di Architettura* as early as 1952.⁶⁴ Today, Scharoun's design is nearly unanimously considered to have particularly stood out. Yet beyond such isolated contributions to a pedagogically progressive architecture for a new democratic Germany, the Darmstadt Conversation primarily shows how difficult it was for survivors of the Nazi terror to build a common narrative beyond poetic and philosophical reflections. This had far-reaching consequences, especially for an understanding of contemporaneity. Shaped by an awareness that history no longer had a clear direction, this place and especially the period since the sixties were defined by an absorption of all previous "isms" that, understandably, had no interest in producing any "isms" of its own.⁶⁵ A new form of individualized contemporaneity replaced modernism's dialectical intertwining of reference and contemporaneity, and no longer defined itself through an awareness of living in a historical time. As Juliane Rebentisch showed, particularly regarding art since the sixties, contemporaneity was reduced to the transience of moments, becoming essentially fluid and—unlike modernism—no longer calculating in terms of eras. This meant a loss of temporal consciousness on the one hand and, on the other, a gain in critical potential: historical narratives, cultural identities, and "new traditions" revealed their constructedness

63 Hans Maria Wingler, "Das schöpferische Beispiel. Architektur-Ausstellung zum 'Darmstädter Gespräch,'" in *Die Neue Zeitung*, August 11–12, 1951, n.d.

64 Ciro Cicconcelli, "Lo spazio scolastico," in *Rassegna Critica di Architettura*, no. 25 (1952), 8–15.

65 Juliane Rebentisch, "The Contemporaneity of Contemporary Art," in *New German Critique*, no. 124 (February 2015), 223–237.

under the paradigm of *posthistoire*, thereby losing some of their normative force. However, today's resurgence of imperial narratives and autocratic thinking raises the justified question of whether this optimism has, in turn, reached its own end.



Fig. 10. Exhibition catalogue *mensch + Raum* (humanity + Space), ed. Georg A. Neidenberger, Berlin: Brüder Hartmann 1951, Cover.

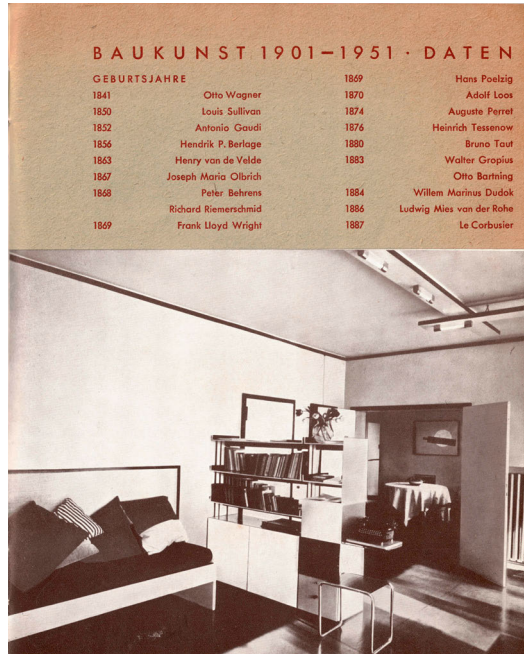


Fig. 11. Exhibition catalogue *mensch + Raum* (humanity + Space), ed. Georg A. Neidenberger, Berlin: Brüder Hartmann 1951, page with architects' years of birth and photograph of the interior of the Masters' Houses in Dessau.



Fig. 12. Photograph of the Darmstadt Conversation of 1951, photographer unknown Source: Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archives), Signature: B 145 Bild-F00074-3601.

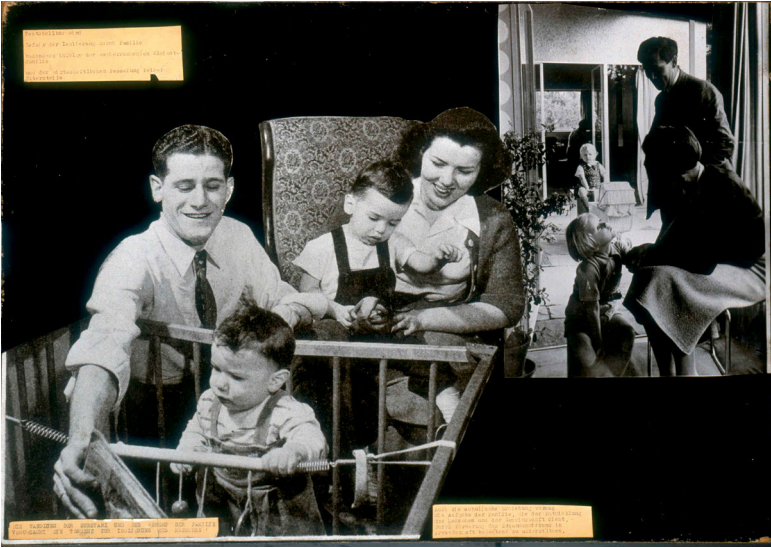


Fig. 13.
Hans Scharoun: Photo collage for the exhibition Meisterbauten (Master Buildings)
Source: Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Hans-Scharoun-Archive, Nr. 1499 Pl.175/8.02,
photographer unknown.

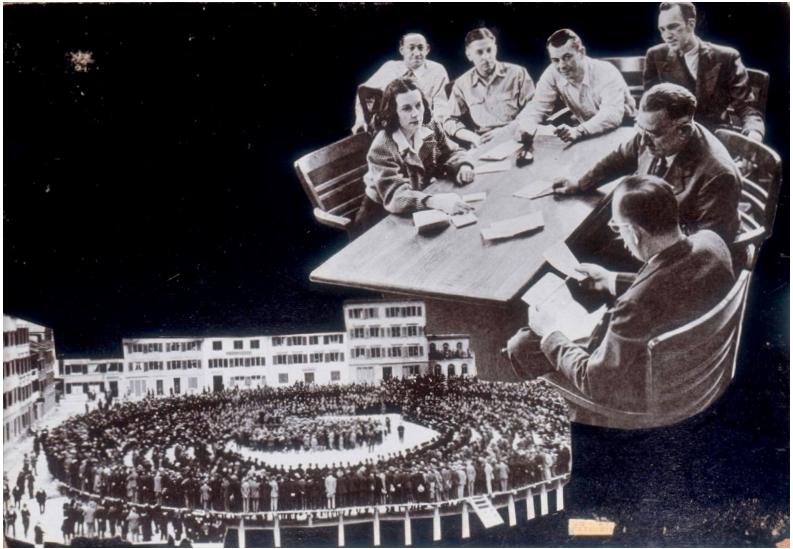


Fig. 14.
Hans Scharoun: Photo collage for the exhibition Meisterbauten (Master Buildings).
Source: Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Hans-Scharoun-Archive, Nr. 1499 Pl.175/8.04,
photographer unknown.

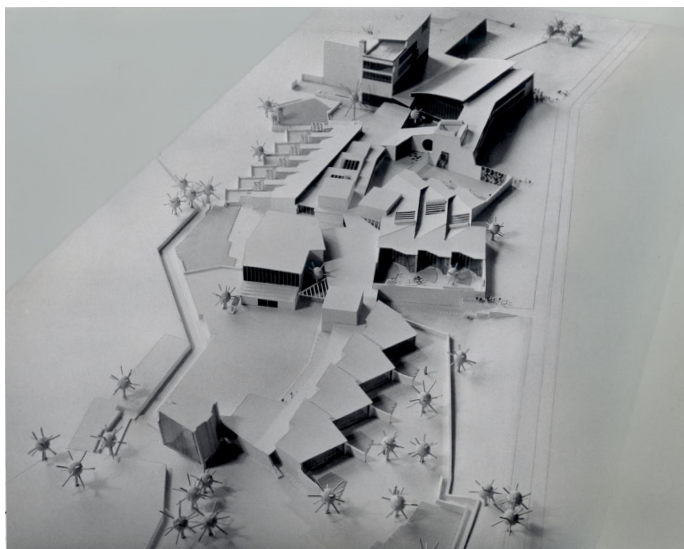


Fig. 15.
Ewald Gnlika: Photograph of Hans Scharoun's Model design for a school
in Darmstadt, 1951.
Source: Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Hans-Scharoun-Archive.



Fig. 16.
Gunnar Klack: Photograph of the Volksschule in Marl, 1968–1971, Hans Scharoun/Michael
Hellgardt, taken in 2017.
Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scharoun-Schule-Marl-08-2017.jpg>.

Beginning - Ending

Classical Paradigms in Flux

Embellissement and Technological Shift in Nineteenth-Century Paris

Salvatore Pisani

“If you alter the Book, you alter the world”

Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, 1989

If we understand signifiers as symbols that generate and circulate meanings, then we can consider the city as a text—a collection of codes that, once deciphered, orient residents and visitors in space and time. Those who can read signs, signals, and distinguishing marks—whether street names, traffic signals, or the distinctive symbol for a pharmacy—will be able to find their bearings in the web of urban life and its temporal cadences. Roland Barthes described this phenomenon in his 1967 lecture “Semiology and the Urban”: “He who moves about the city, e.g., the user of the city . . . is a kind of reader who, following his obligations and his movements, appropriates fragments of the utterance” and concludes that “the city is writing.”¹ Following this poststructuralist application of the textual paradigm to urban space, signifiers generate references through connection, producing discourses that overlay the city and its formalized mechanisms with a shifting play of meanings and narratives.² From the perspective of art and architectural history,

1 Roland Barthes, “Semiology and the Urban,” in *The City and the Sign*, ed. M. Gottdiener and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 95.

2 The distinction touched on here between visual communication and cultural codification follows Umberto Eco, *Einführung in die Semiotik* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1972), 24–25. For the semiotic concept of space after the cultural turn, see Sigrid Weigel, “Zum ‘topographical turn’. Kartographie, Topographie und Raumkonzepte in den Kulturwissenschaften,” in *KulturPoetik*, vol. 2 (2002), 151–165.

signifiers and references in the city address the past, present, and future, sometimes referring to other cities both in emulation and rivalry.³ At times, they keep alive the memory of historical identities, while also marking the status and location of their surroundings. A marketplace and cathedral, for example, point to an old city center; office towers and feeder roads suggest a newer district at the outskirts. In this sense, references, whether intentional or not, make up a semantic coordinate system, similar to a texture or a way of speaking, that casts itself interpretively over the built environment, both codifying and continuing the writing of it.⁴ This ambivalence between fixity and non-fixity, which constantly recontextualizes signifiers and references and endows them with shifting moments of meaning, provides the analytical starting point for the following discussion.

Our first area of concern will be the problem of innovation itself, as well as the means, semantics, and references by which innovations prove themselves to be innovations, integrate into existing frameworks, or bridge the gap with the old. Our thematic focus will be on the relationship between the classical canon and urban engineering in early nineteenth-century France. The canon was defined and safeguarded by the Académie and the École des beaux-arts, which controlled the state's architecture curriculum. Beaux-Arts architecture saw itself as building-art, as *architecture savante* (erudite architecture), destined to be applied in prestigious building projects and urbanistic beautification initiatives, known as *embellissements*. Where Beaux-Arts architects intervened, they created buildings and spaces in the classical tradition—a practice that continued well into the second half of the nineteenth century. Besides obtaining positions in the national government and départements, the most qualified graduates of the École des beaux-arts were often recruited by the administration of Paris. Since the 1830s, the city had increasingly commissioned urbanization projects, including what Germans term

3 See Wolfgang Pehnt, *Städtebau des Erinnerns. Mythen und Zitate westlicher Städte* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2021).

4 The post-structuralist perspective presented here appears in nineteenth-century discourse on urbanity, sometimes in the form of *prosopopoeia*, where objects narrate their own history. See, for example, Charles Nodier: "Il n'y a peut-être pas une rue, pas une place publique dans cette vieille ville [de Paris] qui ne rappelât un fait singulier et frappant si ses murailles s'animaient, si elles pouvaient parler." Charles Nodier, *Paris historique. Promenades dans les rues de Paris*, vol. 1 (Paris: Académie Française, 1838–39), 3.

Städtetechnik—infrastructure that ensured hygiene, drinking water supply, sewage disposal, transport, and the like. In the era of industry and engineering, infrastructure and urbanization meant that the city was transformed and radically rebuilt, quite literally from the ground up.⁵ The planning and execution of these measures was not up to the architects alone; they were assisted by a host of surveyors, civil engineers, hydraulic specialists, mechanical engineers, botanists, and many other experts in various domains. Most of these had come up through engineering schools, the most prestigious being the *École polytechnique*.⁶ Urban engineering thus encompassed a cross section of different, even heterogeneous skills and responsibilities, all integrated into a model that united public and private investment. The Place de la Concorde was one prominent, large-scale project of this “innovative milieu” developing in Paris’s central administration at the beginning of the July Monarchy.⁷ Among its attractions was the first large-scale deployment, in 1837–38, of more than 80 gas-powered street lamps. Designed by Beaux-Arts architect Jakob Ignaz Hittorff, the cast-iron creations appear as fluted Ionic columns—thus becoming hybrids (Fig. 17). As befits such a crossing of divergent references, these objects possess a distinctive duplicity: they are *art savant* on the one hand and technology on the other. Furthermore, their

5 For more on engineering and industry as central drivers of urban development in the nineteenth century, see Jürgen Reulecke, *Geschichte der Urbanisierung in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 49–67 and Christian Kleinschmidt, *Technik und Wirtschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2007), 13–16. For more on the early phases of Paris’s transformation, see Karen Bowie, ed., *La modernité avant Haussmann. Formes de l’espace urbain à Paris 1801–1853* (Paris: Éditions Recherches, 2001) and H. Hazel Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Springer, 2009), 143–156.

6 See André Grelon, “Von den Ingenieuren des Königs zu den Technologen des 21. Jahrhunderts. Die Ausbildung der Ingenieure in Frankreich,” in *Ingenieure in Frankreich 1747–1990*, ed. André Grelon and Heiner Stück (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1994), 15–57.

7 On the birth and significance of Paris as a “creative city,” see Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilization: Culture, Innovation, and Urban Order* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson History, 1999), 706–745. The idea of the innovative or creative city, with its numerous areas of crossover between art, engineering, and administrative history, formed the basis of a project at the University of Mainz funded by the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) and led by Gregor Wedekind and myself, entitled “Mobilier urbain. Objektkultur und öffentlicher Raum in Paris des 19. Jahrhunderts.” Some of the following reflections are owed to that project.

hybridity points both to the symbolic (the classical canon) and non-symbolic (cast iron, coal gas). Also non-symbolic are the technical networks, like the gas supply pipe system, whose linear arrangement partially determined the placement of the street lamps. The Place de la Concorde thus interacts with a technological spatial network whose incompatibility had to be overcome first.⁸ We will return to this point.

In fact, the technological shift of the Place de la Concorde seamlessly integrated into the framework of classical urban beautification (*embellissement*), whose core features were symmetry, axiality, and a semantics of the classical (Fig. 18).⁹ The *embellissement* itself culminated in a prominent reference to Rome: the motif of the centrally placed obelisk flanked by fountains pays homage to St. Peter's Square and honors the academic principle of *aemulatio* (emulation).¹⁰ The visual primacy of *embellissement* explains why the Place de la Concorde's "technological shift" has found its way into neither art history nor the history of technology. And yet, the beautification of Paris in the nineteenth century cannot be separated from the classical canon, nor can it be properly discussed without considering developments in engineering and technology.¹¹ Rather, it demands that we concentrate on the intersection of

8 On the concept of technology as an system going beyond isolated (symbolic) artifacts and instruments, see Thomas P. Hughes, "The Evolution of Large Technological Systems," in Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor Pinch, eds., *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (London: The MIT Press, 1987), 45–76.

9 On the central category of *embellissement*, which defined France's early urban design, see Sophie Descat, "L'embellissement urbain au XVIIIe siècle. Éléments du beau, éléments du sublime," in *Les arts des Lumières. Essais sur l'architecture et la peinture en Europe au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Claire Ollagnier (Paris: ghamu, 2019), 127–142, as well as Alexis Joachimides, *Die Ästhetik der Stadt. Städtebau in Bordeaux und Edinburgh 1730–1830* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2021). On the history of the Place de la Concorde, see Solange Granet, *La place de la Concorde* (Paris: Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 1963) and the exhibition catalogue *Paris erwacht! Hittorffs Erfindung der Place de la Concorde* (Köln: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, 2017).

10 See Salvatore Pisani, "Monument wird Mobiliar. Zur Transformationsgeschichte der Place de la Concorde in der Julimonarchie," in *Skulptur und Platz. Raumbesetzung, Raumüberwindung, Interaktion*, ed. Alessandro Nova and Stephanie Hanke (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2014), 315–332, esp. 327.

11 The relevant discursive history, i.e. the web of relationships between architecture and engineering in architectural theory, has been outlined many times; see especially

these two historiographic fields—art and engineering—which continue to pay little attention, or respect, to one another.

The relationship between art and engineering in the nineteenth century, according to Sigfried Giedion's influential thesis, was one of insurmountable opposition. As Giedion writes, "From the beginning of the [nineteenth] century two opposed attitudes . . . face each other in France: the *École des Beaux-Arts* is confronted by the *École Polytechnique*."¹² However, when we examine this issue in the context of urbanization and municipal building administration—that is, within actual building practice—a considerably different picture emerges: art and engineering became creolized and entangled in manifold new configurations. To analyze these hybrid formations, we must maintain a dual perspective that does not simply conflate the history of practice with that of discourse.¹³

While the new intermarriage of art and engineering may have been accepted in the practical realities of everyday work, the representatives of high art and culture categorically rejected it. It is unnecessary to go further into this well-researched discursive territory.¹⁴ A few key examples will suffice. For the *Beaux-Arts* establishment, mixing of art with engineering constituted an impermissible transgression of normative boundaries—a moral failure resulting from the degradation of artistic standards to the level of utilitarian and consumer goods. A paradigmatic example is the painter Jean-August-Dominique Ingres's vehement objection to proposed reforms of the *École des beaux-arts* in 1863. Regarding the idea of turning the *École* into a school of applied arts with a clear practical orientation, Ingres wrote: "Now

Ulrike Schuster, *Stadtutopien und Idealstadtkonzepte des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel der Großstadt Paris* (Weimar: arts + science weimar, 2003).

12 Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 210. The relationship between engineering and art has since proven to be a dynamic and multifaceted field of study, as is shown by an anthology at the intersection of media theory and visual studies: Oliver Ruf and Lars C. Grabbe, eds., *Technik-Ästhetik. Zur Theorie techno-ästhetischer Realität* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2022).

13 For a purely discursive analysis, see Héléne Lipstadt and Harvey Mendelsohn, *Architecte et ingénieur dans la presse. Polémique, débat, conflit* (Paris: C.O.R.D.A., 1980).

14 See the still seminal work of Georg Maag, *Kunst und Industrie im Zeitalter der ersten Weltausstellungen. Synchronische Analyse einer Epochenschwelle* (Munich: Fink, 1986).

they want to mix art with industry. Industry! We do not want it.”¹⁵ This strident reaction from the Beaux-Arts movement’s chief ideologue exemplified resistance against a threatened unification of the irreconcilable, and hence the erosion of the classical canon and the elitism of France’s premier training ground for artists and architects. For the Beaux-Arts establishment, nothing less was at stake than their claim to establish and safeguard the standards of classical art. Unlike for the Romantics, however—and herein lies a crucial distinction—technology and engineering did not act as an alternative canon.¹⁶ While the Romantics insisted on exceptionalism, engineering inherently embraced functionality and means-end rationality. Accordingly, the concept of singularity is foreign to engineering, while relationality and normalism are immanent to it. We will return to this point as well.

This essay takes as its starting point the openness of engineering to integration with art, and conversely, art’s limited receptiveness to integration with engineering. In the first section, I discuss how classical paradigms became both fixed and amplified during the era of archaeological classicism. This helps explain why academic art and the engineering of infrastructure remained in tension despite numerous instances of convergence and comingling. The second section will look at a productive resolution of this divergence through hybrid forms, taking Paris’s cast-iron street furnishings as an example. My focus will be on a cross-sectional analysis of *embellishment* and urban engineering, for which I will combine historical and systematic approaches.

15 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Réponse au rapport sur l’École impériale des beaux-arts, adressé au Maréchal Vaillant, ministre de la maison de l’Empereur et des beaux-arts, Paris, 1863, 4: “Maintenant on veut mêler l’industrie à l’art. L’industrie! Nous n’en voulons pas!” For more on this affair, see Alain Bonnet, *L’enseignement des arts au XIXe siècle. La réforme de l’École des beaux-arts de 1863 et la fin du modèle académique* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006) and Amandine Diener, *Enseigner l’architecture aux Beaux-Arts (1863–1968). Entre réformes et traditions* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2022).

16 The conflict between the Beaux-Arts and the Romantic school, which began in the 1820s, is customarily treated through the rivalry of the two schools’ main representatives. See Andrew Carrington Shelton, “Ingres versus Delacroix,” in *Art History*, vol. 23, no. 5 (2000), 726–742.

A Short Introduction to the (Il)logical Classical Reference System

A typical attribute of classical or classicist art is that it refers back to antiquity, or at the least to one of its renaissances. The Beaux-Arts style's aspiration to the universal and essential is exemplified by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's painting *The Apotheosis of Homer*, which even his contemporaries characterized as a "manifeste en l'honneur de l'art antique" (Fig. 19).¹⁷ Homer, the blind father of poets, sits enthroned in the center of the painting, appearing as the embodiment and starting point of the classical tradition.¹⁸ The flock of artists surrounding him forms an idealized genealogy, beginning with the lyric poet Pindar and the sculptor Phidias—who deferentially offer Homer a lyre and a hammer—and extending to the seventeenth-century artists depicted in the foreground, including Racine, Corneille, Poussin, and Molière. With their gazes and gestures directed toward the father of poets, his disciples serve as visual guides, literally pointing the way to Homer. The painting depicts filiation as a central category of the classical reference system; Ingres himself described the figures gathered about the throne as "les enfants d'Homère."¹⁹ Individual interactions—on the left, the black-robed Raphael extends his right hand to the painter Apelles, while the toga-clad Virgil lays his arm amicably across Dante's shoulder—represent internal acts of reference, creating a fraternal bond between figures from antiquity and post-antiquity.²⁰ When Raphael appears as the reincarnation of Apelles and Dante as that of Virgil, signifiers themselves beget more signifiers in a per-

17 Paul Delaborde, "Homère déifié, dessin de M. Ingres," in *Revue des deux mondes*, vol. 57 (1865), 775–781, here 778.

18 The ceiling painting was commissioned and produced in 1827 for the newly established Musée Charles X in the Louvre; see Sébastien Allard, *Le Louvre à l'époque romantique. Les décors du palais (1815–1835)* (Lyon: Fage, 2006), 79–85 and Yoo-Kyong Lee, "Ingres au salon de 1827. L'Apothéose d'Homère," in *Bulletin du Musée d'Ingres*, vol. 82 (2010), 79–98. For more on the political appropriation of antiquity with regard to Ingres, see Uwe Fleckner, "Die Wiedergeburt der Antike aus dem Geist des Empire. Napoleon und die Politik der Bilder," in *Napoleon und Europa. Traum und Trauma*, Exhibition catalog, ed. Bénédicte Savoy (Bonn: Prestel, 2011), 101–115.

19 See Paul Delaborde, "Homère déifié, dessin de M. Ingres," in *Revue des deux mondes*, vol. 57 (1865), 775–781, here 777.

20 These acts of referencing continue through discourse when, for example, an article on Ingres's *The Apotheosis of Homer* in the *Revue encyclopédique* states that Apelles

petuation and continual validation of Homer's timeless authority. The acts aggregated in this process—transmission, appropriation, transformation, veneration, and exemplification—not only stabilize and perpetuate the object of reference (Homer, father of poets), but unfold into their own referential universe characterized by perpetual rebirth (renaissance).

In Ingres's painting, classical doctrine begins (Latin *principium*) with Homer, who would endure even through the “dark” era of the Middle Ages as a maxim and benchmark. Homer is that which cannot exist: the beginning without beginnings, following nothing, referencing nothing. He possesses the mystery of divinity, as indicated by the temple in the background dedicated to him. To his divine origin are owed the eternal laws of classicism, which he transmitted into human temporality.²¹ Like the Catholic doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the Church), classical art rests on a principle of rigorous exclusion, maintained by the cult of Homer's disciples. To the extent that classicism withdraws to a position of internality, it erects immovable borders that permit no external references. Classicism defines itself as an inviolable doctrine through this fundamental claim.

Ingres's *Apotheosis of Homer* envisions that fusion of Hellenism and contemporaneity held dear by the Beaux-Arts school and Western Europe more generally at the turn of the nineteenth century. Yet when we look at many other revivals of antiquity—from the Italian Renaissance to the French Baroque and Weimar Classicism—we notice that each refers to a different version of antiquity. Thus, while the signifier “antiquity” clearly points toward the depths of European history, it has no fixed facticity. On the contrary, transformation studies now widely recognize that the act of referencing antiquity simultaneously creates, alters, and renews the very object being referenced.²² Reference and reception exist in a bidirectional relationship.

took Raphael's hand “pour l'amener auprès d'Homère”; cited in Lee, “Ingres au salon de 1827,” in *Bulletin du Musée d'Ingres*, 96.

21 See Christoph Asmuth, *Subjekt und Prinzip. Philosophie des Anfangs* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2017) on the principle of incipience and its foundational meaning for systems of reference.

22 See Christoph Asmuth, *Interpretation – Transformation. Das Platonbild bei Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher und Schopenhauer und das Legitimationsproblem der Philosophiegeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 15–18 and Hartmut Böhme, “Einladung zur Transformation,” in

Antiquity did not consist of fixed facts for Ingres either. Three decades later, he sketched a new graphic revision of his Homer painting; in this version, he doubled the number of Homer's disciples and made significant alterations—especially to the painting's architectural backdrop (Fig. 20).²³ In place of the Ionic *peripteros*, he introduced a four-columned, polychrome *prostylos* featuring a mixture of Ionic capitals and Doric entablature. This temple backdrop, despite its rule-breaking incongruities, was subsequently elevated to the status of a new norm. The main impetus for this reassessment was a publication from 1851 in which Jakob Ignaz Hittorff exhaustively reconstructed the ancient color scheme of a Greek temple with mixed architectural orders (Fig. 21).²⁴ Hittorff had no qualms about basing his reconstruction on the scanty remains of buildings and foundations—which is why we must conclude that this colorful antiquity was both discovered and fabricated by archaeology. To the extent that the archaeology of the Beaux-Arts movement was based on something that itself had no basis, the nineteenth century effectively created its own antiquity. However, to infer from this that its reconstruction was arbitrary would be to misunderstand the logic and practice of classical referencing. As much as Hittorff's results were not based on solid evidence, they adhered to a reconstruction methodology endorsed by the Académie des beaux-arts. It is important to note that the Académie's director, Quatremère de Quincy, developed and authorized an archaeological process by which gaps in the fragmentary record of antiquity could nevertheless be filled in controlled manner. A brief outline of this approach: Quatremère de Quincy believed that the "restitution" of fragmentary or even absent artifacts was possible if archaeological evidence and written records underwent

Transformation: Ein Konzept zur Erforschung kulturellen Wandels, ed. Hartmut Böhme, Lutz Bergemann, et al. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2011), 7–37, esp. 8–10.

23 There is ample literature on the revised version of the painting, under the title *Homère déifié*; see Louis-Antoine Prat, *Ingres* (Paris: 5Continents, 2004), 92; Georges Vigne, "L'Apothéose d'Homère ou l'Antiquité apprivoisée," in *L'illusion grecque: Ingres & L'Antique*, ed. Pascale Picard-Cajan, (Montauban, Arles: Actes Sud, 2006,) 180–88, esp. 187–88. Exhibition catalog; and *Ingres: Lettres 1841–1867: De L'Âge d'or à Homère déifié*, ed. Daniel Ternois, vol. 2 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2016).

24 See Salvatore Pisani, "Der Bildatlas. Jakob Ignaz Hittorff und Ludwig Zanth 'Architecture antique de la Sicile, 1827,'" in *Das Buch als Entwurf. Textgattungen in der Geschichte der Architekturtheorie. Ein Handbuch*, ed. Dietrich Erben (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2019), 284–309.

a mediologically regulated reconstruction process of analogy and comparison. Where the record no longer provided visual evidence, Quatremère de Quincy readily advocated using imagination.²⁵ This could be managed, he maintained, according to a strictly systematic procedure of comparison and analogy, guaranteeing a credible reconstruction of Greek artworks.²⁶ The crux of this procedure is clear to see: what masquerades as plausible derivation equally depends on a recreation of the signifier. In other words, the gaps in the historical record spur on a manufacturing of signs that originate not only in antiquity, but also in the process of reconstruction itself, and thus in the present.

Academic and Archaeological Amplification of Reference to the Classical

Until well into the twentieth century, the process of reconstruction described above represented the capstone of the elite training at the Beaux-Arts school. Winners of the annual Grand Prix de Rome were awarded with a stay of several years at the Villa Medici in Rome, an offshoot of the French academy.²⁷ Before returning to France, where government positions beckoned, these scholarship recipients received their final educational polish by completing archaeological reconstruction designs known as *envois de Rome*. The little-known *envoi de Rome* completed by Maurice Boutterin in 1913 serves as an illustration. His design shows the villa of the Roman emperor Tiberius on

25 See my remarks in Pisani, “Der Bildatlas,” 296–298.

26 For more on the analogies and premises of this concept in idealist aesthetic theory, particularly Kant’s subordination of imagination to the control of reason, see Dieter Mersch, “Imagination, Figuralität und Kreativität. Zur Frage der Bedingungen kultureller Produktivität,” in *Kreativität*, ed. Günter Abel (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006), 344–359.

27 See Pierre Pinon and François Xavier Amprimoz, *Les Envois de Rome. Architecture et archéologie*, (Rome: École française de Rome, 1988) and, most recently, Luigi Gallo, “Pour échauffer le génie’. Séjour à Rome des Grands Prix d’architecture sous l’Empire,” in *Bâtir pour Napoléon. Une architecture franco-italienne*, ed. Letizia Tedeschi, Jean-Philippe Garric and Daniel Rabreau (Brussels: Mardaga, 2021), 132–45.

the island of Capri—but not as it ever actually appeared (Fig. 22).²⁸ In fact, the ancient cliff-side villa in Boutterin's *envoi* oscillated indistinguishably between fact and fiction, between reconstruction and invention. Boutterin incorporated elements reflecting a fin-de-siècle image of antiquity. Even the choice of the villa of Tiberius—a Roman emperor who, in the last decade of his life, retreated from Rome's political sphere to an island in the Bay of Naples, supposedly to indulge in a licentious life of luxury—already signals a decadent aesthetic. Boutterin addressed an image of antiquity sketched by Suetonius in *The Twelve Caesars*, while also referencing visions popular in French visual arts and literature since the 1850s, and in “sword-and-sandal” films since 1900.²⁹ The colossal composition (2 x 4.5 meters) is indeed based on a floor plan excavated in 1835 at the heart of the building complex, yet all the surrounding facilities (terraced architecture, hippodrome, tree-lined parks, processional avenues) sprang purely from the artist's imagination and education. Domed buildings, temple porticos, and triumphal arches all belong to the repertoire of antiquity as much as they do to the Beaux-Arts—but they simply never existed at the villa of Tiberius.³⁰ To the extent that Boutterin's design blurs the line between antiquity as the referenced source and

28 See Vincent Jolivet, “Maurice Boutterin (1882–1970). Palais de Tibère à Capri, 1913,” in *Italia Antiqua. Envois de Rome des architectes français en Italie et dans le monde méditerranéen aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, Exhibiton catalog, ed. Annie Jacques, Stéphane Verger, and Catherine Virlovet (Paris: École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 2002), 268–79.

29 See Dominique Païni, “Peindre l'instant d'après ou Gérôme cineaste,” in Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904). *L'histoire en spectacle*, Exhibiton catalog, ed. Laurence Des Cars (Paris: Skira, 2010), 333–39; and Adrian Stähli, “Screening Pompeii: The last days of Pompeii in cinema,” in *The last days of Pompeii: Decadence, apocalypse, resurrection*, Exhibiton catalog, ed. Victoria C. Gardener Coates et al. (Malibu: Getty Publications, 2012), 78–87. The mythologizing of the ancient Tiberius reached its apex in the middle of the twentieth century when Edwin Cerio, a historian of the island of Capri, sardonically proclaimed that Tiberius was “the myth of the orgy everlasting”; Edwin Cerio, *Capri: Ein kleines Welttheater im Mittelmeer* (Capri, 2013), 8 [originally published in Italian as *L'ora di Capri*, (Capri: Insula Editrice, 1950)].

30 See Clemens Krause, *Villa Jovis. Die Residenz des Tiberius auf Capri* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2003) on the reconstruction of Tiberius's villa according to current structural and archaeological criteria.

antiquity as reinterpreted through nineteenth-century eyes, Tiberius's villa becomes something it never was in historical reality.³¹

When judged by archaeological architectural standards, these *envoi* drawings must be rejected, as they embody the post-factual principle of blurring—or not even attempting to establish—the boundary between fact and fiction.³² In fact, we can better appreciate them through the lens of artistic research, an anti-academic approach.³³ This new, anti-orthodox research methodology is characterized by its refusal to objectify its subject matter, instead opening it up like a cabinet of curiosities, thereby relying on the power of the aesthetic. For the purposes of artistic research, the architect acts as an artist. Rather than compete with archaeology as a field of positive science, they produce aesthetic knowledge that disregards attempts at verification or rational discourse.³⁴ Boutterin used exaggeration to uncover an essential feature of the object he depicted, only a faint glimmer of which can be seen in the ruins themselves. Instead of showing what archaeology can verify and

31 These remarks follow the concept of transformation as elaborated by Lutz Bergemann, Martin Dönike, Albert Schirrmeister, Georg Toepfer, Marco Walter and Julia Weitbrecht, *Transformation. Ein Konzept zur Erforschung kulturellen Wandels* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2011), 39–56.

32 This does not apply equally to all of the envois; rather, it describes a tendency that gained increasing prominence in the second half of the nineteenth century. See the summary in *Roma antiqua. Grandi edifici pubblici: Envois degli architetti francesi (1786–1901)*, Exhibiton catalog (Rome: Edizioni Carte segrete, 1992). Reference amplification, whether achieved through particularly opulent reconstructions or exceptional illustration techniques, is especially characteristic of the envois of Charles-Alfred Leclerc (Baths of Trajan, 1871), Edmond Paulin (Baths of Diocletian, 1880), Georges Chedanne (Pantheon, 1891), and Alfred Recoura (Circus of Maxentius, 1891). For more on the post-factual as a crisis phenomenon of the factual, see Gary S. Schaal, Dannica Fleuß, and Sebastian Dumm, “Die Wahrheit über Postfaktizität,” in *APuZ. Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, October 27, 2017, <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/258506/die-wahrheit-ueber-postfaktizitaet/>.

33 See *Künstlerische Forschung. Ein Handbuch*, ed. Jens Badura et al. (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2015).

34 In contrast to academic knowledge production, with its imperatives of verifiability and critical self-reflection, the validation of knowledge plays a subordinate role in artistic research, as evident in many of the envois. See Karin Knorr Cetina, *Wissenskulturen. Ein Vergleich naturwissenschaftlicher Wissensformen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2002).

describe, his reconstructed design prioritizes evoking that which is lost.³⁵ In other words, Boutterin embraces a kind of archaeology that does not disavow its creative relationship to the object of reference, but instead deliberately foregrounds it.

It is not difficult to identify the historical moment of Boutterin's amplification of reference to the classical: the turn of the twentieth century, when the Beaux-Arts movement had long surrendered its claim to aesthetic hegemony. Gothic Revival, iron and concrete architecture, and art nouveau had already established themselves as alternative reference systems in architectural practice.³⁶ Amplifying one's own referential elements represents a proactive strategy in the face of this challenge.

***Embellissement* and Technological Shift, 1835**

Let us now return to the early history of Parisian urban engineering. As I noted earlier, the question of the new is not merely a question of technology: the crucial caesura in the Parisian cityscape was created not by the introduction of coal gas or cast iron, but by the hybrid integration of these technological elements with traditional *embellissement*. The paradigmatic example of this hybridization are the cast-iron gas lamps in the shape of columns, which were installed in 1837–38 in the Place de la Concorde and, later, all along the Champs-Élysées. The lamps' design reflects a specific historical moment when technology wasn't treated as separate from art—instead, the two merged into a novel form. The round iron bars, in particular—which were a product of casting technology and were mass-produced—integrated seamlessly with classical Ionic design elements. On the other hand, the columns' narrow cross-section is proof that antiquity no longer served as the sole reference point. This resulted in a paradox: what was truly new was not the technology,

35 On the theoretical principles governing the interrelationship of showing and reference as they have defined the discourse of analytic philosophy since Wittgenstein, see Willard Van Orman Quine, "Things and Their Place in Theories," in *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1–23. See also Willard Van Orman Quine, *The Roots of Reference* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974).

36 On the "referential" changes to Parisian architectural culture directly after 1900, see Giulia Mezzalama, *Cambiare le regole: Questioni di architettura e storia urbana nella Parigi di inizio Novecento* (Rome: Viella, 2013).

but the hybrid forms that, beneath their references to the old, revealed the emergence of the new.

If we ask how this engineering technology became part of Paris's cityscape, we cannot avoid crediting the Beaux-Arts school's role as a Trojan horse.³⁷ While the technology represented progress, it was visually indistinct and unfamiliar, and thus constituted a provocation. When it comes to early technological history, we must therefore reverse the usual argument that canonical forms compensate for the uncertainties brought about by a changing world.³⁸ This compensation theory should be reconsidered, recognizing that the classical model in fact did not decelerate or repress technological progress, as even Giedion claimed, but instead drove innovations that could not have come about without reference to tradition.³⁹ In the end, with the Place de la Concorde, technology became the heart of the city, transitioning from referential rootlessness into the semantic space of the "grand narrative" of the modern city.⁴⁰

The technological transition occurring at the Place de la Concorde in 1835 was neither simple nor automatic. The specific challenges of this transformation process are most evident in the immediate run-up to its redevelopment. In 1834, the entrepreneur Isaac-Ami Bordier-Marcet submitted a proposal to the Paris city administration for lighting the Pont de la Concorde (Fig. 23 and Fig. 24). His plans featured suspended oil lamps that would hang above the road and whose tension cables would be attached to iron lattice pillars.

37 For a recent study to this effect, see Michael Kiene, "Jacques-Ignace Hittorff, constructeur savant," in *Les matériaux métalliques. Histoire d'une technique et sauvegarde du patrimoine du 19e siècle*, ed. Matteo Porrino (Gollion: Infolio, 2021), 203–35.

38 Herfried Münkler, "Warum Kanon? Wozu Kanon?" (lecture, Nürnberg, January 16, 2012). <https://www.intendanten-gruppe.de/index.php/impulse-und-berichte/warum-kanon-wozu-kanon>. The seminal volume for the present considerations is Theodor W. Adorno, *Ohne Leitbild. Parva Aesthetica* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), esp 7–19.

39 Giedion's weighty invective followed from what he saw as a Drapierung ("draping") of technology in Beaux-Arts decor; see Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1928), 3.

40 On *concorde* (national harmony) as the symbolic message of the bourgeois monarchy following the unrest and turmoil of the July Revolution of 1830, see Salvatore Pisani, *Architektenschmiede Paris. Die Karriere des Jakob Ignaz Hittorff* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 157–69.

His main argument for the use of traditional hanging lamps was that narrow, cast-iron street lamps would not suffice to light the “*entourage colossal*” (colossal surroundings) of the Pont de la Concorde, especially considering the task of doing justice to the six monumental statues of *grands hommes* displayed there.⁴¹ In view of the plan to erect the Luxor Obelisk on the Place de la Concorde, Bordier-Marcet argued that his proposed cast-iron masts would create an obelisk-like form, providing the necessary coherence in shape and proportion. His project aimed to provide “*éclairage monumentale*” (monumental lightning) for the bridge, which would also serve as a boulevard leading up to the Place de la Concorde. Two years later, in 1836, Hittorff’s justification for installing 20 seven-meter-high lanterns in the shape of rostral columns on the Place de la Concorde was no different: he argued that they would create “*illumination monumentale*” that satisfied the demands of *embellissement*.⁴² Given that these rostral columns and their lighting would ultimately be dwarfed by the expanse of the square,⁴³ Hittorff’s justification—like Bordier-Marcet’s before him—reveals itself simply as a discursive practice through which architects and entrepreneurs alike provided legitimation for new urban technology and its artifacts as they infiltrated the semiotically dense urban landscape.

Technological transformations are generally imaged as a series of exnovations and innovations: the old is made redundant by the new, and there is a clean cut between the two. In fact, the opposite is true. This is partially due to path dependence, which particularly (although not exclusively) involves capital-intensive technologies. Oil lamps, for example, would continue to be

41 On the unexecuted lighting project for the Pont de la Concorde, see the report published in a special edition by Bordier-Marcet in *Figaro* on June 9, 1834: “Souvenirs de l’expérience faite sur le pont de la Concorde pendant l’Exposition de l’Industrie Française, pour l’achèvement monumental et l’éclairage dudit pont.” quotations on p. 2; preserved in Paris, Archives nationales F/13/1246. For a history of the erection (1791) and removal (1837) of the *grands hommes* statues, see Georges Poisson, “Les statues du Pont de la Concorde,” in *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire de Paris et de l’Île-de-France*, vol. 11 (1985), 173–93.

42 Cited in Granet, *La place de la Concorde*, 110.

43 A further attempt at lighting the Concorde in a monumental style was the electric arch lamp installed in 1844, which was supposed to illuminate the immense expanse of the square using only a single beam of light. See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Lichtblicke. Zur Geschichte der künstlichen Helligkeit im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2004), 59.

used in Paris long after the introduction of coal gas.⁴⁴ When Bordier-Marcet clung to the “outdated” technology of the oil lamp and rejected newer, gas-powered lampposts, he was protecting his monopoly on the market of hanging-lamp technology—a field where he was not necessarily an innovator, despite his involvement in its “technological transformation” when it came to *embellishment*.⁴⁵ Rather than assuming a clear break, we ought therefore to imagine multiple paths of technological transformation occurring simultaneously, even when attention naturally gravitates toward novelty.⁴⁶ The innovative technology of gas lighting was ultimately chosen for the Place de la Concorde. Looking at the broader context, this “reorientation” wasn’t solely the architect’s decision; rather, the Paris municipal administration cast the decisive vote.

The history of the Place de la Concorde is indeed deeply connected with that of heavy industry in Haute-Marne, which housed the furnaces where the city’s iron furnishings were cast, as well as that of the gas plants built in the Parisian suburb of Batignolles, which powered Hittorff’s street lamps.⁴⁷ When the architect incorporated industrial elements, he did so at the behest and with the aid of the municipal administration, which—coordinating the entire system—functionally integrated these various structural components. To consider these technological and industrial aspects as mere preliminaries to the production process would be to underestimate the changing conditions whose powerful currents rapidly engulfed urban spaces and cityscapes, beginning to reshape them. The Place de la Concorde marks a conspicuous starting point, in that the linear arrangement of the underground gas pipelines was mirrored in the positioning of the lamps above ground—and in accordance with the principles of *embellissement* (Fig. 18). As the sole visible component of an otherwise invisible infrastructure system, the lampposts also confer non-symbolic, technological qualities onto the symbolic world of

44 See Roger Boutteville, *L’éclairage public à Paris* (Paris: Léon Eyrolles, 1925), 37–38.

45 On Bordier-Marcet as leading manufacturer and entrepreneur in the field of bridge lighting, see the newspaper article “Éclairage des ponts. Appareils Bordier-Marcet,” in *La Pandore*, December 4, 1829.

46 See a critical review by David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

47 On the structure of the chemical and heavy industries in France, see Denis Woronoff, *Histoire de l’industrie en France du XVI siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 226–56.

embellissement.⁴⁸ This perspective invites us to tread differently on the well-worn paths of art-historical urban research and to develop new interdisciplinary questions that cross boundaries with technology studies.⁴⁹

The New, the Norm, and Normalism: Furnishing Haussmann's Boulevards

In 1853, as is well known, Napoleon III delegated the colossal Paris renovation and reconstruction project, the *Grands Travaux*, to Georges-Eugène Haussmann, who had been appointed prefect of the Seine specifically for this purpose. Haussmann placed the city administration and urban space under a decidedly technocratic regime.⁵⁰ Among his first acts were centralizing the municipal building administration and thoroughly reorganizing individual departments. Haussmann entrusted the greening and furnishing of public spaces to the newly created *service des promenades et plantations*, appointing the engineer Adolphe Alphand as its director.⁵¹ Despite the systematic approach underlying all planning and operations, an analysis of the campaign

48 On this innovative integration of architecture with infrastructure since the nineteenth century, see Dietrich Erben, "Infrastruktur, Architektur und politische Kommunikation. Eine Skizze," in *Arch+. Zeitschrift für Architektur und Urbanismus*, no. 239 (2020), 70–79.

49 Discussions of the technological history of the Place de la Concorde typically focus on the removal of the obelisk from Egypt and its erection in Paris in 1836, including the celebratory illustrations of these events on the sides of its plinth. This reveals a fixation on the inherent political messaging related to narratives of progress: "The language of symbols and plans in the technological age [meaning the engravings on the plinth] is the language in which the progress of productive power expresses itself"; see Wolfgang Kemp, "Der Obelisk auf der Place de la Concorde," in *Kritische Berichte*, vol. 7, (1979), 18–29, citation on 28. Erben's work demonstrates how a shift in perspective from urban architectural history toward technological history can provide a breath of fresh air; see Erben, "Infrastruktur."

50 On the Haussmannization of Paris, see Pierre Pinon's essential *Atlas du Paris haussmannien. La ville en héritage du Second Empire à nos jours* (Paris: Parigramme, 2016).

51 On the organization and duties of Alphand's architecture department, see *Le Grand Pari(s) d'Alphand. Création et transmission d'un paysage urbain*, ed. Michel Audouy et al. (Paris: La Villette, 2018) and Chiara Santini, *Adolphe Alphand et la construction du paysage de Paris* (Paris: Hermann, 2020).

to furnish public spaces requires the double vision mentioned above. While model designs for benches, kiosks, and urinals were created by administration architect Gabriel Davioud, responsibility for positioning and arranging them in the urban space lay with various department engineers, foremost among them Emile Grégoire.⁵² Haussmann's administration thus relied on continued interdisciplinary cooperation between the Beaux-Arts and technology. For furnishing the *grands boulevards* and the axis roads leading off of them, the administration also drew on models that had been tested as early as the 1830s and 1840s under the prefecture of Rambuteau.⁵³ What was new, however, was the rigorous systematization and standardization of these measures (Fig. 25).⁵⁴ No longer did any piece of furniture stand alone; each was integrated into an overarching organizational system that was both aesthetic and functional. The system featured furnishings that, reduced to only a few elements, guided correspondingly restricted patterns of behavior. For example: deciduous trees cast shade during the day, inviting passersby to linger on the bench and perhaps read a newspaper purchased at an adjacent kiosk; street lighting extends these activities seamlessly into the evening hours. The technological nature of such an arrangement for daily life lies in its assumption of smooth "proceedings"—consistent functional chains that, when applied to the lifeworld, signal that it can be modelled according to mechanical principles. In addition, urban furniture, unlike monuments and display fountains (*fontaines d'apparat*), did not fulfill any representative function. Rather, it regulated and ensured the functionality of public space, especially the perfectly straight boulevards. And yet, the vocabulary of classical forms (such as cannelures, rosettes, convex moldings, and gables) mark Paris's urban furniture as a further instance of *embellissement*—albeit one into which technological elements like cast iron, seriality, and assembly techniques had been incorporated.⁵⁵

52 Gabriel Davioud architecte (1824–1881), ed. Pierre Lépine (Paris, 1981/1982), 52–53.

53 The surviving catalogue of measures can be seen in "Embellissement du Faubourg Saint-Martin," in *L'Illustration. Journal universel*, vol. 7, no. 179 (August 1, 1846), 340.

54 On the fundamental importance of technical networking principles for cities in the early nineteenth century, see Adrienne van den Bogaard and Cornelis Disco, "Die Stadt als Innovationsknotenpunkt," in *Technikgeschichte*, vol. 68 (2001), 107–132.

55 On the production logic and installation technology of Paris's urban furniture with regard to arrangement and appearance, see Salvatore Pisani, "Mobilier urbain. Infrastruktur-Ästhetik im Paris des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Technik-Ästhetik. Zur Theorie*

As we have seen, the technological transition was designed from the outset to be inconspicuous, suggesting a sub-politics that counts urban engineering among its tools.⁵⁶ After all, Paris's street furniture did not conceal its role as objects and agents of politically willed social participation.⁵⁷ Normalism was, accordingly, its emblem.⁵⁸

A different chapter, however, begins with the disruptive technological transition of the second half of the nineteenth century. This was marked by the metro and elevated railway projects and the building of the Eiffel Tower, which planted themselves in the city *ex nihilo* and had the public up in arms even before construction began.⁵⁹ Such resistance to and incomprehension of the new can be understood through reference theory: truly novel elements must always be characterized by a non-referenceability; otherwise, they would not be new, but merely a variation of the familiar. Thus, Paris's street furnishings could be "naturalized" into the city space quickly and unproblematically because their "new" technological aspects were connected to established references that produced the necessary normality.⁶⁰ By contrast, the unsettling effect of reference-free innovation was portrayed by Joris-Karl Huysmans, author of *À rebours*, who, in seeing the Eiffel Tower, immediately asked after its purpose: "Ultimately, one has to ask oneself what the purpose of this Tower is. If we consider it separately, isolated from other buildings

techno-ästhetischer Realität, ed. Oliver Ruf and Lars C. Grabbe (Bielefeld: transcript, 2022), 299–316.

56 On the context of "governmentality," see Michel Foucault, *Analytik der Macht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 148–74.

57 On the elitist concept of embellissement in the eighteenth century and its categories of magnificence and commodité, see: Voltaire, "Des embellissements de Paris," in *Les Œuvres complètes de Voltaire/The complete works of Voltaire*, vol. 31B (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1994), 213–33.

58 See Agnès Levitte, "Mobilier urbain et design de l'ordinaire," in *La beauté d'une ville. Controverses esthétiques et transition écologique à Paris*, Exhibition catalog (Paris: Pavillon de l'Arsenal, 2021) 460–67.

59 On this historical nexus of problems, see most recently Jean-Marc Hofman, "Une aventure sur les rails," in *Métro! Le Grand Paris en mouvement*, Exhibition catalog, ed. Francis Rambert (Paris: RMN, 2023), 69–79.

60 On the concept of normalism, see Jürgen Link, *Versuch über den Normalismus. Wie Normalität produziert wird* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).

. . . it offers no meaning, it's absurd."⁶¹ Despite, or exactly because of, this semantic void, Huysmans proceeded to furnish the 1889 exhibition structure with an incoherent conglomeration of references in the spirit of neo-baroque zest for metaphor: the Eiffel Tower was a lightning conductor, "an Arc de Triomphe of industry," "a Tower of Babel," "a work from the forges of Vulcan," "a Cyclopean thunderbolt," "a spider's web of metal," "a piece of lace made from cast-iron," a factory chimney, birdcage, demijohn, hollow obelisk, the apotheosis of a bridge pile, an oil drilling rig, the skeleton of an excavator, and a spire without bells (the latter because its church would worship only capital).⁶² We might conclude that objects without precedent, such as the Eiffel Tower, are like unoccupied signifiers onto which incessant layers of meaning can be grafted in a city that is, above all, "writing." For Roland Barthes, returning to our opening theme, the Eiffel Tower was an empty sign that said everything and nothing, producing only the unclassifiable and the elusive.⁶³

61 J.-K. Huysmans, *Certain Artists (Certains)*, trans. Brendan King (UK: Dedalus, 2021), ch. 7, 198, iBooks.

62 Huysmans, *Certain Artists*, ch. 8, 194–96.

63 Roland Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower," in *The Eiffel Tower, and Other Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 3–17. The French original was first published in 1964: Roland Barthes, *La Tour Eiffel* (Paris, 1964).



Fig. 17.
Cast-iron lamppost on the Place de la
Concorde in Paris, designed by Jakob Ignaz
Hittorff (1836). Photograph by Charles
Marville, c. 1850. © Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



Fig. 18.
View of the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Photograph by the Neurdein brothers,
c. 1890. © École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, Paris.

Fig. 19.
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Apotheosis of Homer*, 1827. © Musée du Louvre, Paris.

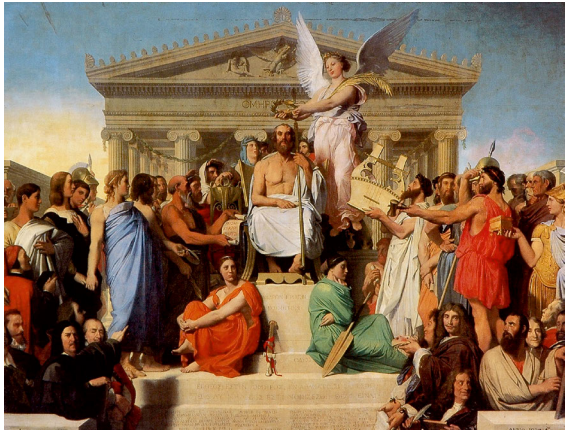


Fig. 20.
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Homer Deified*, c. 1860. Location unknown.



Fig. 21.
Jakob Ignaz Hittorff, *Reconstruction of Temple B at Selinunte (Temple of Empedocles)*.
From: Jakob Ignaz Hittorff, *Restitution du Temple d'Empédocle à Sélinonte, ou l'architecture polychrome chez les Grecs* (Paris, 1851), plate II.

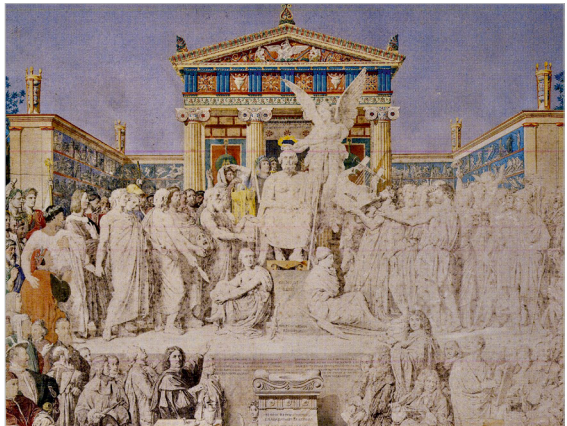




Fig. 22. Maurice Boutterin, *Envoi de Rome* depicting the Villa of the Emperor Tiberius on Capri, 1913. Paris, École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts © École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, Paris.

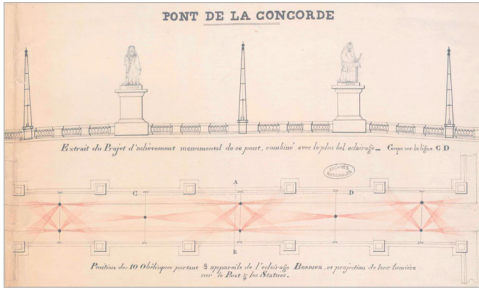


Fig. 23. Lighting project for the Pont de la Concorde, design by Isaac-Ami Bordier-Marcet, 1834. View of the cast-iron lattice masts and grands hommes statues, with a plan view of the lighting. © Archives nationales, Paris.

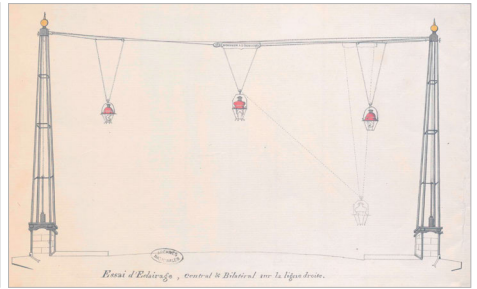


Fig. 24. Lighting project for the Pont de la Concorde, design by Isaac-Ami Bordier-Marcet, 1834. View of the lattice masts with proposed hanging lamp installation. © Archives nationales, Paris.

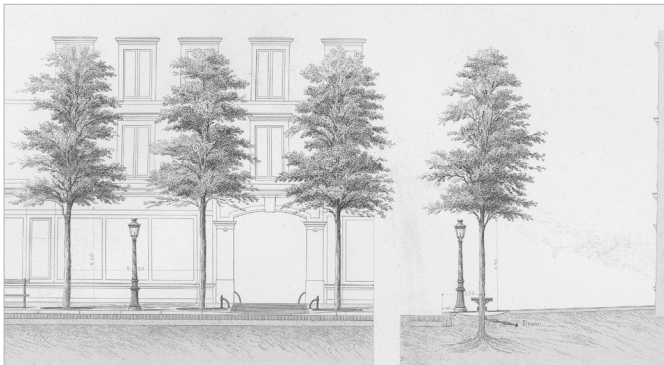


Fig. 25. Model design for the furnishing of a Parisian boulevard. From: Adolphe Alphand, *Les promenades de Paris* (Paris, 1867–1873; detail).

From “Beginnings” to Modernity

The Contemporary Relevance of Jerzy Sołtan’s Cubist Theory

Szymon Ruszczewski

Yes, the cathedrals were white, completely white, dazzling and young—and not black, dirty, old. The whole period was fresh and young ...And today, yes! today also is young, fresh, new. Today also the world is beginning again.¹

Opening a reflection on reference and contemporaneity with Le Corbusier’s words from *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches* (1937) puts us at odds with one of the conclusions reached at the Reference and Contemporaneity in Architecture conference that forms the basis of this volume. Should we accept the claim that “while reference relates in large part to the past, contemporaneity is focused primarily on present and future . . . originality, innovation, and problem-solving”?² Does reference really tie us to the past in this way? Le Corbusier’s words, along with the cubist architectural vision of his Polish collaborator Jerzy Sołtan, suggest that—on the contrary—reference bridges past and future.

Jerzy Sołtan worked with Le Corbusier from 1945 to 1949 then spent the rest of his career in Poland and the United States, teaching and designing according to principles he had absorbed in Paris. His importance as a tea-

1 Le Corbusier, *When the Cathedrals Were White*, trans. Francis E. Hyslop Jr. (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947; repr., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), xxi–xxii; originally published as *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches* (Paris: Plon, 1937).

2 Carsten Ruhl, email to the author, October 4, 2023, and see also the Introduction.

cher and a theoretician becomes clear when we consider his decades-long involvement in architectural education from 1949 onward—especially his twenty years as a faculty member at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design, where he served as chairman of the School of Architecture from 1967 to 1973. Through his work as an educator and his involvement with Team 10, Sołtan developed ideas that offer a valuable but often overlooked take on twentieth-century architecture, particularly in relation to the question of reference and contemporaneity. Central to his thinking was the concept “grassroots architecture.”³ Unlike today’s understanding of the term—with its associations of activism and bottom-up organizing—Sołtan meant by “grassroots” the essential spirit of modern architecture that draws from specific historical moments while pointing toward the future. For him, modern architecture leads to contemporaneity, and neither stands opposed to history. What they reject is historicism—the kind embodied in Beaux-Arts classicism and postmodernism. Sołtan saw postmodernism as nothing more than an unfortunate detour, an obstacle (or a “dead-end,” among other dismissive labels) that had temporarily knocked modernist architecture off course.

This paper explores Sołtan’s cubist vision of “grassroots architecture” and the dialectical relationship it creates between reference and contemporaneity. It begins by examining how Sołtan defined this concept, then discusses why it remains relevant today, and finally analyzes it within a broader interdisciplinary context. The analysis draws on doctoral research⁴ into Sołtan’s legacy as designer, teacher, and theoretician, using archival materials including letters, articles, lecture notes, and teaching programs, as well as his personal notes and diary entries, supplemented by oral history interviews with former students, friends, and colleagues. Because Sołtan’s “grassroots” concept draws heavily on ancient references, the paper also examines his theory in light of recent scholarship showing that ancient civilizations were more interconnected than previously understood, with similar architectural and cultural developments—akin to Sołtan’s “grassroots”—occurring across different societies.

3 Szymon Ruszczyński, *The Life and Work of Jerzy Sołtan: The Last Modernist Architect* (London: Routledge, 2024), 97–109.

4 Szymon Ruszczyński, “Finding Sołtan: Legacies and Heritages of the Last Modernist Architect” (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2022).

“Grassroots Architecture” According to Jerzy Sołtan

For Sołtan, “grassroots” meant beginnings—the foundations and the true essence of architecture. He also used the phrase “architecture of the burgeoning cultures.” In his view, grassroots architecture emerged from the raw forms that appeared when the language of a given culture, era, or style was just taking shape. This explains his frequent references to “early” moments in architecture: early Romanesque, early Christian architecture (Fig. 26), early Chinese architecture, and the very first civilizations of the Mediterranean and Middle East—Mesopotamia, early ancient Egypt, and archaic Greece. These examples appear throughout his texts, articles, and lectures. The slides he showed his students at Harvard included Sumerian cities, ancient Greek architecture at Sounion, Delphi, and Athens, early architecture in Ravenna, the medieval palace in Avignon, and the city walls of Aigues-Mortes in southern France (Fig. 27).⁵

Sołtan also classified the vernacular culture of many distant peoples as “grassroots architecture.” Following art critic Herbert Read, whom he often quoted, Sołtan believed that “in the primitive art we see so clearly what is so difficult to perceive in the complex products of highly cultured civilisations—the directly expressive quality of the artist’s vision, its objectification in solid shapes.”⁶ Vernacular constructions in Cameroon and the rougher examples of Neolithic villages similarly represented for Sołtan the freshness of forms and pure ideas he identified as “grassroots architecture.”⁷ For him, these raw, fresh, and simple forms captured the essence of human civilization in its initial stage, unspoiled by decoration and added layers. The initial phases of different epochs represented the moment when human creation was at its simplest and purest. These moments, he claimed, were inspiring and electrifying. He often recalled his first visit to Wawel Castle in Poland to illustrate this sense of awe and inspiration:

5 Jerzy Sołtan’s slides for lectures, Harvard University Archives, Jerzy Sołtan Collection, CB series, 11A-1, 12A-16, 12A-17, 12A-18.

6 Herbert Read, *Art Now*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), 45–46.

7 Jerzy Sołtan’s slides for lectures, Harvard University Archives, Jerzy Sołtan Collection, CB series, 9A-1.

Today the visitor enters a handsome, colonnaded Renaissance-Baroque courtyard and then—the Renaissance-Baroque interiors. Duly impressed, I was led through these classicist rooms and halls. I was however—I remember it well—not moved by what I saw. Yes, yes, all this is fine... but—I felt—it is not ‘mine’. Orderly rigorous and not ‘helpful’ to me. And then something strange happened. I just became elated... . . . Quite a few years later it was given to me to realise that this change of mood occurred when entering the mediaeval part of the castle—[with] the white-washed raw stone walls, the a-symmetric volumes, the window-apertures cut out here and there, seemingly haphazardly but somehow providing light and view right where it was needed.⁸

While we could argue that Sołtan was simply rationalizing this memory to fit his theories, the story clearly had lasting impact—he continued telling it even seventy years later. This interest in raw and fresh forms was widespread in the mid-twentieth century. Through his contacts with various artists in Paris and Le Corbusier’s connections, Sołtan became familiar with the work and ideas of Constantin Brancusi and Pablo Picasso, while also taking painting lessons with Fernand Léger. Working for the architect Claude Laurens gave him opportunities to meet his father, sculptor Henri Laurens, and Georges Braque. Most of these artists drew on the ancient past in their cubist work—Picasso’s polychromic sculptures referenced Greek art,⁹ while Brancusi showed interest in exoticism and the ancient Greek art of the Cycladic Islands (Fig. 28), visible in works like *Mademoiselle Pogany*.¹⁰ This same fascination with Cycladic art appears in Henri Laurens’s work, like the *Head of a Young Girl*, which has been also linked to Mesopotamian art and tribal African masks¹¹—uniting both ancient “grassroots” and vernacular traditions. Léger and Braque, by contrast, focused more on pure and simple forms as a way of expressing changes in the modern world, as seen in Léger’s robotic

8 Jerzy Sołtan, untitled notes from March 1995, Harvard University Archives, Jerzy Sołtan Collection, AC007.

9 Nicholas Chr. Stampolidis and Olivier Berggruen, eds., *Picasso and Antiquity: Line and Clay* (Athens: Museum of Cycladic Art, 2019).

10 Sanda Miller, *Constantin Brancusi* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 92.

11 Jane Castel, “Gauguin to Moore: Primitivism in Modern Art Sculpture,” in *Canadian Art Review* 9 (1982), 94–98, here 98.

figures in works like *Soldiers Playing Cards*—a connection that proves important for understanding Sołtan’s ideas.

For Sołtan, the cultural shift accompanying the emergence of modern architecture represented one of these “grassroots” moments: a burgeoning culture of tomorrow, a culture pointing to the future of humanity. However, he claimed, architecture had not yet found how to convey the spirit of this new era. To find its expression, we must look at other beginnings, other “grassroots” moments. In his view, there is a correspondence between these historical moments and the present day, when we are witnessing a moment of change where a new culture is being born. Therefore, he argued, we need to return to the foundations of other epochs to research, understand, and feel these essential forms—and therein find a way to express this new era. “Beginnings of cultures—unite!” was one phrase Sołtan would deliver, half-jokingly, at architectural conferences over the years. Through this union and understanding—however long and laborious it might be—Sołtan believed humanity could find a way to reflect recent revolutionary changes in science and society. When illustrating these ideas with concrete examples, he referred in particular to the work of architects like Le Corbusier, Ivan Leonidov, Giuseppe Terragni, Louis Kahn, and Berthold Lubetkin. He noted Le Corbusier’s own interest in beginnings—early Christian architecture, villages in Southern Europe and the Middle East, and Romanesque architecture. Ronchamp chapel (Fig. 29) thus stands as a reference to Roman catacombs and early Christian constructions carved from rock. Similarly, Ivan Leonidov’s design for the Ministry of Heavy Industry referred, according to Sołtan, to ancient Mesopotamian architecture with its ziggurat-like podium. Terragni’s work, particularly his unbuilt design for the Danteum, illustrating Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, reinterpreted the classical column and used geometric ratios based on the golden rectangle—proportions known also to the ancient Greeks, and which for Sołtan represented another example of “grassroots architecture.” Likewise, the interest in essential forms and pure solids characteristic of architects like Louis Kahn and Berthold Lubetkin also related to this tendency.

Sołtan’s own design work followed similar principles throughout his career, regardless of time or location. In two unbuilt designs for churches in Poland (1957–1958), he linked religious buildings to raw materials, rocks, and caves, referencing early churches and basilicas in Palestine and Syria—simple constructions or spaces carved from rock—and the tradition of early

Christian gatherings in Roman catacombs.¹² Similar “grassroots” references appear in his later designs for schools around Massachusetts (1970–1977), where buildings become medieval walled cities (Fig. 30), resembling Aigues-Mortes in southern France through their staircase towers that give rhythm to their elevations and brick-layered walls.¹³ For Jaqueline Tyrwhitt’s house in Sparoza, Greece (Fig. 31), the main façade composition references early Greek temples (Fig. 32), with a similar tripartite division.¹⁴ In some projects, he also referenced historical building techniques: at Sparoza, for example, he relied on traditional stonemasons’ craftsmanship rather than modern concrete technologies, while for a house in Laconia, New Hampshire (1967–1968), he drew on New England’s vernacular carpentry traditions.¹⁵ The importance of raw and unpolished forms appears in his design for the Polish Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels Expo (1956–1957), which featured children’s drawings of Polish history displayed on a hundred-meter undulating wall.¹⁶ Whether through direct references to “grassroots” moments, simple forms, or raw ideas, what mattered for Sołtan was the tangible connection between primal, basic elements across different times. For him, all these examples represented the “rebirth of architecture.”¹⁷

From Common Themes in Ancient History to New Beginnings

Similar ideas about interconnectedness and parallelism have emerged in the field of ancient history. Scholars now point to the “global” aspect of the ancient world, where either direct contact or parallel developments can be observed. Michael Scott’s research, for example, dismantles the Mediterranean-centric vision of the ancient world by focusing on similar patterns across different civilizations.¹⁸ The idea of “classics” as tied to Mediterranean and

12 Ruszczewski, *The Life and Work of Jerzy Sołtan*, 181.

13 *Ibid.*, 221.

14 *Ibid.*, 203.

15 *Ibid.*, 206.

16 *Ibid.*, 176.

17 *Ibid.*, 100.

18 Michael Scott, *Ancient Worlds: An Epic History of East and West* (London: Windmill Books, 2016).

broadly Western culture now seems outdated, and French writer Raymond Queneau’s assertion that “literature . . . begins with Homer . . . , and every great work that follows is either an Iliad or an Odyssey”¹⁹ sounds troubling—not because literary works lack similarities, but because this linear vision of civilization no longer seems viable. As Scott argues, thanks to contact between ancient civilizations—in flourishing kingdoms like Bactria in present-day Afghanistan or commercial hubs like Palmyra in the present-day Syria—the exchange of ideas, concepts, and stories in antiquity was vibrant and decidedly bidirectional. He claims that “across ancient worlds, both myths and histories . . . were rearticulated and re-presented over time,” pointing to the fact that “such narratives, from very different societies, often have common themes.”²⁰ Despite the long-established view of ancient history as a series of isolated chapters—the result of infrequent travel—Scott claims that there was an “emerging world consciousness in our ancient past, which in many ways mirrors the position we find ourselves in today.”²¹ Amongst such recurring myths and stories, we can point to similarities between the Mahabharata and the Iliad, where scenes, themes, and archetypes overlap:²² an invincible valiant warrior who refuses to join a conflict (Arjuna and Achilles); a contest of suitors (for both Draupadi and Helen); and the idea of alignment of deities with opposing sides.²³ Further parallels could be drawn between other epics and archetypes, but the key point is that these similarities may stem from common roots, given the shared origins of Indo-European languages.²⁴

Given this vision of a connected—and to some extent global—ancient world, the similarities Sołtan identified between different “grassroots” mo-

19 Raymond Queneau, “Preface,” in Gustave Flaubert, Bouvard and Pécuchet, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Dallas: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005), 25.

20 Scott, *Ancient Worlds*, 348.

21 Scott, *Ancient Worlds*, 8.

22 N. J. Allen, “Mahabharata and Iliad: A Common Origin?,” in *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 83 (2002), 165–77.

23 Pankhuri Aggarwal, “An Extravagant Depiction of the Human World: Through the Characters in The Mahabharata and The Iliad,” in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Social Science, Humanities, and Education* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.33422/2nd.icshe.2019.06.308>.

24 Ken Dowden, “Greek Mythology 3500 BC to AD 2014,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCaDjvcaWpo>, accessed February 22, 2024.

ments find support in historical research. While these overlaps often have historical explanations, and scholarship increasingly documents interconnected networks in the economic, political, and cultural spheres of the ancient world, some events and processes cannot be explained through contact alone. Following Scott's ideas in *Ancient Worlds*, we can observe separate yet similar developments in different ancient civilizations—a fact that could point to what he calls “shared human dignity.” For example, comparing the Roman Empire with ancient China at the time of Confucius reveals similar patterns in the connection between divine and human worlds, particularly in the relationship between religion and rulers.²⁵ Given that these tendencies appeared simultaneously in geographically distant areas, Sołtan's “grassroots” hypothesis gains strength. Could such parallel developments occur without some shared, almost unconscious human sensibility?

Sołtan illustrates this idea by examining the 1947 modern art exhibition in the Papal Palace in Avignon and the permanent collection of the Picasso Museum in Antibes Castle.²⁶ In both cases, he focuses on the harmonious relationship between modern artworks and raw medieval interiors. Since both the art and the buildings share what he saw as the raw essence and spirit of “grassroots” moments, Sołtan found no visual conflict between them. The 1947 exhibition, organized by French art curator Yvonne Zervos during the first Avignon Festival, included works by Georges Braque, Jean Gris, Paul Klee, Fernand Léger, Joan Miró, and Pablo Picasso. For Sołtan, the seemingly chaotic arrangement of the artworks enhanced the exhibition by creating visual dialogue between the rough medieval walls and the modern art. He called it “a happy ‘cohabitation’,” noting that “they somehow belonged to the same world”²⁷—a feeling that pointed to the shared essence of both modern art and raw medieval construction.

While Sołtan responded positively to both the Antibes and Avignon experiences, he was far more critical of the idea of mounting similar exhibitions in places like Versailles or the Elysée Palace. Neither neoclassical nor

25 Scott, *Ancient Worlds*, 352.

26 Ruszczewski, *The Life and Work of Jerzy Sołtan*, 103.

27 Jerzy Sołtan, draft of the book *On Architecture and Le Corbusier*, November 1955, 75, Warsaw, Museum of the Fine Arts Academy, Jerzy Sołtan Collection. Similar ideas appear in notes “Can Tradition, History, and Modernism Be . . . Friends?” (1988) and notes on religious architecture in Poland (June 1990), both in the same collection.

baroque architecture possessed the simplicity and essential character of his “grassroots” concept. Given the decorative and visually complex character of neoclassical or baroque interiors, the simplicity of modern art would clash dramatically in such spaces, making the result “only thrilling as a surrealist—perfidious cultural joke—a visual *salto mortale*.”²⁸

The Present as a Reflection of Past Beginnings

On account of these examples, Sołtan believed modern architecture represented the early stages of a new epoch. Educated during the final years of modern architecture’s heroic period, when functionalism and new approaches challenged the traditionalist Beaux-Arts vision, he saw modern architecture as the only viable solution for embracing new discoveries, the possibilities offered by industrial and technological innovations, and ongoing social changes. Referring to the French philosopher and anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’s identification of modernism as a civilizational shift comparable to the Neolithic Revolution,²⁹ Sołtan considered modernism inextricably linked to the future of architecture and its users. He was not alone in this assessment. William Curtis, for example, argues that “epic adventure of modernism is clearly not over, especially in a world of a global economy, the universalisation of technology, [and] the redefinition of identities and territories.”³⁰ Curtis’s reference to changes in the economy, politics, society, and science suggests that modernist architecture and modernist ideas are not only current but urgently needed. Similarly, Anthony Vidler claims that “historians of the modern movement might then be seen not only as contributing to our historical knowledge of earlier phases of the modern, although this is important, but equally as instances of the processes of modernity’s self-reflection, themselves to be opened up as unanswered questions.”³¹ Modern architecture should therefore not be dismissed as a dead movement

28 Sołtan, draft of *On Architecture and Le Corbusier*, 76.

29 See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History* (Paris: UNESCO, 1958), 35; originally published as *Race et histoire* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952).

30 William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (London: Phaidon, 1982), 686.

31 Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 200.

from a bygone era of naive fascination with scientific and technological progress. Instead, it should be understood as vital to the future development of architectural practice.

Sołtan's reading of modern architecture as "contemporary architecture" clearly reflects his agenda of extending its influence into the future. In his mind, this overlapped with promoting Corbusian ideas, as considered Le Corbusier among the few "truly modern" architects who embodied the "grassroots" ideal. In notes for an early lecture delivered in 1946, he writes, "to express oneself = to express modernity."³² This statement links modernity to both "us" and "now," bringing modern architecture closer to both present and future. While the concept of new beginnings might seem poetic or romantic, Sołtan grounded it in scientific and technological progress.³³ He argued that in a world where human reality was being revolutionized, a historicist and conservative attitude is impossible to sustain. Drawing frequently on Lévi-Strauss, he maintained that the world had undergone revolutionary changes since the mid-nineteenth century—unprecedented since the Neolithic Revolution—demanding a similar shift and new beginning in culture and the arts. For Sołtan, the contemporary world still lacked its own culture and needed development. The "grassroots" concept offered a means to build it. Although Lévi-Strauss's reflections dated to the mid-twentieth century and addressed concepts from 1920s modern architecture, Sołtan believed the changes brought by new discoveries and technologies were so profound that even in the 1990s, building a new culture for such a revolutionary moment remained urgently relevant. Forty years later, he repeated the same conviction: "[N]ew times are worthy of new environment,"³⁴ leading directly to his call for a new architecture suited to a burgeoning new epoch.

Similarly, historians studying the classics often emphasize that their research is not an end per se, but a form of inquiry that allows us to reflect on our present and future. This means that "the past . . . is always a work in progress, a malleable tool that contributes to self-understanding and

32 Jerzy Sołtan, notes for a lecture at YMCA in Paris, 1946, Jerzy Sołtan Collection, Museum of the Fine Arts Academy, Warsaw.

33 Ruszczewski, *The Life and Work of Jerzy Sołtan*, 111.

34 Jerzy Sołtan, lecture in Montreal, September 1990, Warsaw, Museum of the Fine Arts Academy, Jerzy Sołtan Collection.

identity,³⁵ a concept that gradually displaces the eighteenth-century notion of the past as a closed, immutable, and frozen.³⁶ Following the same logic, architecture’s task is to examine the past, references, and “grassroots” moments in order to project a new architecture that can help build a new civilization—an aim recalled by some of Sołtan’s students at Harvard.³⁷ In his lectures, he often compared architecture to “litmus paper” for society, meaning that architectural forms serve as reliable indicators of a society’s cultural and spiritual health. A new architecture would therefore serve, in his view, as a pathway to the brave new future of society as a whole. He emphasized this point in a 1965 Harvard lecture:

New sensibilities have to be developed, new sources of imagination uncovered, new forces of association mobilised. . . . A new culture has to be built up. This does not occur overnight. . . . Frankly, how much time do we architects, the majority of us, dedicate to the activities I am speaking about? How much do we even know of even the most simple, basic, merely visual language and grammar? And supposing that we do know, is this kind of very basic grammar sufficient to move to the new world? Was it sufficient for the moderns of the early twenties? A total attitude, a culture—that is what is necessary.³⁸

With these words, Sołtan emphasizes architecture’s fundamental anthropological role in building a new culture that engages with other historical moments of beginning. To express this new culture, he argues, contemporary architecture must enter into dialogue with the architecture of these earlier beginnings, creating connections that link it to the past without resorting to mere historical revival. For him, researching “grassroots” and seeking references there does not mean focusing on the past; rather, his approach aligns with de Certeau’s ideas. It means building something new, transgressing

35 Scott, *Ancient Worlds*, 354.

36 See Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); originally published as *L’écriture de l’histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

37 Ruszczewski, *The Life and Work of Jerzy Sołtan*, 112.

38 Jerzy Sołtan, lecture “The Eternal Seesaw” at Harvard, April 1965, Harvard University Archives, Josep Lluís Sert Collection, SA503.

boundaries, and moving toward a new culture—toward contemporaneity. The “grassroots” concept can thus be considered part of his legacy—and that of cubist artists—serving as a guide for creating the culture of tomorrow. When modernism is viewed through his lens, radical postmodernist critique loses its force and meaning, since “grassroots” architecture connects to history and draws on the elementary forms of emerging cultures. Sołtan’s interpretation of modernism opens it directly toward the future as an attempt to build a new culture and identity that reflect modernity. This vision keeps modernist thought vital and underscores its importance for contemporary architecture, challenging scholars like architectural historian James Stevens Curl who attack modernism and blame it for architecture’s current problems.³⁹ Owing to his wholehearted commitment to modern ideas, Sołtan should be considered a missionary of modern architecture, correcting its errors, cleansing its reputation, and eliminating flaws in its interpretation.

39 James Stevens Curl, *Making Dystopia: The Strange Rise and Survival of Architectural Barbarism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Fig. 26.
The ancient rock-cut city of Uplistsikhe in Georgia, exemplifying early “grassroots” architecture and serving as a potential reference for religious buildings. “Uplistsikhe view” (photo: Evgeny Genkin), Wikimedia Commons, 2007.



Fig. 27.
The fortified city of Aigues-Mortes as an example of “grassroots” medieval architecture that Sołtan referenced in his lectures. “Aigues Mortes—a fortified town” (photo: Mike McBey), Wikimedia Commons, 2019.



Fig. 28.
An example of Cycladic art that influenced many cubist artists, including Constantin Brancusi, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Laurens. "Kilia-type figurine, 4360–3500 BC, Museum of Cycladic Art" (photo: Zde), Wikimedia Commons, 2019.



Fig. 29.
Le Corbusier's Ronchamp Chapel, with openings that reference early Christian churches and gathering spaces cut into rocks. Photo: Szymon Ruszczewski.

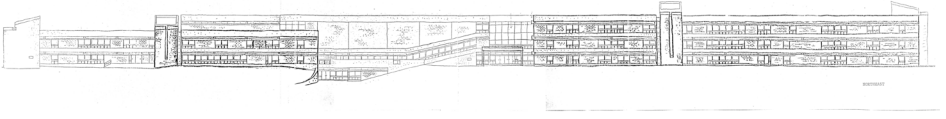


Fig. 30.

Jerzy Sołtan's design for Salem High School in Massachusetts, featuring a brick-layered façade with staircase towers that reference Romanesque and medieval architecture. Drawing by Jerzy Sołtan, Joanna Sołtan private archive.



Fig. 31.

Jerzy Sołtan's design for Jacqueline Tyrwhitt's house in Sparozza, with a porch facing a private garden that references ancient Greek architectural models. Photo: Szymon Ruszczeński.



Fig. 32.

Example of an ancient anta temple type, as seen in the Athenian Treasury in Delphi, showing a façade composition similar to that of Jacqueline Tyrwhitt's house in Sparozza. "Reconstruction of the Treasury house of Athens in Delphi" (photo: Davide Mauro), Wikimedia Commons, 2018.

Display - History

The Scope of Architectural Contemporaneity

Reference on Display at the First Architecture Biennale in Venice¹

Davor Ereš

The first Venice Architecture Biennale offers a particular lens through which to examine how architectural reference shapes contemporaneity, demonstrating how exhibitions can reconstitute the discipline both in its practice and theoretical discourse. The works displayed within the institutional framework of the exhibition create an architectural presence that draws upon historical references to define contemporary practice. Reference operates through the discipline's accumulated theoretical and practical knowledge—yet these are traditions that architecture must continually reinterpret and surpass. This inherent drive toward self-renewal thus defines architectural contemporaneity. Through the case of the first Venice Architecture Biennale, this text examines the methodological relationship between the architectural discipline, reference, and temporality.

Exhibiting Architecture: From Collection to Contemporary Event

The practice of exhibiting architecture has its origins in the collection of ancient printed objects, relics, and architectural souvenirs, which began in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.² It only gained full formative

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2 Stephan Trüby, "Architecture in the Age of Curating," in *The Architecture of Exhibition: How to Expose the Spectator to the Audience?*, ed. Marko Todorović (Belgrade: Polygon, 2009), 21–22. See, for example, John Soane, *Description of the House and Museum on*

importance in response to the demands of architectural contemporaneity during the modern period. Architectural exhibitions (Weimar 1923, Paris 1923, Stuttgart 1927, Barcelona 1929, New York 1932) became the constitutive spaces where modern architecture appeared, especially in connection with the emergence of historical avant-gardes.³ These exhibitions created sites of rupture—moments of paradigm formation—where the exhibition as event established architecture’s relationship to “the time before” and “the time after.”⁴

This temporal division created by the exhibition as event turns it into a means of structuring “historical time.” The exhibition generates temporal distinctions between past, present, and future. Within this temporal framework, contemporaneity emerges as an ontological awareness of the present. Philosopher Peter Osborne characterizes contemporaneity more specifically, arguing that “the contemporary is an operative fiction: It regulates the division between the present and the past (the ‘non-contemporaneous’) within the present.” He notes that “[e]pistemologically, one might say, the contemporary marks that point of indifference between historical and fictional narrative.”⁵ Reflecting on the implications of the exhibition format, Osborne views museum exhibition spaces as places where continuity over time is emphasized and change is understood as modification within an evolutionary narrative.⁶ Biennials, by contrast, play a different role, as art historian Terry Smith observes:

the North Side of Lincoln’s Inn Fields, the Residence of Sir John Soane (London: Levey, Robson, and Franklyn, 1835).

- 3 On the notion of time in modernity, see Sanford Kwinter, “Beat Science,” in *Paradoxes of Appearing: Essays on Art, Architecture and Philosophy*, ed. Michael Asgaard Andersen and Henrik Oxvig (Baden: Lars Müller, 2009), 150; Peter Osborne, “Modernity: A Different Time,” in *The Politics of Time, Modernity and Avant-garde* (London: Verso, 1995), 1–29; and Beatriz Colomina, “Museum,” in *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 201–32.
- 4 Thordis Arrhenius, “Discourse,” in *Place and Displacement: Exhibiting Architecture*, ed. Thordis Arrhenius et al., (Zürich: Lars Müller, 2014), 15–20.
- 5 Peter Osborne, “Global Modernity and the Contemporary: Two Categories of the Philosophy of Historical Time,” in *Breaking Up Time: Negotiating the Borders Between Present, Past and Future*, ed. Berber Bevernage and Chris Lorenz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 81.
- 6 Peter Osborne, “Existential Urgency: Contemporaneity, Biennials and Social Form,” in *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 24, no. 49–50 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.7146/nja.v24i49-50.23321>.

Biennials are, crucially, exhibitionary events, as distinct from displays of the kind exemplified most clearly in the permanent collection rooms of a modern art museum . . . , and from temporary exhibitions in such museums Being events, rather than primarily an assembly of art objects on display, is what makes biennials contemporary.⁷

The Venice Biennale as an exhibitory institution offers a “visible” reflection of complex multiplicity, “of unity and disjunction of social space as well as the disjunctive unity of present times.”⁸ It can hence be seen as an operational and epistemic discourse on temporality. This viewpoint provides a fruitful framework that promises wider possibilities for interpreting architecture’s relationship to contemporary conditions.

The Venice Biennale and The Prehistory of “The Presence of The Past”

The Venice Biennale (*La Biennale di Venezia*) is an international event founded in 1895 as a biannual exhibition, making it the longest-running exhibition of its kind. Emerging from the tradition of nineteenth-century world’s fairs, the Venice Biennale became the most prominent exhibition phenomenon of the twentieth century, establishing itself as a platform for new developments across various art forms. However, it was not until 1979—after several years in which art and architecture coexisted—that the Venice Biennale programmed and created a dedicated architecture section⁹ (Fig. 33).

The prehistory of the Architectural Biennale is extensive. Architecture was first shown alongside the visual arts at the 1968 Biennale.¹⁰ However,

7 Terry Smith, “Biennials Within the Contemporary Composition,” *Stages 6* (April 2017): 4f., https://www.biennial.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/stages-6-the-biennial-condition_compressed.pdf (accessed February 29, 2024).

8 Osborne, “Global Modernity and the Contemporary,” 81.

9 Marco De Michelis and Alta L. Price, “Architecture Meets in Venice,” in *Log 20* (2010); Léa-Catherine Szacka, *Biennials/Triennials: Conversations on the Geography of Itinerant Display* (New York: Columbia University, 2019), 16.

10 Léa-Catherine Szacka, “Exhibiting Ideologies: Architecture at the Venice Biennale 1968-1980,” in *Exhibiting Architecture, A Paradox?*, ed. Carson Chan, David Andrew Tasman, and Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen (New Haven: Yale School of Architecture,

it was not until 1975 that architecture was formally included, initially as a subset of the visual arts and later within its own section. Architect Vittorio Gregotti, as director of the Visual Arts section, organized an exhibition on urban regeneration proposals titled “A proposito del Mulino Stucky” at the Magazzini del Sale in 1975, followed by other architecture exhibitions in 1976 and 1978 that “provided a critical perspective on the historical and ideological origins of the modern movement.”¹¹ The 1976 exhibition was “Europa-America. Centro storico-suburbio. 25 architetti contemporanei.” This was particularly significant for its focus on the relationship between Europe and America’s contemporary architectural scenes. The 1976 Venice Biennale also provided an occasion for “the production of architectural discourse: . . . stormy discussion took place between approximately twenty of Europe and America’s most eminent architects.”¹² These events established a new field for the architectural discipline that engaged with contemporary conditions while simultaneously creating a new position for architectural practice within the Biennale institution.

Architecture officially became an independent section during Giuseppe Galasso’s four-year presidency (1979–1982). Galasso appointed architect and historian Paolo Portoghesi as artistic director¹³ with four architect-theoreticians as co-curators: Charles Jenks, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Vincent Scully, and Kenneth Frampton.¹⁴ After attending three meetings of the advisory board in Venice (September and November 1979, and February 1980), Frampton decided to resign in April 1980, a mere three months before the exhibition opened. Among other reasons, Frampton later recalled feeling that the

2015), 159–67. Anne Kockelkorn, „Der Ausstellungskatalog. Der Katalog der 1. Architekturbieniale in Venedig ‚Presence of the Past‘“, 1980, in Dietrich Erben ed., *Das Buch als Entwurf. Textgattungen in der Geschichte der Architekturtheorie. Ein Handbuch* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2019), 344–367.

11 Léa-Catherine Szacka, “Debate on Display at the 1976 Venice Biennale,” in *Place and Displacement*, ed. Arrhenius et al., 98.

12 *Ibid.*, 99.

13 “The first Exhibitions curated by Vittorio Gregotti,” <https://www.labiennale.org/en/history-biennale-architettura> (accessed February 29, 2024).

14 Maria Cristiana Costanzo, “The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale,” in *The Disquieted Muses: When La Biennale di Venezia meets History*, ed. Cecilia Alemani et al. (Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2020), 228.

Biennale promoted “not so much a postmodern as an anti-modern polemic.”¹⁵ He developed the concept of “critical regionalism” following his decision to withdraw from the Biennale organization committee.

Jürgen Habermas responded to the Biennale exhibition in his 1981 lecture “Modernity versus Postmodernity,”¹⁶ observing: “I would describe it by saying that those who exhibited in Venice formed an avant-garde of reversed fronts. . . . It is a diagnosis of our times: ‘Post-modernity definitely presents itself as Antimodernity.’ This statement describes an emotional current of our times.”¹⁷ Hal Foster’s collected *Postmodern Culture* (1983) later printed Habermas’s article under the title “Modernity: An Incomplete Project.” Foster similarly addressed modernity as “an unfinished project,” calling for the “modern project . . . to be saved.” He stated:

Originally oppositional, modernism defied the cultural order of the bourgeoisie and the “false normativity” (Habermas) of its history; today, however, it is the official culture. As Jameson notes, we entertain it: its once scandalous productions are in the university, in the museum, in the street. In short, modernism, as even Habermas writes, seems “dominant but dead.”¹⁸

15 Léa-Catherine Szacka, “Criticism From Within: Kenneth Frampton and the Retreat from Postmodernism,” *OASE* 97 (2016): 113.

16 Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” essay delivered as James Lecture at the New York Institute for the Humanities, New York University, March 5, 1981; first delivered in German, September 1980. Later published as “Modernity: An Incomplete Project,” trans. Seyla Ben-Habib, in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Bay Press, 1983), 3–15.

17 In full: “Last year, architects were admitted to the Biennial in Venice, following painters and filmmakers. The note sounded at this first Architecture Biennial was one of disappointment. I would describe it by saying that those who exhibited in Venice formed an avant-garde of reversed fronts. I mean that they sacrificed the tradition of modernity in order to make room for a new historicism. Upon this occasion, a critic of the German newspaper, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, advanced a thesis whose significance reaches beyond this particular event; it is a diagnosis of our times: ‘Post-modernity definitely presents itself as Antimodernity.’ This statement describes an emotional current of our times which has penetrated all spheres of intellectual life. It has placed on the agenda theories of post-enlightenment, postmodernity, even of posthistory.” Habermas, “Modernity: An Incomplete Project,” 3.

18 Hal Foster, preface to *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), ix.

Foster's remark that the "scandalous productions are in the university, in the museum, in the street" is particularly emblematic of the 1980 Biennale exhibition's approach.

These intense polemics between Modernists and the "avant-garde of reversed fronts" was a critical component of the discourse around the 1980 exhibition, in which "the disagreement arose not only from the outside but was present within the organisation committee."¹⁹ The exhibition, titled "La Presenza del Passato" ('The Presence of the Past'), thus offers many possibilities for examining the relationship between the construction of architectural contemporaneity of the early 1980s and its engagement with historical reference. This is especially significant given postmodernism's embrace of diversity through historical references, its return to past architectural experience, and its calls for reinventing architectural practice.

To ensure that the selection of exhibitors and the viewpoints would encompass "a range of different and at times divergent interpretations,"²⁰ a committee of critics with distinct theoretical positions was included in the process of creating the exhibition's content. Portoghesi conceived the Biennale as an opportunity for participants to "play" with the past and its forms. In his catalog text, Portoghesi suggested that the exhibition should help the audience (both professionals and non-professionals) grasp "the whole system of architecture with its finite but inexhaustible sum of experiences connected or connectable by a society which has refused a monocentric culture, a main tradition with no competition."²¹

The exhibition itself was housed in the halls of the restored Venetian medieval industrial complex of the Corderie dell'Arsenale (the Venetian Arsenal). It was structured around various "breaks from Modernism"²² across seven zones: the exhibition "Dedicated to Gardella, Johnson, Ridolfi," the exhibition space "The Presence of the Past" featuring the "Strada Novissima" (an simulated street created inside the Arsenale), the "Critics' Corner" space, the exhibition "Ernesto Basile: Architect", the exhibition "The Banal Object," and the exhibition "The Drawings of Aldo Rossi."

19 Szacka, "Criticism From Within," 118.

20 Paolo Portoghesi, "The End of Prohibitionism" in *The Presence of the Past: First International Exhibition of Architecture* (Milan: Electa; Venice: Edizioni la Biennale di Venezia, 1980), 9.

21 Portoghesi, "The End of Prohibitionism," 11.

22 Ibid.

The Arsenale: Reference and the Creation of Contemporaneity

To fully understand how the exhibition was structured to create a sense of contemporaneity, we must broaden our analytical scope. In this particular case, we should examine the specific role of reference in shaping the presentation of architecture. Beyond oral and written testimony, images, and subsequent interpretations, we must question whether more reliable methods exist to capture the elusive nature of the exhibition's ephemeral theoretical and physical structure. This approach should reveal the complex relationship between content, space, time, and participants, exposing both what the exhibition aimed to accomplish and how it sought to do so. Regarding the ephemeral nature of exhibition architecture, it is important to note that contemporary testimonies are always difficult to assess from our present vantage point. In this case, participants' accounts typically lack the necessary critical distance for proper evaluation.

Dante, in the *Inferno* (XXI.7–21), gives a detailed description of the production process within the Venetian Arsenale as part of a simile describing the scene of misty, boiling pitch where corrupt officials are punished.²³ Yet this elaborate catalog of shipbuilding activities has often distracted readers from understanding the deeper symbolic purpose of the comparison.²⁴ As John Ruskin observed of Dante's admirers, if we were to pick an "honestly studious three or four" from every hundred, "we should rarely find one, who

23 "As in the arsenal of the Venetians, all winter long a stew of sticky pitch boils up to patch their sick and tattered ships that cannot sail instead of voyaging, some build new keels, some tow and tar the ribs of hulls worn out by too much journeying; some hammer at the prow, some at the stern, and some make oars, and some braid ropes and cords; one mends the jib, another, the mainsail): so, not by fire but by the art of God, below there boiled a thick and tarry mass that covered all the banks with clamminess. I saw it, but I could not see within it; no thing was visible but boiling bubbles, the swelling of the pitch; and then it settled." Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), *Inferno*, XXI. The *Inferno* explains the material flow of the Arsenal of Venice, which was the largest industrial site in Europe and possibly in the world during its time. See Christoph Roser, "Material Flow in the Arsenal of Venice 1797" (2017), <https://www.allaboutlean.com/material-flow-arsenal-of-venice/> (accessed June 20, 2025).

24 Eliot Davila argues that Dante uses the Arsenale as a symbol of how collaborative work should function (specialized, coordinated, aimed at a worthy goal) to contrast with

knew why the Venetian Arsenal was described.”²⁵ A similar interpretive problem (“I saw it, but I could not see within it”) affects “The Presence of the Past”: Subsequent critics have focused on the exhibition’s spectacle rather than examining how it used historical references to construct architectural contemporaneity. This oversight is captured in critical notes on the very idea of the exhibition, which also served as a means of criticizing its exhibitors, such as: “The generic redundancy of classicism along with a kitschy and hedonistic atmosphere acts as the trigger to identify the presence of a ‘false friend’.”²⁶ But besides its simple appearance, there’s much more to “see” and to understand. Like Dante’s Arsenale passage, the Biennale’s elaborate surface effects have obscured its underlying production method. The exhibition sought to produce fresh architectural content through strategic engagement with the past, but this mechanism has become mythologized over time, leading interpreters to focus on recreating the experience and focusing on the clashes of supremacy rather than understanding the processes. Ruskin concludes his discussion of Dante’s Arsenale space with a similar point:

Doubtless, you consider, all this extremely absurd, and are of opinion that such things are not likely to happen in the next world. Perhaps not; nor is it clear that Dante believed they would; but I should be glad if you could tell me what you think is likely to happen there. In the meantime, please to observe Dante’s figurative meaning, which is by no means absurd. Every one of his scenes has symbolic purpose, down to the least detail.²⁷

how these corrupt officials disturbed collaborative governance by pursuing selfish ends. See Eliot Davila, “The Venetian Arsenal and Dante’s Poetic Purpose,” in *Augsburg Honors Review* 4, no. 5 (2011).

25 John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*, vol. 1 (London: George Allen, 1902), 359.

26 Boris Hamzeian and Olmo Martellacci, “Biennale 80: False Friends. La Strada Novissima and OMA between Establishment and Overcoming of the Last STYLISM,” https://www.academia.edu/26953482/Biennale_80_False_Friends_La_strada_Novissima_and_OMA_between_establishment_and_overcoming_of_the_last_STYLISM (accessed July 12, 2025).

27 Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, 360.

Indeed, just as Dante's *Inferno* "captures both the symbolism of the Arsenal and the excitement of its production process by cataloging seven different tasks being performed by seven different craftsmen,"²⁸ the seven different Biennale exhibitions portrayed a variety of postmodern architectural approaches and pursued an internal logic of reference.

Let us begin with the *Arsenale* space itself. Portoghesi's acquisition of the restored Venetian medieval industrial complex represents perhaps the most lasting contribution of the first official architecture exhibition to the Biennale institution.²⁹ As the official exhibition guide, "La tana riaperta" ("The reopened den"), explained, before hosting the "Presence of the Past" exhibition the space "was used as a sort of warehouse for old, unusable material." The guide emphasized that the Venetian *Arsenale* "is made up of a complex that is very precisely divided up into places and spaces that have followed the passage of time and the events which accompanied the development and decline of the Venetian Republic."³⁰ In describing the space this way, the exhibition organizers acknowledged both the physical architecture and the historical duration through which the *Arsenale* had been shaped.³¹ They recognized duration as the decisive factor conditioning architecture

28 Davila, "The Venetian Arsenal and Dante's Poetic Purpose," 81.

29 The acquisition was also significant because the Biennale leadership saw architecture as a way out of the crisis triggered by 1968, which had exposed the Biennale as a reactionary, market-drive institution lacking connection to Venice's urban context. See *The Disquieted Muses: When La Biennale di Venezia meets History*, ed. Cecilia Alemani et al., (Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2020).

30 Manlio Brusatin, "The reopened den," in *Guidebook for 'The Presence of the Past' (Venice: Prima Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, 1980)*, <https://www.thecosmichouse.org/explore/image> (accessed February 29, 2024).

31 In his 1982 observation on the Venice Architectural Biennale, Kyle A. Thayer discussed the differentiation between *fabrica* and *machina*. He noted, "This is the debate, central to 15th- and 16th-century views of culture and construction, between *fabrica* and *machina*; *fabrica* is the external appearance of something as well as the process of building, and *machina* is its internal and inherent functioning." Thayer emphasizes the historical significance of the *Arsenale* as a space of production, connecting its space to broader questions of architectural discipline and building practices. He points out that "Production inside the *Arsenale* went on at a furious pace, especially when compared with the timetables for construction of buildings, which often employed entire generations of workers and architects." In Kyle A. Thayer, "Landfall, Anchorage, Disembarkment: 'The Presence of the Past' Gets Off the Boat," in *Archetype III*, no. 1 (Spring 1982), 3.

as a building practice over time, concluding that the Arsenale “is one of the many places in Venice of great historical importance, and certainly one of the most complex; its analysis is decisive for understanding the city, [and] the given, or attempted solutions to the problems which were gradually caused by time.”³² The unique configuration of the Arsenale space,³³ combined with the exhibition as a new mode of representation, compelled the architectural discipline to develop fresh approaches to production and self-presentation beyond the conventional frameworks of museums and galleries.

Even opponents could not deny the major qualities of this temporary architectural event: accessibility, publicness, and openness. Vittorio Gregotti, one of the exhibition’s harshest critics, acknowledged: “Visiting an unknown monument remains the most important experience of this exhibition.”³⁴ While Gregotti undoubtedly intended to diminish the exhibition’s broader ambitions, he nonetheless highlighted how the choice of the Arsenale as a site revealed the nuanced, multilayered relationship between reference and contemporaneity. Reference operated through the exhibition’s design—in its architectural language, its spatial setting, its urban context, and its engagement with disciplinary knowledge. Most importantly, reference served here as the primary means of declaring a new architectural contemporaneity that could revitalize its practice.

32 Manlio Brusatin, “The reopened den,” in *Guidebook for ‘The Presence of the Past’* (Venice: Prima Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, 1980), <https://www.thecosmichouse.org/explore/image/guide-booklet-for-the-presence-of-the-past> (accessed February 29, 2024).

33 “Stretched on the south side of the Arsenale, built in 1303 and then rebuilt between 1579 and 1585 on a project by Antonio Da Ponte—the sculptor and architect of the Rialto Bridge—the Corderie were once used to build mooring ropes, cables and ropes used on ships. The large building (measuring 317 meters in length, 21 in width with a height of 12.10 meters at the eaves) is characterized by an imposing wooden roofing in the palladium style. Two rows of large columns in masonry (6 meters of height for an average diameter of 1 meter) divide the space into three aisles and support two lofts rebuilt in 1916 in reinforced concrete to replace the original wood.” *La Biennale di Venezia*, “Arsenale,” <https://www.labiennale.org/en/venues/arsenale> (accessed February 29, 2024).

34 Quoted in Léa-Catherine Szacka, “The 1980 Architecture Biennale: The Street as a Spatial and Representational Curating Device,” in *OASE* 88 (2012), 18.

Reference, Post-Production, and Architectural Ephemerality

Broadening our analysis to include temporality reveals a tension between the quasi-“permanent” nature of built architecture and the fact that buildings in exhibitions serve only as ephemeral displays.³⁵ As I have noted elsewhere, “Observing the complex disciplinary nature of architecture in relation to the format of the exhibition as a multi-layered temporal structure, architectural appearance always synthesizes the correlations between architectural practice and knowledge as an inevitable epistemological component of the architectural present (and presence).”³⁶ Consequently, our approach necessitates navigating the interplay between the ephemeral quality of architecture on display and the enduring nature of architectural objects. This entails presenting architectural projects via drawings and models, exhibiting architectural objects through temporary structures, and concurrently proposing novel modes of thought to advance a theoretical framework. To understand these temporal relationships within “The Presence of the Past,” we must distinguish between exhibition design and architectural objects themselves. Ephemerality clearly dominated the exhibition as an architectural strategy, reflecting not merely design choices but a new, more open approach to architectural production—one that expressed the discipline’s desire for contemporary relevance.

The exhibition’s strategy went beyond mere theatrical display—ephemerality served as deliberate architectural tactic. The exhibition’s pivotal ephemeral installations were created neither as full-scale prototype houses (as at the 1927 Stuttgart Weissenhof exhibition) nor as small-scale models (as at the 1932 New York MOMA exhibition). Here, ephemerality functioned as a strategy of architectural production, not simply “a series of Potemkin-like façades: a highly theatrical display, which produced a new and very impressive type of exhibition space”³⁷—though this remains the dominant interpretation. The principle of collaboration was crucial to this production model,

35 Eva-Liisa Pelkonen, “Mining the Paradox,” in *Exhibiting Architecture: A Paradox?*, ed. Eva-Liisa Pelkonen, Carson Chan, and David Andrew Tasman (New Haven: Yale School of Architecture, 2015), 9–10.

36 Davor Ereš, “The Influence of Temporality: Exhibiting Architecture and the Prospect of Immediacy of Discipline at the Venice Biennale,” in *AM Journal* 31 (2023), 20.

37 Szacka, “The 1980 Architecture Biennale,” 14.

which required on-site construction and assembly through cooperation between architects, curators, and technical staff. This approach differed from the standardized exhibition practices of the time, which typically involved simply “hanging” pre-prepared artifacts (Fig. 34, Fig. 35).

Through this changed approach to architectural presentation, “The Presence of the Past” returned directly to the fundamental relationship between architecture and time. The exhibition architecture was intended to demonstrate not only new aesthetics but also new production methods that engaged with the heritage of the Venice Arsenale. As Alessandro Mosetti notes, this showcased a deliberate shift away from the attempts of modernist “architectural ideology . . . to diminish the significance of time and history”; by contrast, ephemerality was meant to bring a spatial temporal sensitivity to Venice’s material qualities: By recognizing Venice’s scenic character, ephemeral architecture served as an instrument to evoke “urban memories”.³⁸ The Venice Arsenale and its spaces functioned as a historical reference point for the discipline. Here, ephemerality operated not only a strategy to protect and replicate the existing site, but an architectural practice that sought to connect with, overlap, and enhance the existing fabric through a lighter and more open approach to space and time.

Aldo Rossi’s Arsenale entrance portal, which he designed and built, exemplifies this approach to architectural practice, seeking to change the discourse of exhibition presentation. The wooden gate, constructed in the public street in front of the Arsenale complex, marked a “new space”—a portal that formed a passage and vestibule for entering the Arsenale complex. Rossi presented his project within the exhibition.³⁹ He created the portal as an ephemeral structure using scaffolding covered with narrow wooden planks (coated with varnish that gave them a dominant yellowish color and wood texture) while accentuating certain surfaces with white and blue paint. The portal, with four narrow passages and three towers topped with emblematic flags, embodied the neo-rationalist language of reduced forms.

This ephemeral structure served as an “extension” of Rossi’s “Teatro del Mondo,” which had been constructed in November 1979 as part of the archi-

38 Alessandro Mosetti, “Recognizing the Scenic Value of the City: Ephemeral Architecture as a Medium to Evoke Urban Memories,” in *CPCL* 3, no. 1 (2020), 34–52.

39 “The drawings of Aldo Rossi,” in Guidebook for “The Presence of the Past.”

tektural Biennale's promotional carnival program.⁴⁰ Using materials later employed again in the Arsenale entrance portal, this floating project was, as Aldo Rossi put it, "a place where architecture ended and the world of the imagination began"⁴¹ and "the theater, in which the architecture serves as a possible background, a setting, a building that can be calculated and transformed into the measurements and concrete materials of an often elusive feeling."⁴² Creating elusive sensations through the architectural setting, Rossi's gateway fused historical forms with contemporary rationality, becoming something between a postmodern ephemeral triumphal arch and a crossing. Rossi used the "historical forms" of the carnival and passages as references to connect the building's functions with the present time and the architectural language of new rationality. In doing so, he emphasized architecture's dual nature as both "permanent" and "ephemeral."

Distinctive Presence and Historiography as Reference

Paolo Portoghesi titled the exhibition "La Presenza del Passato" to establish a tension between architectural "presence" and historical "past" and setting up the exhibition's central framework through this playful and paradoxical

40 La Biennale di Venezia, "Carnival Breaks Through the Fog" (1980), <https://www.labiennale.org/en/asac/carnival-breaks-through-fog-1980> (accessed February 29, 2024). Already in November 1979, the exhibition "Venezia e lo spazio scenico" (Venice and Scenic Space) had led the first important initiatives of the decade. It was commissioned by the Theater and Architecture divisions, respectively directed by Paolo Portoghesi and Maurizio Scaparro. Scaparro successfully linked the Biennale's activities to the Venice Carnival, while Portoghesi acquired the Arsenale to host the exhibition on postmodernism "La via novissima."

41 Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, trans. Lawrence Venuti (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 66.

42 See "Aldo Rossi: Architect of Tendenza and Teatro del Mondo," *The Collector*, <https://www.thecollector.com/aldo-rossi-architect-tendeza-teatro-del-mondo/> (accessed February 29, 2024). Aldo Rossi presented two concepts in his book *The Architecture of the City* (1966): the "Real City," which had a specific form and referred to a particular place and time, and the "Analogue City," which proposed a different reality. The Analogue City was the city of memory and experience, which could not exist in real space but only in representation. Rossi presented this concept in a 1976 collage that drew influences from the past; Carsten Ruhl, "Im Kopf des Architekten: Aldo Rossis La città analoga", in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 69 (2006), 67-98

connection of two disparate temporalities.⁴³ Portoghesi and the committee invited architects to participate in the exhibition by conceptualizing and fabricating designs that would express “the sense of the form” as “the relationship existing nowadays between the heritage from the past and projectual [sic] work.”⁴⁴ In this light, the primary objective of the first Biennale should be understood as what Jacob Lund calls “the contemporary contemporary”⁴⁵—above all, an action in the present time that serves as the starting point for anachronistic or unforeseen interactions, and as the inevitable departure point and condition for any historical imagination.

Giorgio Agamben proposes a particular conception of the “contemporary” as an “untimely” subject or individual capable of forming a disjunctive or anachronistic connection with his or her own time.⁴⁶ In this context, the role of historiography and historicity as projective action becomes crucial.⁴⁷ Boris Groys observes that “[t]he present has ceased to be a point of transition from the past to the future, becoming instead a site of the permanent rewriting of both past and future—of constant proliferations of historical narratives beyond any individual grasp or control.”⁴⁸ Thus, the self-reproducing presentness of the contemporary appears to have replaced modernity’s sense of transitoriness—of moving constantly forward through time. Archi-

43 See Sanford Kwinter, *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 216.

44 Léa-Catherine Szacka, “1980 in Parallax: When Post-Modernisms Met in Venice” (2023), <https://www.thecosmichouse.org/explore/text/1980> (accessed February 29, 2024).

45 “The present ways of articulating past, present, and future therefore not only make our present, here and now, different from previous presents, but they also testify to a change in our experience of time itself; an experience of an ever-expanding, perpetual present, which in a certain sense can be seen as a time-relation that has no temporal horizon other than itself.” Jacob Lund, *Anachrony, Contemporaneity, and Historical Imagination* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019), 19.

46 Giorgio Agamben, “What Is the Contemporary?,” in *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 41.

47 As Terry Smith notes, Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations* (1873–76) emphasized “above all his passionate insistence that overweening respect for the determinative power of History had reduced his contemporaries to servile subjects, incapable of making their own lives, let alone future history.” Terry Smith, “Agamben and Nancy on Contemporaneity and Art,” March 2012.

48 Boris Groys, “Comrades of Time,” in *Going Public* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 90.

tectural theorist Gevork Hartoonian asks: “In what ways, then, could today’s architecture engage with its time and yet resist becoming part of the current culture of spectacle?”⁴⁹ This question stresses the need to rethink architectural historiography as a tool for understanding architecture’s contemporary position.⁵⁰ Two main approaches emerged among early modernist historians: Nikolaus Pevsner’s “periodization” and Sigfried Giedion’s “Zeitgeist.” Both historiographers promoted concepts of period style that resisted change.⁵¹ However, historiography’s full potential lies in providing a reflective framework that transcends simple periodization—it can help us understand architecture’s complex relationship with temporality.⁵² The structure of the first Venice Biennale reveals these new aspirations in architectural theory, historiography, and practice—driven by the urge for difference and contemporaneity (Fig. 36, Fig. 37).

“Change” versus “closure” became the principle through which Portoghesi promoted new architectural tendencies within the discipline.⁵³ The diversity of these tendencies was concentrated in the exhibition section called “Critics’ Corner.” Situated at the end of the “Strada Novissima” corridor, and symbolically opposite Philip Johnson’s display, the Critics’ Corner was created as a smaller space for discussion. It was curated by three architectural thinkers: Charles Jencks, Christian Norberg-Schulz, and Vincent Scully. They “were asked to present their ideas in visual terms” and designed installations to offer visitors a clearer understanding of the broader conversations at play. Jencks used metaphor to express his ideas, symbolizing Post-Modern tendencies displaying a huge pencil and a book containing a riddle “all the

49 Gevork Hartoonian, *Time, History and Architecture: Essays on Critical Historiography* (London: Routledge, 2018), 32.

50 See Panayotis Tournikiotis, “History in Search of Time Present,” in *The Historiography of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

51 See Gevork Hartoonian, *The Mental Life of the Architectural Historian* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

52 See Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

53 The approach of Hartoonian usage of term “closure” is better understood when considered alongside Michel Foucault’s concept of episteme, which suggests a state of temporality on the brink of transformation.

wasms have become isms”.⁵⁴ Norberg-Schulz used “a photographic diorama to illustrate modern and antique Architecture,” while Scully provided a television “lesson” on postmodern architecture “which [was] particularly clear and telling, broadcast by a television set [in] English and Italian.”⁵⁵ This section of the *Arsenale* exhibition attempted to encompass the current state of the discipline while simultaneously transcending it. Its methods addressed both visual and technological aspects, creating new forms of engagement. Ironically, this postmodern approach could also be characterized by Hartoonian’s observation regarding early modernist historians—that changes in architecture’s relationship to technology and the visual representation were central to their historiographies.⁵⁶ In the *Arsenale* exhibition, however, architectural theory assumed the role of historiography, rearranging the present and future of architecture by providing an overview of the past.

“The Presence of the Past” was emblematic in that it “exhibited” architectural critical theory for the first time—not only through curatorial decisions about which architects to include or exclude, but as an autonomous component of the discipline that deserved its own exhibition space. In this way, the exhibition blurred the boundaries between theory, practice, built objects, and speculative proposals within architectural production. By merging present with past, treating the contemporary and the historical as both current and future possibilities, and making reference equivalent to actual objects, the exhibition introduced architectural post-production as the main agent of disciplinary change.

Portoghesi’s catalog essay “The End of Prohibitionism” proclaimed a new field of freedom. Unlike the academic eclecticism of earlier periods, his

54 See: Charles Jencks, “All the Wasms have Become Isms,” booklet for Critics’ Corner, *The Presence of the Past*, First Architecture Biennale, Venice, 1980, <https://www.thecosmichouse.org/explore/image/all-the-wasms-have-become-isms-booklet> <https://www.thecosmichouse.org/explore/image/guide-booklet-for-the-presence-of-the-past> (accessed February 29, 2024). This booklet contained a short introduction to postmodern architecture and a list of 80 slides featured in Charles Jencks’s slideshow, which was projected onto the white “sinking” book featured in his installation.

55 From “Critics’ exhibition” in *Guidebook for “The Presence of the Past”* (Venice: Prima Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, 1980), <https://www.thecosmichouse.org/explore/image/guide-booklet-for-the-presence-of-the-past> (accessed February 29, 2024).

56 Hartoonian, *Time, History and Architecture*, 32.

principle of free collage marked an end to stylistic “restriction.” In this context reference served not merely an element of established authority but as a means of action for reaffirming difference—a way to position the new as a kind of return. Portoghesi promoted architecture’s “return of the repressed,” arguing that the exhibition’s approach was a reaction against years of stifled “instincts to use materials for the present”, claiming that his method was “without preconceived discrimination, to involve memory and imagination with the maximum effectiveness.”⁵⁷ For Portoghesi, the postmodern meant “getting away from the center in all possible directions.”⁵⁸ While Charles Jencks approached postmodern culture as an observer and theorist, Portoghesi worked as an architect, thinking concretely about how to realize buildings.⁵⁹

This theoretical position informed the structure and content of the 1980 Venice Architectural Biennale, which Portoghesi directed. With its theme, “The Presence of the Past,” the exhibition was organized as a direct challenge to modernist conventionality, using installations like the “Strada Novissima” to physically manifest a blend of historical and modern references as a means of constructing a new contemporaneity. The first sector, at the entrance to the Arsenale complex, honored three established architects. This section, called “Omaggio a Gardella, Johnson, Ridolfi” (“Dedicated to Gardella, Johnson, Ridolfi”) featured different curators for each architect: Paolo Farina curated Ignazio Gardella, Massimo Vignelli designed the setup for Philip Johnson, and Claudio D’Amato curated Mario Ridolfi.⁶⁰ It is symbolic that the first architectural Biennale opened with a homage to Philip Johnson, who, together with Henry-Russell Hitchcock, organized the paradigmatic

57 Paolo Portoghesi, “The End of Prohibitionism,” in *The Presence of the Past: First International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale* (Milan: Electa/La Biennale di Venezia, 1980), 10.

58 Portoghesi, quoted in Eva Branscome and Léa-Catherine Szacka, “Architectural Postmodernism and Its Midwives in Conversation with Charles Jencks and Paolo Portoghesi,” in *Arch+ Klotz Tapes*, 2014, 23.

59 *Ibid.*

60 “The Presence of the Past,” in *Guidebook for ‘The Presence of the Past’* (Venice: Prima Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, 1980), <https://www.thecosmichouse.org/explore/image/guide-booklet-for-the-presence-of-the-past> (accessed February 29, 2024).

“Modern Architecture: International Exhibition” at MoMA in 1932.⁶¹ Johnson was presented as the architect who had once declared “you cannot not know history,”⁶² but also as a prominent contemporary figure who combined modernism and postmodernism in his work, lending weight to what the exhibition described as “the explicit and vowed rediscovery of history’s decisive role today.”⁶³ Johnson’s recent projects were also displayed in this section, with the model of the AT&T building occupying the central position—a building that would become an icon of postmodern architecture in America and whose construction had just begun. The model served as material evidence of contemporary relevance, its presence signifying the “now” of architectural practice in relation to disciplinary reference, represented both as stylistic device (the building’s crowning pediment) and as Johnson’s current position relative to his paradigmatic 1932 exhibition.

The first architecture Biennale in Venice thus established architectural post-production as a primary tool of exhibition practice. What becomes evident here is the primacy of the exhibition structure over other (theoretical) discourses. Post-production as a means of embodying the present—articulated through the exhibition—can be seen as holding similar significance to history books, which had previously served as the primary medium for interpreting and presenting historical time. Both exhibitions and books produce and reproduce references to construct contemporaneity. The exhibition constructs a transitory contemporary/exposing moment, while books construct the discursive contemporaneity of a particular period (Fig. 38, Fig. 39, and Fig. 40).

61 The exhibition introduced Americans to a new architecture, which Johnson, as the show’s director, termed the “International Style”—often described as the first fundamentally original and widespread style since the Gothic. See: Alfred H. Barr Jr., Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson, and Lewis Mumford, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1932).

62 The exhibition guide does not mention Johnson’s exhibition in New York, just the book: “A great connoisseur and mentor of modern art, Johnson has gone through the whole parabola, from the moment in ’31 he wrote the book with Hitchcock on the International Style.” “Philip Johnson,” in *Guidebook for “The Presence of the Past”* (Venice: Prima Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, 1980), <https://www.thecosmichouse.org/explore/image/guide-booklet-for-the-presence-of-the-past>, (accessed February 29, 2024).

63 “The Presence of the Past,” in *Guidebook for “The Presence of the Past”*.

Peter Osborne argues that “[i]f modernity projects a present of permanent transition, the contemporary fixes or enfolds such transitoriness within the actuality of spatially distributed conjunctures, or at its broadest, the envelopes of lives.”⁶⁴ For the curator-architect of the exhibition, this space of “envelopes of lives” also served as a space of communication to “regenerate and affirm life”: “For Portoghesi, architecture, and especially a façade (literally the ‘face’ of a building), could communicate their function and history to its users, and the best way to do so was by copying or emulating historical forms without restriction of time or place.”⁶⁵ This break from modernist “restriction” opened up a diversity of themes marked by a clear tendency to challenge the modernist canon.

The commission of the Venice Biennale, with the support of the Critics’ Committee, entrusted the planning of the “Strada Novissima” to twenty architects from “all over the world.”⁶⁶ The brief offered three options: “a. the architect’s dwelling, with the place where he works, or a personal museum, or a space for the exhibition and ‘sale’ of his own ideas; b. simply a ‘dwelling’, a place for everyday and private life; or c. a façade (maybe only partial) of a building destined for meetings (for work or study), gatherings, entertainment.”⁶⁷ The proposition also included production requirements covering: “1. Theme, 2. Size and the distribution of the space available, 3. Architectural characteristics required and, 4. Budget and building techniques.”⁶⁸ This “offer” constituted a kind of game within the architectural discipline, where the street, with its “contemporary language”, was supposed to “regenerate and affirm life.”⁶⁹

This section of the exhibition operated on two levels. The ground floor (“piano terra”) presented works by twenty groups of architects from eight

64 Osborne, “Global Modernity and the Contemporary,” 81.

65 Szacka, “1980 in Parallax”.

66 As Léa-Catherine Szacka notes, “the Strada Novissima represented a variety of languages that were emerging mainly as responses to the orthodoxy of the Modern Movement. Yet, no representations from Africa, South America or the Middle East region were part of the official selection of 20 architects, and only one figure from Asia, the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, contributed to the Strada.” Szacka, “1980 in Parallax”.

67 Borsano et al., *The Presence of the Past*, 38.

68 Ibid.

69 Portoghesi, “The End of Prohibitionism,” 11.

countries, arranged from Johnson's exhibition in the following sequence: 70 20) Koolhaas, 19) Dardi, 18) Portoghesi, 17) Graves, 16) Bofill, 15) Gehry, 14) Moore, 13) Ungers, 12) Stern, 11) Venturi, 10) Putini, 9) Krier, 8) Tigerman, 7) Kleihues, 6) Grau, 5) Hollein, 4) Gordon Smith, 3) Scolari, 2) Isozaki, 1) Greenberg.⁷¹ As a part of a two-tier system, the upper level housed a more conventional presentation of panels and models by fifty-five lesser-known and younger architects. The façade structures, combined with the Arsenale space, created "a real architectural space, not only a display, but as a space at real scale that could be physically experienced."⁷² In this experience, reference to historical imagination played a pivotal role. Panayotis Tournikiotis concludes: "We should make architecture on the foundation of an awareness of its origins (that is, of history), but we should make architecture whose sights are set on the future, on the present which is not yet present and which will never be able to become present unless it first acknowledges the past."⁷³ The acknowledgment of the past in the exhibition context becomes "presence"—the display of architecture in time.

As Portoghesi elaborated in a television documentary presenting the exhibition: "Streets are like the corridors of a house: they are precisely spaces that facilitate encounter [sic] between people . . . I believe that this need for enclosed spaces is something that modern man has [recently] rediscovered, and therefore the return to the street is now a truly vital hypothesis."⁷⁴ This aspiration to reconfigure the space of the Arsenale aimed to achieve open "communication," or what Osborne describes as the unity and disjunction "of social space as well as the disjunctive unity of present times"⁷⁵—a way to

70 The order and naming are taken from the exhibition catalogue, listed according to the linear flow of the exhibition. See "The Presence of the Past," in Guidebook for "The Presence of the Past".

71 The participants were primarily men—a bias that Szacka argues resulted from "numerous compromises and . . . unforeseeable refusals to participate." Szacka, "1980 in Parallax".

72 Szacka, "The 1980 Architecture Biennale," 18.

73 Panayotis Tournikiotis, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 268.

74 Translation from Szacka, "The 1980 Architecture Biennale," 16. See *La presenza del passato*, directed by Maurizio Casavilla (RAI, 1980), 32 min., <https://youtu.be/ALxNnR55sZA>.

75 Osborne, "Global Modernity and the Contemporary," 81.

establish change. This change was located in the perception of the architectural discipline's capacities and tools for articulating visual, spatial, and theoretical difference. Difference was the exhibition's key motivator, and this difference was meant to establish a sense of contemporaneity. As Osborne argues, "If the primary value of the modern is 'the new', in its distinction from 'the old' (which it produces), the primary value of the contemporary is its actuality, in distinction from the fading existential hold of what is still present but 'out-of-date'—that is, no longer articulating living relations between a multiplicity of spatially distributed standpoints."⁷⁶ For "distinction," as a cognitive apparatus of constant recognition of change, reference creates the key relation in which change occurs. In this case, the architectural discipline functions as reference to the past. In the context of the first Venice Architecture Biennale, "the concept of the contemporary projects into presence a temporal unity that is in principle futural or 'horizontal' and hence speculative."⁷⁷

Marvin Trachtenberg's concept of "building in time" helps explain the structural and operational temporalities of architecture: "The House renders architecture's spatial function: the definition and separation of spaces, the production of inside and outside or, philosophically, the interiority of presence and the exteriority of representation."⁷⁸ The House (as opposed to the Edifice) always serves as an exemplar, as Mark Wigley argues:

Since Plato, the house has always been [the western] tradition's exemplar of presentation. The governing concept of Idea as presence, and of the visible world as informed matter, the material presentation of immaterial

76 Osborne highlights the broader context in a footnote: "This emphasis on the value of actuality places the concept of the contemporary within the ambit of Foucault's idea of a 'critical ontology of the present'." Osborne, "Global Modernity and the Contemporary," 81. See also Giorgio Agamben, "What is the Contemporary?" and John Rajchman, "The Contemporary: A New Idea?," in *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, ed. Armen Avanesian and Luke Skrebowski (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), 125–44.

77 Osborne, "Global Modernity and the Contemporary," 80.

78 Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 16.

ideas, is traditionally established with the metaphor of the house produced by an architect, the house as the presentation of an “idea.”⁷⁹

For Portoghesi, the driving force behind “The Presence of the Past” and the “Strada Novissima” exhibition, the façades weren’t considered “real” buildings, but “new syntactic contexts” as he elaborated: “The return of architecture to the womb of history and its recycling in new syntactic contexts of the traditional forms is one of the symptoms that has produced a profound ‘difference’ [...]”.⁸⁰ Therefore his aim was more to leverage façades as “difference” and as a visual reference to produce a temporal sense of “presence”.

The temporal structure of the exhibition promised to expand the field of architecture by engaging viewers’ imaginative projection as a central feature. This opened new possibilities for interpreting the exhibition of architecture—namely, as a relational model of communication where architecture referred to itself by being exhibited. The act of exhibition creates the experience of being in time (or rather, of being in the present time); exhibiting content (architectural objects, models, paper projects, theoretical propositions, and other visual resources) exposes the experience of being-in-time, the presentness of time. This presentness involves not only spatial presence but temporal occurrence, since exhibitions use their episodic, ephemeral form to create an enduring experience of time that shapes both the immediate present and its consequences. With the acceleration of architectural presentness, “the object/project dichotomy is fading away with object and project blending into one another and equally navigating the boundaries between art and architecture.”⁸¹

Within this conceptual framework, the postmodern exhibition façades served not only as models for ideas but as embodiments of ideas themselves—a form of architectural thinking. A similar “architectural” process shapes the history of buildings. However, the main critiques of the exhibition focused on its “conception of architecture as fashion or scenography,”⁸² ex-

79 Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida’s Haunt* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 103.

80 Paolo Portoghesi, “The End of Prohibitionism”, 9.

81 Szacka, *Biennials/Triennials*, 35.

82 Kenneth Frampton criticized the exhibition strategy of *The Presence of the Past* as “stagecraft,” stating that “the conception of architecture as fashion or scenography”

posing what critics saw as a lack of critical thinking. Absolute involvement in the present—complete up-to-dateness—is, in Agamben's view, blindness. As Agamben writes: "Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it."⁸³ According to him, distance is therefore a necessary condition of truly contemporary being. But the question here is how we can achieve critical distance. Regarding architectural historiography, Hartonin defines "critical" in concrete terms:

The idea of the critical draws from a historiographic vision that is centred on a semiautonomous understanding of architecture. . . . Whereas architectural history could—following the conventions of traditional art history—narrate formal and stylistic transformations across history, critical historiography invests in the intersection between history and ontology.⁸⁴

Ultimately, grasping critical distance requires architectural historiography to understand exhibitions as part of an expanding disciplinary scope. This means, as Hartoonian posits, moving beyond mere formal analysis and directly confronting the exhibition form's inherent ontological and temporal presentness, thus truly engaging with its contemporaneity.

prompted his decision to withdraw as co-curator. He concluded: "The game, as far as I am concerned is the same; that is, in the name of populism, to reduce architecture to a commodity." Quoted in Szacka, "The 1980 Architecture Biennale," 14.

83 Agamben, "What Is the Contemporary?," 40–41.

84 Hartoonian, *Time, History and Architecture*, 31.

Conclusion

Reference, Rupture, and Architectural Contemporaneity Architectural theory's understanding of past, present, and future is profoundly shaped by the concept of temporal ruptures.⁸⁵ The first Architecture Biennale in Venice, both as program and space, represents a clear attempt to create such a rupture through a series of tactical approaches. These tactics employed traditional exhibition methods—displaying paper projects, architectural models, and built works—but the exhibition also introduced, for the first time, the production of ephemeral architectural structures that went beyond mere exhibition design. All these approaches were grounded in the active use of historical references to establish what the exhibition called “the presence of the past”—a new way of defining contemporaneity in the early 1980s.

From today's perspective, examining this earlier moment of contemporaneity should inform discussions not only about modes of architectural production but also about modes of presence in our current moment. The new way of experiencing architecture created within the exhibition—a form of architectural post-production—points toward greater disciplinary openness. This thoughtful awareness of temporalities aimed to create a more open form of architectural thinking that seeks new ways for the discipline to engage with time.

Reference in this context functions not primarily as a repository of knowledge and experience, but as a visual and textual marker of transformation. Such a dynamic use of historical reference, made manifest through innovative display methods, directly challenged linear notions of time, positioning temporality as a fluid and open-ended field for architectural inquiry and practice. By transcending the traditional exhibition format, the first Venice Architecture Biennale served as a crucial site for disciplinary reevaluation, transforming display into an active and critical tool. This allowed the exhibition to become a performative space where historical references weren't just shown, but actively re-staged, making temporality a tangible element of the architectural discourse itself.

85 Lucian Hölscher, “Mysteries of Historical Order: Ruptures, Simultaneity and the Relationship of the Past, the Present and the Future,” in *Breaking up Time: Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future*, ed. Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 138–39.



Fig. 33.
 Fragment of façade by Hans Hollein, "Strada Novissima", first Venice Architecture Biennale, "The Presence of the Past," 1980. Photograph by Charles Jencks. Courtesy of the Jencks Foundation at The Cosmic House.

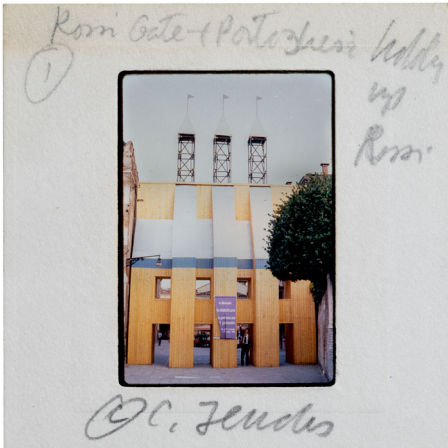


Fig. 34. - Fig. 35.
 Aldo Rossi's entrance gate to the Arsenale for the first Venice Architecture Biennale, "The Presence of the Past," 1980. Photograph: Charles Jencks. Courtesy of the Jencks Foundation at The Cosmic House.



Fig. 36. - Fig. 37.
Charles Jencks, Critics' Corner installation, "All the Wasms have Become Isms", first Venice Architecture Biennale, "The Presence of the Past," 1980. Photograph: Charles Jencks. Courtesy of the Jencks Foundation at The Cosmic House.



Fig. 38.
 "Strada Novissima" installation inside the Arsenale, first Venice
 Architecture Biennale, "The Presence of the Past," 1980. Photograph by
 Charles Jencks. Courtesy of the Jencks Foundation at The Cosmic House.



Fig. 39. - Fig. 40.
 Façades by Frank Gehry and OMA (Rem Koolhaas), "Strada Novissima," first Venice Architecture Biennale, "The
 Presence of the Past," 1980. Photograph by Charles Jencks. Courtesy of the Jencks Foundation at The Cosmic
 House.

Leonardo Benevolo and the *Storia dell'architettura moderna*

Reference and Contemporaneity in an Architectural History

Matteo Cassani Simonetti

Leonardo Benevolo's *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, published by Editori Laterza in 1960, stands as one of the best-known books on modern architectural history to appear in Italy before the 1970s—and likely the most popular both within the country and abroad, thanks to its numerous translations and re-prints.¹ Benevolo (1923–2017) was simultaneously an architect, historian, and urban planner. Beyond the *Storia's* content, it is precisely this multifaceted identity that makes this book distinctive. Unlike many architectural historians, who may have been trained as architects but were not directly engaged in design practice, Benevolo maintained an active design practice throughout his career, convinced that historical study was fundamental to design and, conversely, that design informed historical understanding. By contrast, the elder Sigfried Giedion (1888–1968) or the younger Bruno Zevi (1918–2000) were both historians directly involved in architecture but as cultural organisers; in the same way, Nikolaus Pevsner (1902–1983) and Reyner Banham (1922–1988) were primarily art and architecture historians. Put simply, their work was primarily oriented toward the realm of language—both oral and written—rather than toward drawing and architectural design. Benevolo's characteristics, on the other hand, enable us to examine the relationship

¹ This text offers reflections on Leonardo Benevolo's *Storia dell'architettura moderna* that are explored in greater depth in Matteo Cassani Simonetti, *La Storia di Leonardo Benevolo nella cultura architettonica italiana (1945-1960)* (Syracuse: LetteraVentidue, 2025), to which I also refer for principal bibliographical details. This text is dedicated to Mattia Ravaioli.

between architectural history and the design process, despite the sometimes condescending treatment of his historiographical work by other historians. This examination brings together two defining traits of the twentieth-century Italian architect as intellectual, at least according to some historians:² the use of language and the practice of architecture conceived as a political act (Fig. 41).

Manfredo Tafuri (1935–1994) offered a well-known and unflattering assessment of Benevolo's volume in his *Teorie e storia dell'architettura* (1968).³ Tafuri underlined the failure of Italian operative criticism, linking both Bruno Zevi and Leonardo Benevolo in this research endeavor—and in its failure. He wrote:

Apparently more objective and without definitive judgments, Benevolo's 'history' inserts critical judgment into the exposition and 'montage' of the facts. Here the deformations are revealed by the 'forced' attitude with which the author chooses or ignores figures, movements and cycles of works. Also, compared to Zevi's work, Benevolo's *Storia dell'architettura moderna* is ideologically far more limited. In the end both bend history in order to demonstrate a priori choices for the future of architecture: what changes (and completely) is the quality of such choices.⁴

The word "quality" implies a veiled or explicitly negative judgement by Tafuri; however, even adopting a less trenchant interpretation, Tafuri appears to establish a hierarchy by finding Benevolo's *Storia* to be "ideologically far

2 See Jean-Louis Cohen, *La coupure entre architectes et intellectuels, ou les enseignements de l'italophilie* (1984; Brussels: Mardaga, 2015); Marco Biraghi, *L'architetto come intellettuale* (Turin: Einaudi, 2019).

3 About this assessment in Italian debate, see, for instance, Paolo Portoghesi, "Attualità della storia dell'architettura," in *Comunità*, no. 88, year 15 (March–April 1961), 72–9; Aldo Rossi, "Considerazioni sul concorso per la nuova sacca del Tronchetto," in *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 293 (November 1964), 2–4.

4 Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, trans. Giorgio Verrecchia (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 168.

more limited” than Zevi’s book on modern architectural history, published a decade earlier in 1950.⁵

Beyond whatever value we might attribute to Benevolo’s book, the *Storia*—even without counting its numerous translations—was the most widely circulated text on modern architectural history in Italy until the 1970s and, consequently, may have exerted the greatest influence on the education of generations of architects. It contributed to consolidating the myth of the Modern Movement during its crystallisation into the International Style and helped perpetuate this tradition until the end of the twentieth century. To understand the book’s character—and both to refute and confirm some of the critiques leveled against it—it is necessary to trace its genesis and the context in which it was conceived.

History of the Storia

The opportunity that allowed Benevolo to write the *Storia* arose from editorial circumstances. Vito Laterza, head of Editori Laterza, sought in the second half of the 1950s to expand his publishing house’s catalog by adding architecture and other topics to its traditional focus on the philosophical works of Benedetto Croce. This choice reflected an expansion of the publishing market driven by the economic boom and mass education—a demand that other publishers were attempting to meet by issuing works, or more rarely series, dedicated to architecture and other fields of study. Regarding architecture, for instance, Giulio Einaudi was pursuing the same strategy after the end of World War II with cultural support from Bruno Zevi for a series titled *Collana Storica di Architettura*.⁶ It should also be noted that architectural publications in Italy during the *Ricostruzione* were sporadic and mainly ent-

5 Bruno Zevi, *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (Turin: Einaudi, 1950). See Panayotis Tournikiotis, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 85–111; and Roberto Dulio, *Introduzione a Bruno Zevi* (Rome: Laterza, 2008), 82–94.

6 See Alessandro and Giuseppe Laterza, “Un secolo (e oltre) di libri,” in *Le edizioni Laterza: Catalogo storico 1901–2020* (Rome: Laterza, 2021), ix–xxxiv; and Elena Formia, “L’editoria in Italia nel Dopoguerra e la Collana storica di architettura di Einaudi,” in *Biagio Rossetti secondo Bruno Zevi*, ed. Matteo Cassani Simonetti, Francesco Ceccarelli, and Adachiara Zevi (Rome: Viella, 2021), 93–104.

rusted to minor publishers. While monographs on major contemporary architects were published, historical studies of the architecture of the previous two centuries were almost entirely absent. The 1956 request to Benevolo to write a *Storia dell'architettura moderna* emerged from this context through the intercession of the Roman architect Carlo Chiarini, a mutual friend of Laterza and Benevolo.⁷ Chiarini and Benevolo immediately proposed themselves as editors for an architecture book series—never fully realized, though some titles were later published in the Biblioteca di Cultura Moderna⁸—and Benevolo began writing his volume. Meanwhile, before the *Storia's* publication and demonstrating Vito Laterza's interest in architecture, Laterza published Giuseppe Samonà's *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città* and the Italian translation of Nikolaus Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture*, both appearing in 1959.⁹

The book that Benevolo and Laterza envisioned was intended not only for specialists but also a wide general public: they wanted to create a synthesis, a richly illustrated survey of modern architecture from the mid-eighteenth century onward that could fill a gap in Italian publications. The idea was for a book that would be concise yet sufficiently detailed and comprehensive to document the birth and development of modern architecture. The result was to be, above all, a well-illustrated volume with new photography. The program was ambitious for both the author—who would need to write the text and create the iconographic material—and for the publisher, who was not specialized in illustrated books. The outcome was a colossal work in two volumes totaling a thousand pages, with an equal number of figures.¹⁰

Benevolo's references for historiographical work on modern architecture were the books by Giedion—in 1953 the translation of *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941) had just been published in Italy by Hoepli—and those of Pevsner, whose *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936) had already been translated into Italian by the small publishing

7 See Leonardo Benevolo, *La fine della città*, interview by Francesco Erboni (Rome: Laterza, 2011), 46.

8 Letter from Vito Laterza to Leonardo Benevolo, October 28, 1959, Archivio Giuseppe Laterza Editore, Bari.

9 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Storia dell'architettura europea* (Rome: Laterza, 1959).

10 Letter from Vito Laterza to Leonardo Benevolo, December 15, 1956, Archivio Giuseppe Laterza Editore, Bari.

house Rosa e Ballo in 1945.¹¹ Benevolo gathered the bibliographic sources for his book through various means: Zevi's *Storia* provided him with an extremely extensive and useful bibliography for outlining the events of the most recent period; additionally, he made extensive use of magazines and synthetic works in history, economics, and sociology. As for the illustrations, he collected some from existing repertoires, but for those relating to European works, most of them came from several trips he made to major cities and centers with the explicit aim of creating the volume's iconographic apparatus through new photographs taken directly by him.¹²

However, the most relevant reference book for Benevolo (according to his statements) was *Die Neue Architektur* (1939) by Alfred Roth (1903–1998), a work that is far from a history book. It is composed with carefully selected documentation and based on the choice of a few *exempla*.¹³ Perhaps the same expression that Stanislaus von Moos used for the title of his volume on Roth, *Architecture of Continuity*, could also describe Benevolo's work, underlining their shared approach in considering the Modern Movement as a continuous and vital experience and, consequently, its history as a part of the contemporary debate. The identification of Roth's book as Benevolo's main reference reveals one of the major qualities of the *Storia*: Although its title explicitly announces its historical interpretative perspective, its contents are more comparable to a book expressly addressed to the problems of contemporary design, such as Roth's or Samonà's. The *Storia* is a book conceived by an author who cannot simply be defined as an architectural historian, and whose genre is suspended between travelogue and encyclopaedia. It is written in the heartfelt, participatory tone of someone who, in writing about history, attempts to speak explicitly about the present from an *operative* perspective—understood not in a historiographical tradition but in the context of design culture. This different perspective was probably the outcome of his training and activities: on the one hand, his work as young professor of architectural history at the Università di Roma, where he dedicated his studies to architec-

11 Sigfried Giedion, *Spazio, tempo ed architettura: Lo sviluppo di una nuova tradizione*, trans. Enrica and Mario Labò (1941; Milan: Hoepli, 1953); Nikolaus Pevsner, *I pionieri del movimento moderno da William Morris a Walter Gropius*, trans. Giuliana Baracco (1936; Milan: Rosa e Ballo, 1945).

12 On Benevolo and photography, see Leonardo Benevolo, "Fotografie d'ambiente," in *Centro Sociale*, no. 5–6, year 2, (1955), 51–5.

13 Leonardo Benevolo, *L'architettura nel nuovo millennio* (Rome: Laterza, 2006), vi–vii.

ture from the Renaissance to the Baroque; and, on the other, his job as urban planner and architect.

Benevolo before the *Storia*

In 1946 Benevolo graduated in Architecture at the Università di Roma. He lived through the war and Fascism, as he recalls, without forming a precise opinion on these events.¹⁴ He did not support Fascism, but neither did he participate in the *Resistenza*, and during the war he retreated with his mother to the Alps, waiting for the conflict to end while continuing his university studies. His situation at the end of the war was therefore, in a certain sense, one of transition: too young to have had time to participate in Fascism, then repudiate it, and too inexperienced to assume a leading position during the *Ricostruzione*.¹⁵ This was the trajectory of many architects in those years, and this difficult legacy can be understood by reading texts by Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Giulia Veronesi, for instance.¹⁶ During the first postwar years, Benevolo pursued many parallel paths toward professional practice, academic activity, and professional associations. He participated in the main architecture associations established in Rome: the Associazione per l'Architettura Organica (APAO), organized by Bruno Zevi in 1944; the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (INU), re-founded by Adriano Olivetti after the war; the Istituto Nazionale di Architettura (IN/ARCH), again organized by Bruno Zevi in 1959; and the Società di Architettura e Urbanistica (SAU), founded in the late 1950s. All these associations were characterized by a strong anti-fascist spirit. Simultaneously, he maintained his presence at the Faculty of Architecture in Rome, where some of the leading figures of Fascism, like Marcello Piacentini, continued to teach. Finally, Benevolo also worked at the notorious Società Generale Immobiliare, which was engaged in massive reconstruction and

14 Benevolo, *La fine della città*, 30.

15 On the *Ricostruzione*, see Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana 1944–1985* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), 5–46.

16 See Ernesto Nathan Rogers, “Catarsi,” in *Costruzioni-Casabella*, nos. 185–98 (1946), 40–2; and Giulia Veronesi, *Difficoltà politiche dell'architettura in Italia, 1920–1940* (Milan: Libreria editrice Politecnica Tamburini, 1953).

speculative operations, and where he was in charge of executive and technological design at the Ufficio Progetti.¹⁷

This overview of the cultural spheres frequented by Benevolo, and their clear ideological contradictions, reflects the position of a young architect eager to engage in the major debates surrounding the Ricostruzione. Urban planning, however, became Benevolo's primary focus. As a member of the INU, he worked on regional planning in Abruzzo from 1952 and participated in numerous conferences on regional urban planning that emphasized comprehensive territorial studies incorporating the sociological and economic dimensions of communities.¹⁸ His sensitivity to architecture's social dimension likely developed through his work in Abruzzo at the Centro Educazione Professionale per Assistenti Sociali (CEPAS) with Angela Zucconi (1914–2000); Ludovico Quaroni had introduced him to this organization, where he taught statistics rather than architecture or planning. His Abruzzo experience also involved highly technical urban planning work, but this approach to technique was grounded in social needs and aimed at improving community development and coordination among social workers. This philosophy is evident in *Centro Sociale*, a journal crucial for understanding the connections between architecture, social activities, and practical experience that formed the foundation of Benevolo's work¹⁹ (Fig. 42, Fig. 43).

Another area where Benevolo articulated his passion for urban planning and his interpretation of architecture as serving social needs was in debates and projects concerning the preservation of historic centers.²⁰ He interpreted the ancient city as a place to be safeguarded not so much from a conservation perspective, seeking to preserve its architecture and monuments, but in order to maintain the social and artistic unity that it had achieved over

17 For an overview of Benevolo's life, see Benevolo, *La fine della città*.

18 On Benevolo and urban planning, see Leonardo Benevolo, *Le origini dell'architettura moderna* (Rome: Laterza, 1963).

19 See Alice Belotti, *La comunità democratica: Partecipazione, educazione e potere nel lavoro di comunità di Saul Alinsky e Angela Zucconi* (Rome: Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, 2011); on *Centro Sociale*, see Michela Maguolo, "La comunità e il suo centro: Una rivista, un tema, un dibattito," in *Engramma*, no. 166 (June 2019), https://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=3638 (accessed April 15, 2024).

20 For a summary of Benevolo's approach, see Leonardo Benevolo, "La conservazione dei centri antichi e del paesaggio come problema urbanistico," in *Ulisse*, vol. 5, no. 27, year 11 (Autumn–Winter 1957), 1445–53.

time. For him, the historic center was a district of the modern city—a district with specific needs related to its history, but still a district serving its inhabitants. This position, setting aside its polemical aspects, was similar to those of the journalist Antonio Cederna (1921–1966), Benevolo's friend and colleague, and of the Italia Nostra association, where he held leading positions.

For Benevolo, the ethical dimension of conserving historic city centers was grounded in personal beliefs that involved his faith. More generally, his deep knowledge of the doctrine of St. Thomas and his studies of neo-scholastic philosophy during the war led him to interpret architecture as a profoundly moral activity—a morality he recognized as foundational in the work of Nikolaus Pevsner, a historiographer whose work strongly influenced Benevolo, and which he also found in the work by William Morris (1834–1896).²¹ A well-known definition of architecture by Morris served as a key phrase for interpreting the *Storia* and another book that Benevolo published in 1960, *Una introduzione all'architettura*—and, more broadly, for understanding his entire body of work (Fig. 44):

A great subject truly, for it embraces the consideration of the whole external surroundings of the life of man; we cannot escape from it if we would so long as we are part of civilisation, for it means the moulding and altering to human needs of the very face of the earth itself, except in the outermost desert. Neither can we hand over our interests in it to a little band of learned men, and bid them seek and discover, and fashion, that we may at last stand by and wonder at the work, and learn a little of how 'twas all done: 'tis we ourselves, each one of us, who must keep watch and ward over the fairness of the earth, and each with his own soul and hand do his due share therein, lest we deliver to our sons a lesser treasure than our fathers left to us.²²

Benevolo combined the topic of morality—the foundation of his activities—with the dominant presence of technology in the modern world and structured his interpretation of the Modern Movement, its history, and its legacies within this dialectic. For instance, in 1946, while developing one of his earliest theoretical texts, he wrote:

21 On this topic, from a critical perspective, see David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

22 William Morris, "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization," lecture at the London Institution, Finsbury Circus, March 10, 1881, in *Hopes and Fears for Art* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1882), 181.

The problem [of technology], then, becomes particularly important today. This is both because technology has achieved a truly extraordinary development on its own, and because architecture for the last thirty years has relied precisely on technology to achieve its artistic results . . . Technology could be interpreted as the continuation that man is called upon to give to God's creation—and man, through technology, becomes in a certain sense God's collaborator in continuing the work of creation.²³

This interpretation of the sacred nature of architecture and the design process was not explicitly developed in the *Storia*, but some of these ideas were expressed through a more secular framework that emphasized strong social and moral foundations as decisive for the Modern Movement.

The *Storia* as a Collective Project

As I suggested above, the *Storia* is distinctive in that it exists somewhere between historiography and design. Its second distinctive feature concerns the context in which it was developed—a context that involves not only Benevolo but also a significant portion of Rome's architectural culture, allowing us to interpret the book as a collective project. During the second half of the 1950s, a group of architects founded the SAU to establish a common architectural approach rooted in the Modern Movement and focused on architecture and planning.²⁴

23 My translation. "Il problema [della tecnica], poi, diventa particolarmente importante oggi. Sia perché la tecnica ha raggiunto, per conto suo, uno sviluppo veramente straordinario, sia perché l'architettura da trent'anni in qua si fonda proprio sulla tecnica per raggiungere i suoi risultati artistici . . . La tecnica si potrebbe chiamare il proseguimento che l'uomo è chiamato a dare alla creazione di Dio—e l'uomo, attraverso la tecnica, diventa in un certo senso il collaboratore di Dio per continuare l'opera della creazione." Leonardo Benevolo, "Teoria dell'arte, scritti del 1946," manuscript, Archivio Leonardo Benevolo, Cellatica, Italy, "Schedario" series, folder "Teoria dell'arte."

24 SAU members included Renato Amaturò, Luisa Anversa, Carlo Aymonino, Maurizio Aymonino, Pietro Barucci, Gabriele Belardelli, Leonardo Benevolo, Massimo Boschetti, Arnaldo Bruschi, Giuseppe Campos Venuti, Carlo Chiarini, Fabrizio Cocchia, Adolfo DeCarlo, Baldo de' Rossi, Nico Di Cagno, Beata di Gaddo, Luciano Giovannini, Marcello Girelli, Italo Insolera, Aldo Livadiotti, Mario Manieri Elia, Nino Manzone, Giuseppina

Benevolo's *Storia* was conceived and developed within the SAU. For the association's members, the book served as something of a manifesto—the foundation of a shared tradition based not on formal values but idealistic principles: trust in humanistic technology, collaborative work, and commitment to the Modern Movement, which was undergoing a crisis during these years (as seen, for example, with CIAM).²⁵ The SAU proposed an alternative to the formal research that dominated Italian architectural culture—research, for instance, that had prompted Rayner Banham to declare that Italy had withdrawn from the Modern Movement.²⁶ Benevolo's *Storia* thus emerged from a context where historical reference and contemporary relevance converged, creating a truly operative history for design practice, not one merely operative in its theoretical declarations, like Zevi's perspective.

A brief comparison between Zevi's *Storia* and Benevolo's reveals these differences: both addressed primarily architects and students, and both sought to define history's role in design practice. In essence, Zevi reinterpreted past masters and inserted them into contemporary discourse to extract formal principles for developing contemporary architectural expression.²⁷ Benevolo, by contrast, found in social and collective history the the essential spirit of the Modern Movement—a movement that necessarily had heroes of *method* rather than heroes of *architectural language*. Zevi's is a history of masterpieces, Benevolo's a collective history—admittedly dogmatic and at times moralistic, grounded in a faith that architecture and planning, understood as collaborative efforts toward social improvement (and, for Benevolo, toward the glorification of God), can transform society. This philosophical difference is evident in their books' visual approaches. Benevolo's *Storia* combines old and contemporary photographs to create a complex representation of architec-

Marcialis, Carlo Melograni, Cleto Morelli, Piero Moroni, Ugo Sacco, Alberto Samonà, Michele Valori, Eduardo Vittoria, and Marcello Vittorini.

25 Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 238–66.

26 See Reyner Banham, "Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture," in *Architectural Review*, no. 747 (1959), 285. On the debate, see Francesco Cellini, "La polemica sul Neoliberty," in *Controspazio*, nos. 4–5 (1977): 52–3.

27 On this topic, see Matteo Cassani Simonetti, "Biagio Rossetti come pretesto," in *Biagio Rossetti secondo Bruno Zevi*, ed. Matteo Cassani Simonetti, Francesco Ceccarelli, and Adachiara Zevi (Rome: Viella, 2021), 61–91.

ture and its transformations while Zevi's book uses photographs of recently completed works to emphasize formal innovation (Fig. 45).

In general, as already noted, Benevolo's *Storia* is essentially a narrative without heroes. If we must identify a central figure, it is not Frank Lloyd Wright (as in Zevi's account) but Walter Gropius, who represents Benevolo's ideal of the Modern Movement master. For Benevolo, Gropius embodied the socially engaged architect, rather than the creator of formal or spatial masterpieces. When writing about Gropius, Benevolo seemed to be drawing a self-portrait—one that also reflected the SAU's position:

Gropius's lesson was validated precisely by what happened outside the school; with his eye on method, not on style, he discreetly but irresistibly invited the best architects from the various countries to look deeper into the rationale behind their experiments, their heritage. . . . [F]ormal tendencies were manifold—even if certain less distinguished members of the younger generation were beginning to talk of an international style—but with a common character that laid them open to comparison, to integration and to a shared belief in certain principles: respect for the human scale, strict technical propriety, continuity between the various scales of planning [T]he masters of the modern movement worked and spoke with a completely different tone: reasonable, modulated and concerned with a long-term task.²⁸

Benevolo even began the conclusion of his *Storia* with Gropius's words, quoting a 1952 speech to the Association of American architects. For Benevolo, Gropius's emphasis on teamwork offered a methodological model for contemporary practice.²⁹ Benevolo and his colleagues attempted to implement this approach through the SAU. Even if we consider the *Storia* apart from its historiographical framework, we can sense Benevolo's determination to transform the architectural culture of his time by connecting historical reference with contemporary practice—and by removing history from dusty library shelves to place it directly at the center of the design process.

28 Leonardo Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture*, vol. 2, *The Modern Movement*, trans. H. J. Landry (1960; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 471.

29 Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture*, vol. 2, 783–6.

For Benevolo, the Modern Movement was an inevitable development that remained vital in the 1950s, and architecture had to be grounded in human equality and freedom. This is how his *Storia* concludes: “[I]f the modern movement was to be outgrown, this must be an ‘outgrowing’ far more radical than any that had hitherto taken place: things would have to begin again from the beginning, with completely different aims. The realization of the gravity of this dilemma certainly does not help modern architects to find peace of mind, but it does project duty and hope on to a specific target.”³⁰

Some projects around the *Storia*

It is possible to draw parallels between projects that Benevolo developed in the 1950s and 1960s and the *Storia* to show how the book was explicitly oriented toward contemporary design practice and, conversely, how his design work from those same years reflected the same theoretical principles that shaped his historical interpretation.

This relationship appears, for instance, in the competition project for the Torre Spagnola suburb in Matera, designed by Benevolo with Giampaolo Rotondi in 1955 (Fig. 46). The competition was part of the broader redevelopment of Matera’s Sassi districts, which had produced one of neorealist culture’s best-known achievements: the La Martella settlement sponsored by Olivetti and realized by Ludovico Quaroni. Quaroni had served on the Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia e sui mezzi per combatterla (1951–53; the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Poverty in Italy) and had studied the community of the small village of Grassano. Through CEPAS, he introduced Benevolo to issues concerning the “southern question” (*questione meridionale*) and poverty.³¹

In the Torre Spagnola project, Benevolo and Rotondi sought to represent a community by establishing a civic center as a heart of the village. Their focus on creating a focal point for the new rural neighborhood—a place of identity where a single building would house all public spaces (church, school, social centre, etc.)—proved particularly significant. The project was develo-

30 Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture*, vol. 2, 837.

31 See Gianluca Fiocco, *L’Italia prima del miracolo economico: L’inchiesta parlamentare sulla miseria, 1951–1954* (Manduria: Lacaita Editore, 2004).

ped more for its planning logic, program, and urban structure than for its architectural language: the façades employed a fairly conventional neorealist vocabulary aligned with contemporary debates on ruralism.³²

Other positions developed in the *Storia* appear in Benevolo's Bologna projects. The competition project for Bologna's new trade fair—won in 1960 and realized by the firm Benevolo, Tomaso Giura Longo, and Carlo Melograni—explicitly followed International Style principles and the tradition of major exhibitions, such as the 1957 *Interbau – Internationale Bauausstellung* in Berlin, which Benevolo had visited during his European travels to take photographs for his *Storia* (Fig. 47). While the Bologna trade fair project represented this modern architectural tradition, the urban planning studies for the city's historic center—seemingly distant from typical Modern Movement concerns—reflected the same interpretation of the city. Commissioned by Giuseppe Campos Venuti, Bologna's town planning councillor, in 1962, the study was guided by the principle that, despite the differences distinguishing each part of the city, it nevertheless formed a unified whole at the regional scale.³³ Technically, Benevolo categorized buildings and established conservation guidelines based on a simple concept: everything predating the industrial revolution should be preserved; everything built later could be replaced. This reflected both Benevolo's observation of poor-quality nineteenth-century construction and, more importantly, his interpretation of the historic city not as a problem of pure preservation but as an urban planning challenge based on the social structure of the city and its historic center (Fig. 48).

The Cavedone district in Bologna represents a project that combined lessons from the historic city with modern architectural experience. Working within a team coordinated by Federico Gorio (1915–2007), Benevolo participated in a project that employed courtyard forms for both settlement and social organization while carefully studying every construction detail to achieve maximum economic efficiency and operational quality (Fig. 49).

32 See Michelangelo Sabatino, *Pride in Modesty: Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition in Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

33 See Matteo Cassani Simonetti, "The Conservative Restoration of the Historic City as Social Practice: The Study for the Historic Centre of Bologna by Leonardo Benevolo (1962–65)," in *The Historical City: A Critical Reference and Role Model for Innovative Urban and Metropolitan Development*, ed. Ilaria Cattabriga et al. (Cham: Springer, 2024), 195–205.

In the Matera and Bologna projects, we can see how Benevolo understood design as grounded in architecture's social dimension and extending beyond any specific disciplinary field. While this approach was strongly linked to the tradition of the Modern Movement, it also expressed the theoretical position elaborated in the *Storia*—serving simultaneously as historical reference and catalyst for contemporary design practice.

Unlike the majority of historiography devoted to modern architecture, Benevolo's *Storia* is based on the tension between the expression of what appears to be a conventional historical approach—as its title would suggest—and methodological directives that punctuate its pages. The relationship between *references* and *contemporaneity* centers on the problem of connecting history and design practice, avoiding rigid separations between the two while constructing an approach that treats the Modern Movement tradition as a living element of design—and understanding recent projects as the last link in a genealogy rooted in the recent past.

Benevolo's continuous updating of his volume, even through the early 2000s, allowed the work to cover an ever-expanding chronology, enabling the *Storia* to document developments through to the end of the twentieth century—up to the chronological boundary established by his subsequent volume, *L'architettura nel nuovo millennio* (2006), written to continue his interpretation of contemporary architecture. However, architecture's changing framework during the twentieth century weakened the close connection between history and design that Benevolo had established as the foundation of his book in 1960. The latest editions of the volume might be interpreted not primarily as architectural history, but as a testimony to a method and to the figure of the architect as intellectual—a role that defined the profession during the twentieth century.

Fig. 41.
The slipcase of
Leonardo Benevolo's
Storia dell'architettura
moderna, 1960.



Fig. 42.
An article about CEPAS work in Abruzzo. The man standing is probably Leonardo Benevolo. From Il Tempo, June 9, 1961.



Fig. 43. A poster edited by Leonardo Benevolo, with layout by Albe Steiner, dedicated to urban plans and included in the magazine *Centro Sociale*, 1955.



Fig. 44. The cover of Leonardo Benevolo's *Una introduzione all'architettura*, 1960.

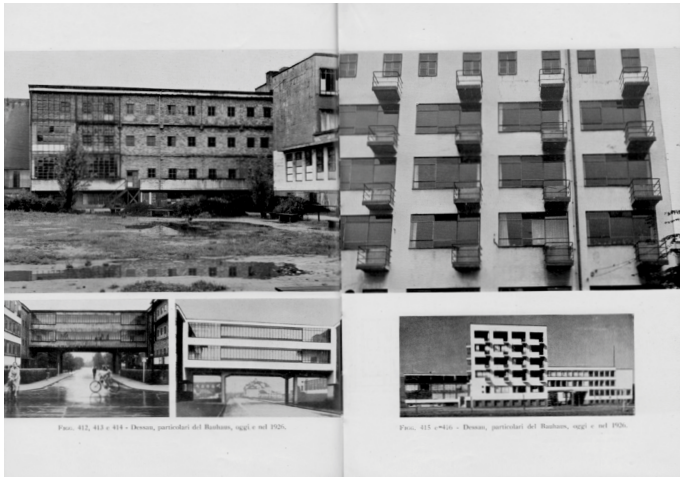


Fig. 45.
Two pages of *Storia dell'architettura moderna* about the Bauhaus building in Dessau, comparing Benevolo's photographs with others of the newly completed building. From Leonardo Benevolo, *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (Rome: Laterza, 1960).

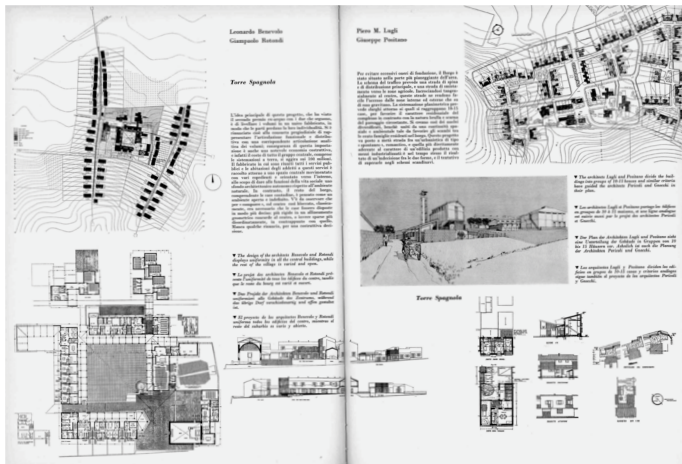
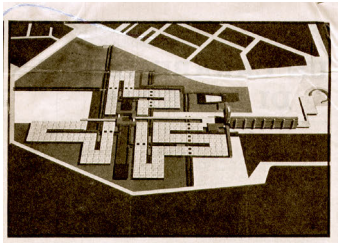


Fig. 46.
The presentation of the competition project for the Torre Spagnola suburb by Leonardo Benevolo and Giampaolo Rotondi. From *L'architettura: Cronache e storia*, year 1, no. 2 (June–July 1955).

Fig. 47.

An article by Bruno Zevi about the competition project for the new trade fair in Bologna by Leonardo Benevolo, Tommaso Giura Longo and Carlo Melograni, 1960. From L'Espresso, June 4, 1961.



La nuova fiera di Bologna

L'ARCHITETTURA VALORIZZA L'ECONOMIA

di BRUNO ZEVI

MENTE si attende che la nuova fiera venga a sostituire, in sede appropriata, il vecchio padiglione di Piazza Maggiore. Il progetto di Leonardo Benevolo, Tommaso Giura Longo e Carlo Melograni, presentato all'Architettura, è un esempio di architettura moderna, che si integra con l'ambiente urbano. La fiera è stata progettata in un'area di 100.000 mq, con un'area di 50.000 mq coperta. Il progetto prevede un edificio principale di 100.000 mq, con un'area di 50.000 mq coperta. Il progetto prevede un edificio principale di 100.000 mq, con un'area di 50.000 mq coperta.

Il quartiere, oltre a essere un polo commerciale, deve essere un polo culturale. La fiera deve essere un luogo di incontro e di scambio. Il progetto prevede un edificio principale di 100.000 mq, con un'area di 50.000 mq coperta. Il progetto prevede un edificio principale di 100.000 mq, con un'area di 50.000 mq coperta.

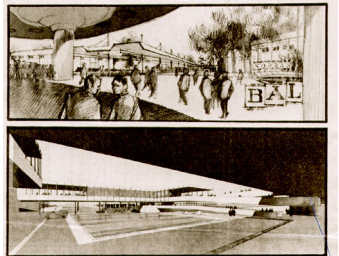
COMUNE DI BOLOGNA
INDAGINE SETTORIALE
SUL
CENTRO STORICO

Istituto di Urbanistica ed Istituto di Storia dell'Architettura dell'Università di Firenze

gruppo di lavoro: Paolo Andina
Leonardo Benevolo · Silvano Casini
Pier Luigi Cervellati · Pier Giorgio Felcaro
Vittorio Franchetti · Sandro Gandolfi
Eros Parmeggiani · Paola Tamanti
segretaria: Francesca Bassi
consulenza: Antonio Cederna

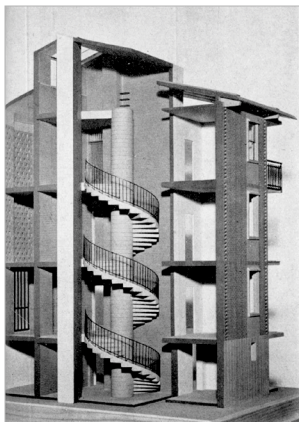
Fig. 48.

The cover of the book about studies on the historic center of Bologna (1965).



Una veduta prospettica d'un padiglione della nuova Fiera di Bologna. Il progetto degli architetti Leonardo Benevolo, Tommaso Giura Longo e Carlo Melograni. Sopra: schizzo prospettico del secondo padiglione degli architetti Alfredo Froda, Franco Mazzetti e Ernesto Rampelli. Nella foto sopra il titolo: pagella del progetto vincitore.

L'Espresso - 4 OTTOBRE 1961 - P. 105/111



Bologna: quartiere di via Cavedone

capogruppo: **Federico Gorio**

progettazione urbanistica:
L. Benevolo, V. Calzolari, S. Danielli, M. Vittorini

progettazione edilizia:
**L. Benevolo, V. Calzolari, S. Danielli, A. Esposito,
M. Vittorini**

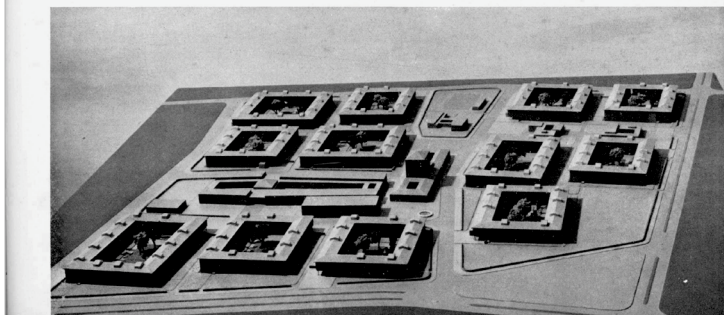
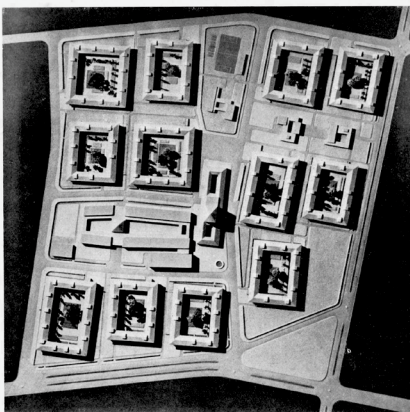
direzione lavori: **M. Carini**
stazione appaltante: **Consorzio Emiliano-Romagnolo**

Il lavoro di impostazione della unità residenziale di Via Cavedone in Bologna è stato svolto seguendo queste linee:
a) lo studio della continuità della struttura organizzativa dalla casa al quartiere;
b) la definizione del carattere urbano del quartiere attraverso la sua continuità edilizia;

c) il controllo del suolo non edificato, interno ed esterno e sua precisa classificazione funzionale e destinazione;

d) l'articolazione dei servizi connessi con lo schema di piano particolareggiato per la intera zona.

Lo svolgimento di questi concetti ha condotto ad impostare l'intero quartiere su una «edilizia chiamata «corte attrezzata»». Lo schema tipico della corte, è il seguente: la corte è definita volumetricamente da quattro fabbricati lineari, a tre piani, contenenti gli appartamenti d'abitazione; i quattro fabbricati non si toccano sugli angoli, ma sono opportunamente scostati in modo da realizzare passaggi (pedonali o carrabili). Per alcune corti del quartiere l'elemento di



35

Fig. 49.
The presentation of the Cavedone district in Bologna under the guidance of Federico Gorio.
From *Architettura cantiere*, no. 15 (1957).

The Geopolitics of Baroque

UNESCO and the Invention of Latin American Architecture as a Political and Aesthetic Project

Daniela Ortiz dos Santos

Dear reader, I should warn you that this paper does not aim to provide conclusive statements and results. Rather, I consider it more constructive and perhaps more appropriate to share with you a few reflections from a work in progress. Allow me to begin with some questions from sociologist Christian Topalov's preface to *L'aventure des mots de la ville*: "What language should the historian use? Should he use the vocabulary of his sources, which protects him from anachronism . . . or that of his own time, which only allows generalizations?"¹

Topalov's words are not a merely invitation to reflect on how architectural and urban historians speak and write. They also constitute a call to consider the terms and expressions anchored in the architectural tradition even more urgently, treating this very language as an object of research. I would like to suggest a similar path: to conduct a collective examination of the transatlantic history of architecture, while carefully considering from where we speak, to whom we speak, and with which tools we learn. When discussing a *lieu d'énonciation*, I have in mind the writings of philosopher Paul Ricoeur.² Putting it very generally, this means making evident what the circumstances

1 Christian Topalov, "Ceci n'est pas un dictionnaire," in *L'aventure des mots de la ville: à travers le temps, les langues, les sociétés*, ed. Christian Topalov, Laurent Coudroy de Lille, Jean-Charles Depaule, and Brigitte Marin (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2010), XXIII, my translation.

2 See Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, 3 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983–1985). The trilogy comprises: *Temps et récit I: L'intrigue et le récit historique* (1983); *Temps et récit II: La*

of speech are. With this in mind, allow me to share a post I recently came across on Twitter: “Whose histories, languages, knowledge systems are being taught, normalized, & valued? Who is benefiting? Who is not? How do we know?”³

Despite not being active on social media, I believe posts like this represent a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. Social media culture has become a mediator of discourses on architecture and the built environment, as well as on education, that directly affect architectural history teaching. This post’s capacity for synthesis in conveying a message, as well as its call for social justice in writing, research, and teaching practice, is indeed powerful. The post, of course, does elaborate on these pointed questions, yet it serves as a useful tool for reflecting on how we should approach architecture, its history, and its categories. It does not seek to alienate us from the world, but recognizes that knowledge construction runs deep within our experience. Knowledge is subjective and situated, resulting from negotiations and conventions embedded in political, cultural, social, and economic contexts.

Although these thoughts may sound obvious to anyone reading this publication, what we still encounter in the libraries and archives of architecture and art schools is a massive number of books and documents that normalize certain values and ideas, and whose theoretical frameworks remain connected to specific groups at the expense of others. Furthermore, while buildings, objects, and practices designated as having universal value by international organizations like UNESCO become vehicles for aesthetic contemplation and tourism, these values appear far more fragile when we witness scenes like those that occurred in Brasília in January 2023, when five thousand Brazilians invaded the Congress building and destroyed the very objects we had naively assumed commanded collective consensus regarding their meaning and value.

Another illustrative yet critical reflection comes from Pedro Erber’s article “Contemporaneity and its Discontents,”⁴ in which a game of both questioning and reconstructing notions of contemporaneity offers a useful strategy for challenging the inevitable hierarchies created by the objectification

configuration du temps dans le récit de fiction (1984); and *Temps et récit III: Le temps raconté* (1985).

3 DP MATH (@DP_math), Twitter post, June 7, 2022, 4:11 PM, https://x.com/dp_math.

4 Pedro Erber, “Contemporaneity and Its Discontents,” in *Diacritics* 41, no. 1 (2013), 28–48.

of the “other and of other cultures” that is inherent in processes of reporting, narrating, and writing art and architectural history. Erber’s insights are useful for considering the idea of Latin America, and particularly the concept of Latin American architecture, which has occupied my thinking for several years.⁵ This story began in Europe, the continent I came to call home after moving from Brazil, when I was then asked to teach about Latin American architecture. My first reaction was to ask myself: What does “Latin American architecture” actually mean? And even more challenging: What could “Latin American architecture” mean to my colleagues at the school where I was teaching?

This experience of both strangeness and a kind of familiarity had a significant impact on my scholarly work, and I began to develop a more careful understanding of Latin American architecture as an invention—a contradictory and unstable historical construct whose history is deeply linked to the histories of internationalism and the transatlantic diaspora. In the turbulent years of the 1960s and ’70s, the term “Latin America” acquired new complexity. Not only was it popularized and adopted by a growing number of artists, architects, and writers from the region, but international and transnational organizations also began to cultivate—through their conventions and structures—practices that strengthened the institutional and legal framework sustaining a Latin American integration movement.

The notion of culture promoted by UNESCO⁶ in the first decades after its foundation in 1945 was widely disseminated and popularized through its

5 The intersection of international organizations and intellectual migration has informed an ongoing project that explores Latin America as a category and the architectural historiography of the region during the Cold War era. Some of the reflections presented here derive from investigations carried out at the Center for Critical Studies in Architecture at the Goethe University Frankfurt. See, for example, Daniela Ortiz dos Santos, “Italian Roots in Latin American Architectural History,” in *Italian Imprints on Twentieth-century Architecture*, ed. Denise Costanzo and Andrew Leach (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022), 265–78.

6 During the Cold War (1947–1991), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was involved in various studies on Latin American built cultures, from vernacular architecture to urban modernist projects. While UNESCO is recognized for having led, financed, and implemented a vast number of projects promoting cultural regional integration whose impact still resonates today, these actions have not been scrutinized in the context of how colonial power structures intersect with diasporic experiences in architectural history. See, for example, Kerry Bystrom, Monica

bulletins, books, radio programs, and photographic and media productions. Yet this notion was not established without dispute.⁷ Such disputes are at the core of this paper, which analyzes a 1980 exhibition and conference as a critical case study for examining UNESCO's multifaceted and contested practices regarding built and heritage cultural affairs from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. In doing so, it aims to shed light on the overlooked collaborations UNESCO maintained not only with international professional associations and cultural organizations, but also with far more complex and less visible groups of displaced people.

In the following pages, I would like to draw attention to the complex use of the baroque, particularly the idea of Latin American baroque during the Cold War era. The symposium and exhibition *Barocco Latinoamericano* that took place in Rome in 1980 serves as an exemplary case study. Funded by UNESCO and the *Istituto Italo-Latinoamericano* (the Italian–Latin American Institute, or IILA), and curated by Italian architect Paolo Portoghesi⁸ with significant assistance from his countryman Graziano Gasparini,⁹ who was based in Venezuela, both the symposium and exhibition unfolded a series of conversations, consensuses, and disputes around the category “baroque” in the Latin American context. While examining documents and positions

Popescu, and Katherine Zien, eds., *The Cultural Cold War and the Global South: Sites of Contest and Communitas* (New York: Routledge, 2021); José Vicente Tavares dos Santos and Maira Baumgarten, “Latin American Sociology’s Contribution to Sociological Imagination: Analysis, Criticism, and Social Commitment,” trans. Beatriz Viégas-Faria, in *Sociologías*, no. 14 (July/December 2005), 178–243, http://socialsciences.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1517-45222006000100003, accessed June 20, 2023.

- 7 Daniela Ortiz dos Santos, “América latina en su arquitectura: Culture, Criticism and Consensus,” in *Architectural Criticism, Media and Memory (1930–1970)*, ed. Priscilla Alves Peixoto, Rute Figueiredo, Daniela Ortiz dos Santos, Joana Mello, and Elane Peixoto (Rio de Janeiro: RIOBOOKS, forthcoming).
- 8 Paolo Portoghesi (1931–2023) was an Italian architect, writer, professor, and specialist in baroque and postmodern architecture. Born in Rome, he served as president of the architectural section of the Venice Biennale (1979–1992), editor-in-chief of the journal *Controspazio* (1969–1983), dean of the Architectural School at the Politecnico di Milano (1968–1978), and professor at the Sapienza – Università di Roma.
- 9 Graziano Gasparini (1924–2019), born in Gorizia, studied in Venice and collaborated with Carlo Scarpa before moving to Caracas in 1948. He was a scholar of baroque architecture and its historiography, and an architect specializing in the preservation and conservation of historic buildings.

promoted by IILA and UNESCO, this paper seeks to illuminate the complex status of reference and contemporaneity in architectural discourse about this region. Before exploring the relationship between IILA and UNESCO, however, let me take a brief detour to examine UNESCO's connection with the region defined as Latin America.

UNESCO and the Construction of a Latin American Visual and Heritage Culture

A few years after its creation, UNESCO established a new policy that deployed culture as soft power¹⁰ and a created Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean. The first three decades after World War II are considered critical, as these were the foundational years of the UNESCO's bureau of cultural affairs and the period in which a series of projects and collaborations were initiated. As a number of authors have noted, the extensive networks that French-speaking bureaucrats maintained with scholars, politicians, missionaries, and professionals based in the Americas facilitated pioneering educational and cultural programs in Latin America.¹¹ The region was used as a laboratory and testing ground for implementing these projects. Moreover, the second director-general of UNESCO was Jaime Torres Bodet, the former minister of culture in Mexico whose agenda as head of the organization enhanced the region's visibility.¹²

As part of Cold War cultural diplomacy, UNESCO made a deliberate choice to implement and sponsor Latin American artistic and architectural cultures, as demonstrated by extensive visual documentation. This effort was facilitated by existing infrastructure in terms of human and technical resources—conditions that were crucial because they accelerated both the creation and implementation of numerous projects, some dating from the mid-1950s. By successfully implementing and promoting these projects on

10 Paul Betts, "Humanity's New Heritage: UNESCO and the Rewriting of World History," in *Past & Present*, no. 228 (2015), 249–85.

11 See Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 12 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–2008).

12 See Nuria Sanz and Carlos Tejada, *México y la UNESCO, la UNESCO y México: Historia de una relación* (Paris: UNESCO, 2016).

a global scale, UNESCO was able to use them strategically to secure funding for future initiatives.

Archival records preserved in UNESCO's collections reveal significant interest in Latin America.¹³ In the areas of arts, architecture, heritage, and urban design, UNESCO cooperated with national and international associations of architects and architecture critics, produced extensive audiovisual materials and media (photographs, videos, magazines, and books), and created categorization systems for assessing the cultural values of the built environment. Concrete examples include collaborations with the International Union of Architects for congresses in Havana (1963) and Buenos Aires (1969), and with the International Association of Art Critics for congresses in Brasília (1959) and Mexico City (1962). UNESCO *Courier* issues on Brasília (1961) (Fig. 50) and "Latin America's Cultural Explosion" (1972), as well as a special issue on the museums in contemporary Latin America (1973), further demonstrate UNESCO's promotion of the region's artistic and architectural cultural values. A third example consists in the fact that, following the 1972 World Heritage Convention, numerous Latin American sites were among the first recognized as having "outstanding universal value," including not only state-sponsored modernist buildings connected to nationalistic agendas (the City of Brasília, listed in 1987), but also buildings and sites rooted in the region's colonial history (Quito, 1978; Ouro Preto, 1980 (Fig. 51 and Fig. 52); Olinda Historic Center, 1982; Jesuit Mission Ruins, 1983; Cuzco, 1983; Salvador da Bahia Historic Center, 1985; Congonhas Sanctuary, 1985; Potosí, 1987; Lima Historic Center, 1988).

UNESCO's Bureau of Cultural Affairs, in particular, played a significant role in this process, taking responsibility for initiating the production of new visual, oral, and textual material about the Latin American region. On the

13 One important example is the 1970 report of the director-general on UNESCO activities and programs, listing a study of contemporary Latin American cultures. This report further mentions that a "meeting of experts was held in Buenos Aires in October [1969, during the UIA congress] in connexion with the study on architecture and town planning in Latin America and the preparation of the work 'América Latina en su arquitectura,' and fourteen specialists were offered contracts to contribute to it." UNESCO, Report of the Director-General on the Activities of the Organization in 1969, communicated to the Member States and the Executive Board in accordance with Article VI.3.b of the Constitution, 103, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000160942.locale=en>, accessed June 30, 2021.

one hand, projects carried out by the bureau helped legitimize ideas of artistic and built cultures from Latin America on a global scale; on the other, they were products of a period when the idea of “culture” in these regions was contradictory, ideologically charged, and contested. While questions of coloniality,¹⁴ bureaucracy, and diplomacy are recognized as intrinsic to various sectors and departments within UNESCO—and while the area of education has been subject to extensive discussion¹⁵—the Bureau of Cultural Affairs has received considerably less scholarly attention. My proposal is to focus on this bureau in particular as an analytical lens through which to examine broader questions of how UNESCO shaped people’s understanding and perception of so-called “other” cultures through a series of names, practices, documents, and events.

The Caracas–Paris–Rome Routes: (Re)inventing Latin American Baroque

1966 was pivotal: UNESCO initiated a major interdisciplinary study on Latin American cultures and the IILA was created. Based in Rome, this institute connected the Italian government to those of Latin American republics to facilitate “collaboration in the cultural, scientific, economic, technical and social” sectors. While the primary aim of the IILA was to promote integration to help the region counterbalance US influence, it also fostered academic and intellectual communities that generated heated debates through events and publications on the nature of Latin America and its cultures.

Between the late 1960s and the 1980s, reports from UNESCO and IILA, as well as correspondence between Paris and Rome, reveal interests aligned in

14 See Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995); and Aníbal Quijano, “Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina,” in *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales: perspectivas latinoamericanas*, ed. Edgardo Lander (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2000).

15 See Ning de Coninck-Smith, “Transnational Architectural Meetings: UNESCO and School Construction in Asia 1960–1972” (paper presented at the workshop “Exploring UNESCO and UIA – Histories of Architecture and Bureaucracy in Development Contexts,” organized by Frederike Lausch and Andreas Kalpakci, ETH Zurich, November 2024; publication forthcoming).

cooperation. According to a UNESCO program and meeting document dated April 22, 1983 (Fig. 53):

Unesco [*sic*] has had working relations with the IILA for many years, in particular since 26 July 1975, when, in response to a Letter dated 21 March of that year from the Secretary-General of the Institute, the Directeur-General of Unesco agreed to the establishment of relations of co-operation through the exchange of information and documents and participation in meetings of common interest. These co-operative ties have been quite strong and collaboration has been fruitful, developing steadily in the fields of culture and science, particularly as regards the cultural heritage and scientific research in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁶

Among the most successful collaborations between these two institutions was a major cultural project on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century artistic and architectural phenomena from the Latin American region. The discussions initiated in the 1970s involved extensive communication efforts to reach all state representatives from Latin America, the Caribbean, the Iberian Peninsula, and Italy to secure funding and support. These efforts appear to have succeeded, as an ambitious exhibition accompanied by a symposium and three publications became reality in the early 1980s. Before discussing the exhibition and symposium that took place in Rome, however, a brief detour may be instructive. A series of events prior to the gathering—events that included many of the same scholars who would attend the 1980 symposium—had already energized networks and debates concerning Latin American architecture and Latin American baroque. These were organized by the *Centro de Investigaciones Históricas y Estéticas* (CIHE), a research cluster based at the School of Architecture of the Central University of Venezuela, founded in 1964 by Graziano Gasparini and Venezuelan architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva.

Caracas was in the spotlight during these years because of Villanueva's design for the university campus, which was widely circulated in books and magazines (including a monograph by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy). A resident of Ca-

16 UNESCO Executive Board, "Relations with the Italian–Latin American Institute," 116th session, Paris, April 22, 1983, 1, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000054948.locale=en>, accessed May 25, 2019.

racas since 1948, a professor there since 1958, and a regular contributor to UNESCO since the early 1960s, Gasparini transformed the school's research and education programs (Fig. 54). Besides teaching modern architecture, the school became a place to explore research methods in architectural history. Under Gasparini's editorship, from 1964 until 1980 the *Boletín del CIHE* featured experimental research, conference proceedings, and debates, with over one hundred contributors from institutions across the Americas and Europe. It served as an important channel for Italian-, Portuguese-, English-, and Spanish-language discussion and for the dissemination of studies on Latin American architectural and urban history, with particular emphasis on the baroque (Gasparini's own interest).

The journal's first issue presented the results of a survey among a dozen academics on the significance of "Spanish-American" baroque architecture, including established scholars such as Diego Iñíguez of Spain and George Kubler from Yale University. Gasparini's analysis highlighted a "disparity in orientation, focus and [critical] interpretation."¹⁷ Some contributors, like architect Carlos Maldonado from the Universidad Central de Ecuador, equated baroque architecture in the Spanish Americas with its expressions elsewhere,¹⁸ while others argued the opposite. Kubler, for example, did not believe in the "existence of a Latin American baroque architecture,"¹⁹ and insisted that with the exception of the Brazilian province of Minas Gerais, „none [of

17 "Aunque vários de los Docentes que participaron en ella [encuesta] coinciden en algunos puntos, se destaca sin embargo una marcada disparidade en la orientación, enfoque e interpretación del problema crítico," in Graziano Gasparini, conclusions to the survey "Encuesta sobre la significación de la arquitectura barroca hispano-americana," in *Boletín del CIHE* 1 (January 1964), 42, my translation.

18 "En mi opinión, la significación valorativa de la Arquitectura Barroca Hispano-Americana es la misma que la de la Arquitectura Barroca en general, es decir, comprende un Arte destinado a hacer alardes técnicos y estéticos con el objeto de impresionar al público en sus tendencias políticas y religiosas," in Carlos Maldonado, response to the survey "Encuesta sobre la significación de la arquitectura barroca hispano-americana," in *Boletín del CIHE* 1 (January 1964), 11, my translation.

19 Kubler continues: "There are perhaps light distinct regional expressions during the 17th and 18th centuries. None of them (with the exception of Minas Gerais [in Brazil]) should be confused with the baroque architecture we know in Italy and central Europe," in George Kubler, response to the survey "Encuesta sobre la significación de la arquitectura barroca hispano-americana," in *Boletín del CIHE* 1 (January 1964), 12.

its regional examples] should be confused with the baroque architecture we know in Italy and central Europe.”²⁰

This debate permeated the two dozen issues edited by Gasparini. While many of these conversations took place in print only, others began at conferences. One symposium hosted by the CIHE in October 1967 to discuss the “situation” of Latin American architectural historiography was featured in a special issue in April 1968. Its participants included Kubler, along with architectural scholars Paolo Portoghesi and Leonardo Benevolo, as well as US-based art critic Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, the only woman who spoke. Memorable images by Gasparini and his brother Paolo²¹ suggest an intense yet friendly gathering. More significant than the specific details of the conference is its connection to debates that took place in Rome thirteen years later. The Caracas event’s main themes (baroque architecture in Latin America), methods (contesting nationalist and stylistic labeling), and driving questions were equally central to the discussions that took place in 1980 in the Italian capital—the same year as the first Venice Architecture Biennale, curated by Paolo Portoghesi.²²

In April of that year, Rome followed Caracas as stage for the *Simposio Internazionale sul Barocco Latinoamericano*. Organized and promoted by the IILA, the symposium saw six dozen scholars gather for a four-day discussion and attend the opening of an exhibition that included a film screening session and a special light and music installation.²³ This extraordinary event—both the exhibition and symposium—received funding from the IILA and UNESCO, as well as institutional support and cooperation from the twenty-one nati-

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ One of the most important photographers of architecture in Latin America, Paolo Gasparini (born 1934 in Gorizia) moved to Venezuela in 1954 and was commissioned by UNESCO in 1970 to conduct photographic projects in the region.

²² See Léa-Catherine Szacka, *Exhibiting the Postmodern: The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale* (Venice: Marsilio, 2016); Silvia Micheli, “Between History and Design: The Baroque Legacy in the Work of Paolo Portoghesi,” in *The Baroque in Architectural Culture, 1880–1980*, ed. Andrew Leach, John Macarthur, and Maarten Delbeke (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 195–210; and Rute Figueiredo, *Exhibiting Disciplinarity: The Venice Biennale of Architecture 1980–2012* (PhD diss., ETH Zurich, 2018).

²³ See José de Nordenflycht Concha, “Roma 1980: barroco local en contexto global,” *Quaderni Culturali IILA* 1, *La otra dirección: Percezione dell’arte latinoamericana in Italia* (November 2018): 61–70.

ons represented. Its opening was a political and cultural event attended by Italian President Sandro Pertini, ambassadors and other representatives of IILA member countries, and the Italian community of baroque scholars.

The resulting catalogue (1980) and conference proceedings (published in two volumes, in 1982 and 1984) are products of institutional, political, and intellectual efforts to assert the relevance of the region's artistic and built cultures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but also to process their Italian "origins."²⁴ The catalogue's introduction by IILA General Secretary Carlo Perrone Capano calls the Rome event "unprecedented,"²⁵ while Portoghesi's essay restates much of his argument from the 1967 symposium in Caracas (Fig. 55).

In general, the essays offer a great variety of architectural and artistic examples, largely unknown to the general European public. The volume begins with seven brief essays followed by abundant (mostly unpublished) photographs of sculptures, church facades, gates, window frames, monastery patios, and frescoes on vaulted ceilings, primarily drawn from the contributors' personal collections. In other words, it constitutes an extensive and curated representation of knowledge through visual and aesthetic contemplation. The idea of a Latin American baroque thus appears to be an undisputed fact.

Gasparini's Ideas of a Latin American Baroque as a (Geo) Political Project and an Alternative Aesthetic Category

Although beautifully illustrated, the catalogue lacks detailed descriptions or contextual analysis of what it shows. It instead offers an accessible and commemorative narrative about both the baroque and the concept of Latin America. In doing so, it embraces a kind of aesthetization of the other, "patrimonializing" buildings and objects from the region as examples

24 *Barocco Latino Americano* (Rome: Istituto Italo-Latinoamericano, 1980); Vittorio Minardi, ed., *Atti Simposio Internazionale sul Barocco Latino Americano*, organizzato dall'IILA sotto gli auspici dell'UNESCO, 2 vols. (Rome: IILA, 1982–1984).

25 Carlo Perrone Capano, preface to *Barocco Latino Americano*, 9. In the same volume, see Paolo Portoghesi, "Il contributo Americano allo sviluppo dell'architettura barocca," 11–13. See also Paolo Portoghesi, "La contribución Americana al desarrollo de la arquitectura barroca," in *Boletín del CIHE* 9 (April 1968), 137–46.

of outstanding universal value—to follow Choay’s analysis of UNESCO.²⁶ As for the symposium proceedings, things become more complicated. With the first volume, produced two years later, considerable effort was made to go beyond the comparison and description of multiple national cases. Instead, various authors presented opposing views concerning the use and rejection of transnational aestheticized categories, although no definitive solutions were reached.

The massive, two-volume proceedings of more than five hundred pages each collect seventy-three speeches delivered in Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Italian. The need to investigate, discuss, and disseminate the artistic and architectural expressions of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Americas appears to have been uncontroversial. Yet participants like Ramón Gutiérrez believed that an “interpretative crisis” around the idea of a baroque in Latin America had been exposed.²⁷ From the outset, the essays reveal a fundamental disagreement: Which Latin American baroque are scholars actually discussing? Should the focus encompass the Americas as a whole? Would it be more appropriate to study only the Spanish Americas? Or perhaps the “Iberian Americas”? Graziano Gasparini, Argentine art critic Damian Bayón,²⁸ and Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea Aguilar²⁹ emphasize Latin America in their titles, while Portoghesi describes an “American” contribution to the baroque, adopting “American baroque” as an analytic category.³⁰ By contrast, German art historian Erwin Walter Palm, exiled in the Dominican Republic, argued that it was impossible to define an “urban baroque” in Latin America.³¹ In short, while the baroque served as a lens for

26 Françoise Choay, *L'allégorie du patrimoine* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1996).

27 Ramón Gutiérrez, “Repensando o Barroco americano,” in *Vitruvius 2* (December 2001), <https://vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/arquitextos/02.019/819>, accessed April 15, 2020.

28 Damián Bayón, “Las artes aplicadas barrocas en Latinoamérica,” in *Atti Simposio Internazionale sul Barocco Latino Americano*, vol. 1, 157–65.

29 Leopoldo Zea Aguilar, “Ideología y filosofía de la cultura barroca latinoamericana,” in *Atti Simposio Internazionale sul Barocco Latino Americano*, vol. 1, 65–73.

30 Paolo Portoghesi, “Il contributo Americano allo sviluppo dell’architettura barocca,” in *Atti Simposio Internazionale sul Barocco Latino Americano*, vol. 1, 275–83.

31 Erwin Walter Palm, “¿Urbanismo barroco en América Latina?” in *Atti Simposio Internazionale sul Barocco Latino Americano*, vol. 1, 215–20.

reexamining Latin American art and architecture, both remained highly contested.

Gasparini's position deserves attention, as he seems to cultivate the idea of Latin America less for its historical accuracy than for ideological reasons: to promote the production of a Latin American history from within. In his contribution, written in Spanish, Gasparini notes:

When colonial architecture is analyzed from the perspective of Spain, it is considered a provincial extension of the Peninsula because it is still believed that “political geography determines artistic geography.” The reality is quite different: Artistic geography follows different rules of association. The effect of a design that was successful in Brussels resonated in Lima before it did in Madrid or Rome.³²

For Gasparini, artistic references took different routes that transcended the colonial relationship between the Iberian Empire and its territories. Indeed, not only in this paper, but also in a number of writings from these years, Gasparini consistently rejected the idea that baroque architecture from the region was linked to the baroque experience of Spain and the Iberian Peninsula. The issue, for him, was that the dominant narratives produced in Spain excluded alternative explanations based on other modes of communication, circulation of people, and knowledge exchange. Instead, he insisted on revisiting the subject's historiography and incorporating new sources. Gasparini thereby linked baroque architecture in the Latin American region with Italian treaties, techniques, and construction knowledge brought to the Americas by Jesuits, whose specialized education came from Venice. For Gasparini, Venice, Brussels, and Paris were the “real” centers of “knowledge transfer,”³³

32 “Cuando la arquitectura colonial es analizada desde España es considerada como una extensión provincial de la Península porque se sigue creyendo que la “geografía política determina a la geografía artística. La realidad es bastante diferente: la geografía artística sigue reglas de asociación diferentes. El efecto de un diseño que ha tenido éxito en Bruselas repercutía en Lima antes que en Madrid o en Roma.” Graziano Gasparini, “La arquitectura barroca latinoamericana: una persuasiva retórica provincial,” in *Atti Simposio Internazionale sul Barocco Latino Americano*, vol. 1, 391, my translation.

33 See Graziano Gasparini, “Análisis crítico de la historiografía arquitectónica del barroco en América,” in *Boletín del CIHE* 7 (April 1967), 9-29; América, barroco y arquitectura (Caracas: Ernesto Armitano, 1972); “The Present Significance of the Architecture of

leaving Madrid as a secondary source. His thesis conflicted with established views about the Spanish colonial history. It was not easily accepted by the scholarly world, as he himself recognized, and remains a minority position.

Conclusions

While scholarship today generally identifies Latin America and its related categories as relatively coherent, we should keep in mind the embedded theoretical conflicts, ideological frictions, and competing visions they contain. The articulation, circulation, and consumption of Latin America in both popular and scholarly literature involved numerous authors with complex histories and agendas. Between 1950 and 1980, a growing number of intellectuals based in the region began to identify themselves with an idea of Latin America and adopted it as an analytic category, including figures like Bayón, Zea, and Gasparini (discussed here). Not uncommonly, publications, exhibitions, and materials created by artists, writers, architects, and photographers who claimed to be producing a Latin American discourse from within received generous funding and support from UNESCO and partner institutions. Moreover, the more we study the biographical narratives of authors who created this extensive production, the more complex the picture becomes. This complexity stems from the fact that many of them had personal histories of migration and exile, as in the cases of the brothers Paolo and Graziano Gasparini, as well as Erwin Walter Palm.

The baroque, like various other stylistic categories, has often been contested, and debates among art and architecture critics continue.³⁴ The involvement of organizations, scholars, photographers, and events with direct ties to migration highlights both the ambiguities of these categories and their in-

the Past," in *Latin America in Its Architecture*, trans. Edith Grossman Holmes, ed. Roberto Segre and Fernando Kusnetzoff (Paris: UNESCO; New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980), 77–103; and the above-quoted "La arquitectura barroca latinoamericana: una persuasiva retórica provincial."

34 See, for example, Tristan Weddigen, "Hispano-Incaic Fusions: Ángel Guido and the Latin American Reception of Heinrich Wölfflin," in *Art in Translation* 9, supp. 1 (2017), 92–120; Andrew Leach, John Macarthur, and Maarten Delbeke, eds., *The Baroque in Architectural Culture, 1880–1980* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Giulio Carlo Argan, *L'âge baroque* (Geneva: Skira, 1994).

tense political and cultural significance, particularly amid perennial calls for Latin American integration operating within Cold War geopolitical tensions and competing left-wing and reactionary interests on both sides of the Atlantic. While these projects throughout the long 1970s helped legitimize the phrase “Latin America” on a global scale, they were also products of a period when the idea of Latin America in the arts and architecture—whether recent or historical—was contradictory, ideologically charged, and in dispute. On the one hand, institutions from outside the region helped to bring studies of these areas—including contested perspectives—to international attention. On the other, these institutions could not escape being instrumentalized by the very regimes within which they operated. UNESCO’s deployment of these contested narratives about Latin American design history became one of its most significant strategies for maintaining legitimacy on the global stage during the Cold War.



Fig. 50.
“Latin America. 150 years of independence.”
Cover of the UNESCO Courier, June 1961.
Source: UNESCO Archives,
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000064074.locale=en>.



Fig. 51.
Image of the baroque Saint Francis Church in the historic town of Ouro Preto in Brazil, listed since 1980 in the UNESCO World Heritage List
Source: Photographer Meindert Versteeg, 2012, author's collection.



Fig. 52.

Image of the historic town of Ouro Preto in Brazil, listed since 1980 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site

Source: Photographer Meindert Versteeg, 2012, author's collection.

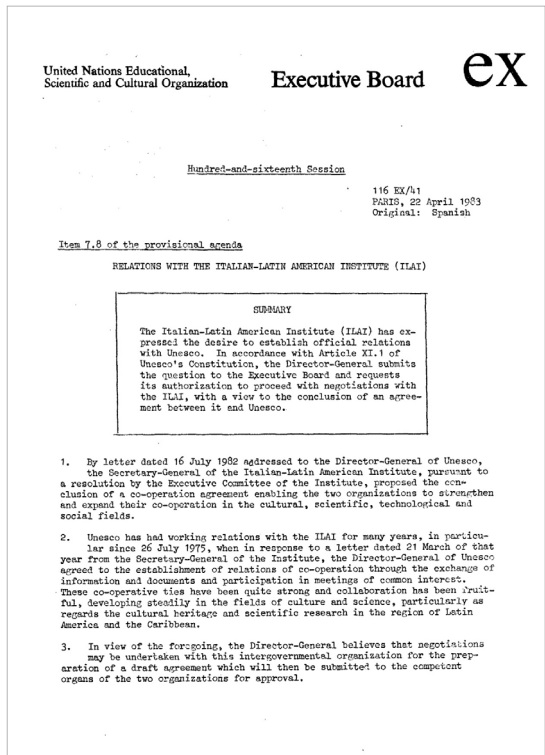


Fig. 53.

First Page of the Draft Agreement between UNESCO and the Italian-Latin American Institute, date 22 April 1983
Source: UNESCO Archives.

Fig. 54.

Graziano Gasparini (1924-2019), Italian born Venezuelan architect.

Source: By Armando Planchart - Archivo Gio Ponti Caracas. Fundación Anala y Armando Planchart: <https://www.elnacional.com/papel-literario/voluntad-artistica-voluntad-historica/>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=110890111>.

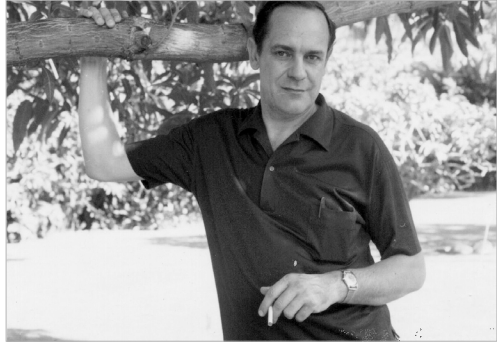


Fig. 55.

Opening of the Exhibition Barocco Latinoamericano in Rome, 1980, displaying architect Paolo Portoghesi and Sandro Pertini, President of the Italian republic. Source: IILA Archive.

Embodiment - Subjectification

History in a Glass House

Philip Johnson's "Stroke of Genius" Between Absolute Contemporaneity and Historical Reference

Markus Dauss

Philip Johnson's Glass House (Fig. 56) is a cuboid measuring 17 by 10 meters. It consists of a steel frame with H-beams and moldings, topped by a ceiling panel of layered plasterboard suspended in a steel frame and mounted on wooden slats. The building sits on a terracotta brick floor, which forms a plinth about 30 centimeters high, raising it slightly above the surrounding lawn. The interior and exterior are separated by thin glass panes, which run in front of load-bearing steel piers. At parapet height, the window surfaces are joined and divided by horizontal steel members. Glass sliding doors are placed in the center of all four sides. A few fixtures act as room dividers: a wooden wall unit of human height (not floor-to-ceiling) delineates the sleeping area (Fig. 57), while a kitchen unit includes appliances, a fold-out countertop, and a bar counter. In the northeast corner, a brick cylinder punctuates the otherwise undifferentiated space, housing a fireplace on one side and a bathroom on the other—water and fire. The elemental form pierces the roof slab (Fig. 58). The cylinder's comparative visual weight anchors the interior and makes the surrounding steel-and-glass structure appear to float. It represents the sole interruption in an otherwise perfect glass box whose exterior surface appears as perfectly smooth as its structural system and interior fixtures appear minimal.

"A house more in name"—this is how Johnson's biographer Franz Schulze describes the concept of maximum reduction that prevails here.¹ Arthur

¹ Franz Schulze, *Philip Johnson: Life and Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 188.

Drexler, Johnson's successor as director of MoMA, echoes this assessment: "In fact, it's less like a house than like a diagram drawn in the air, indicating a certain amount of space."² Minimalism and conceptual abstraction thus define the Glass House. The building is characterized by a dematerialization that reduces it to a graphic cipher. The enclosed space is defined seemingly without effort and, above all, almost without barriers.

These characteristics mark not only a purist understanding of space, but also a modernist contemporaneity that completely rejects traditional architectural principles. Traditional architecture had always designed buildings as massive enclosures with extended walls, pursuing monumental weight and lavish ornamentation. According to Johnson, the only permissible decoration now consisted in the serial use of structural elements, such as beams.³ But in the Glass House, he grants these elements only minimal sculptural expression—at most, they achieve visual presence. The box, whose structure and content resist further reduction, appears as a zero point in the history of architecture conceived as the art of building. It presents itself at first glance as a smooth and therefore reference-free design, a model-less innovation. Cross-connections within the horizon of absolute contemporaneity seem more important than diachronic links in the historical horizon of unbroken continuity.

This radical presentness constitutes the core of the most fundamental reading of Johnson's work that he himself favored. He presented a cutting-edge product that, after its completion in 1949, became—as planned—a topic of conversation and popular destination for the avant-garde circles of the East Coast elite.⁴ Johnson designed the Glass House as his own retreat in the affluent small town of New Canaan, Connecticut, about a two-hour drive from New York City. It was quickly recognized as a statement of achievement by a recent convert to architecture who had also been called a dandy, impresario, curator, and former aspiring politician.⁵ Taking "cutting-edge"

2 Arthur Drexler, "The Architecture Opaque and Transparent," in Philip Johnson: The Glass House, ed. Jeffrey Kipnis and David Whitney (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 2–7, here 6.

3 Philip Johnson, "House in New Canaan, Connecticut," in *Architectural Review* 108 (September 1950), 152–59.

4 Schulze, Philip Johnson, 198.

5 The media hype that Johnson orchestrated is vividly described by Frank D. Welch, *Philip Johnson & Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 30–32.

literally, the glass box sits on the edge of an abrupt drop in terrain on Johnson's sprawling property, overlooking a park-like landscape. The location on one side sports a commanding view. But socially, too, "cutting-edge" assured Johnson a central position and fame within the system of cultural elites. He exploited strategies of "attention economy" to emphasize the absolutely contemporary status of the house he had created for himself.⁶ Furthermore, he set in motion—on a second level—a precisely targeted game of historical references that also included the history of their previous appropriations and modernizations. These dual approaches—the emphasis on radical contemporaneity and the deployment of historical allusions—constituted a sophisticated form of reception control. The strategy was cunning because it deliberately remained in the mode of allusion, leaving the empty, non-explicit spaces to be filled by projection—and it even included false trails. Johnson himself unabashedly described the degree to which his references had influenced him as being as speculative as the interpretations of a Rorschach test.⁷ This strategy was effective. A multitude of readings has wrapped itself like a wreath around Johnson's minimalist glass box. Interpreters have fallen for the narcissist⁸—not excluding the author of these lines (a late and barely mentionable link in this chain). Nevertheless, their interpretive work has produced new, cultural meanings, which somewhat redeems their having been manipulated by Johnson's strategy. Let us reconstruct that dual strategy and its effects in more detail.

6 On this concept of a very special, contemporary form of economy, see Georg Franck, *Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit. Ein Entwurf* (Munich: Hanser, 2007). Franck's concept of the "attention economy" suggests that, in modern society, attention has become a limited and valuable resource. As traditional economic resources become more abundant, focus has shifted to controlling and capturing human attention. This makes attention a key asset for businesses, media, and even individuals, as it drives consumer behavior and influences public opinion. In this framework, attention is not only scarce but must be strategically acquired, managed, and retained, as it has become crucial for success in a media-driven world. As we will see, Johnson mastered the business of capturing and managing attention with great expertise.

7 Schulze, Philip Johnson, 197. The metaphor of the Rohrschach test comes from an interview on August 26, 1990.

8 On the topic of narcissism see Nerma Cridge, "Excess Water: On Floods, Architectural 'Selfies' and Being Inside the Rain," *Images (IV): Images of the Other: Istanbul, Vienna and Venice*, ed. Veronika Bernhard (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2015), 39–48, here 43.

Johnson's essential strategy for creating contemporaneity centers on an omnipresent appeal to Mies van der Rohe.⁹ This approach, however, operates not only through conspicuous reference to his great contemporary, but also includes partial rejection. Most strikingly, Mies is invoked both materially and discursively as a great inspiration: approaching the Glass House from the side, we immediately notice the "hollow corner" (Fig. 59) that mediates the meeting of the glass panels on the long and short sides via a double-T beam (= H-beam), which serves as a framing hinge. This can be understood as a reprise of the "negative" corner cultivated by Mies,¹⁰ who had just implemented it on the IIT campus in Chicago. This corner solution was initially developed in 1939 and pursued further in the 1940s. The invocation of Mies becomes even more intense through the strong typological proximity to Mies's iconic glass and steel skeleton house in Plano (Illinois), designed for Edith Farnsworth and built between 1945 and 1951 (Fig. 60).¹¹ This, too, is an "intimate" weekend pavilion in the countryside (if a transparent building can be described as such). In it, all interior fixtures were contained in a functional core recessed from the (glass) walls and, partly, from the ceiling. This design provided crucial inspiration for Johnson's own solitary showpiece, which he began planning in late 1945. He had probably seen it in drawings during his research for the Mies exhibition he organized for MoMA in 1946–47.¹² However, Johnson completed his retreat considerably earlier than Mies himself. By overtaking him in realizing the idea, Johnson was first to reap the rewards.¹³ This chronological coup naturally lent the project a particularly acute presen-

9 On Johnson's admiration for Mies, which had a pronounced impact beyond the Glass House, see Mirka Beneš, "A Modern Classic: The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden," in Philip Johnson and the Museum of Modern Art, ed. John Elderfield (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 104–51, here 133.

10 Johnson, *House at New Canaan*, 155. On Mies's negative corner solution, which can be understood as a kind of "architectural still life" that presents a recess but also stages an angled profile, see Carsten Krohn, *Mies van der Rohe. Das gebaute Werk* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2014), 115.

11 Jean-Louis Cohen, *Mies Van Der Rohe* (London: E. & F. N. Spon, 1996), 88–95; Franz Schulze, *Mies van der Rohe. Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1986), 262–268.

12 Schulze, *Philip Johnson*, 191. A model of the Farnsworth House was also shown at the Mies exhibition.

13 On the question of authorship in relation to chronology and originality, see Amanda Reeser Lawrence, *The Architecture of Influence: The Myth of Originality in the Twentieth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2023), 42–43.

ce. At the same time, the constellation, marked by both inspiration and competition, could be interpreted as a patricide scene—highly valuable in terms of attention economy. Johnson actually held Mies, who was thirty years his senior and had moved to the United States in 1938, in the highest esteem. He considered him a better designer than Gropius,¹⁴ even though Johnson chose to study architecture at Harvard's Graduate School of Design with Gropius and Breuer beginning in 1940. Johnson even thought Mies to be superior to Le Corbusier and J.J.P. Oud. But correspondingly grand was his ambition to match or surpass Mies with a stroke of genius—a plot that the malicious nickname “Mies van der Johnson” aptly summarizes (although Johnson knew how to integrate it into his self-image for years).¹⁵

Johnson's modifications of the Mies model in his own project are accordingly striking: Both works have twelve steel supports (counting the four stubs of the terrace platform at Farnsworth House), but Johnson painted them black rather than white. The Johnson pavilion sits on a bare brick podium—an “earthen” material—rather than being raised off the ground like the Farnsworth House, which was elevated owing to flooding threats from the nearby river.¹⁶ Most importantly, the Glass House's support system is not located outside the glazed space, as in the Miesian pavilion, but is instead retracted behind the window surfaces. The glass skin thus emerges as an independent shell, becoming a membrane-like two-sided form whose flatness encloses the interior while enabling unbroken communication with the outside. The glass-smooth, shadow-free surfaces act either like stage curtains through which we view the picturesque surrounding scenery or, when exposed to direct sunlight, like screens that capture reflections. With Mies, we feel inspired to push the glass surfaces aside, despite their transparency, like *shōji* in a Japanese house, as opposed to those where the suppor-

14 Schulze, Philip Johnson, 148.

15 Christian Bjone, Philip Johnson and His Mischief: Appropriation in Art and Architecture (Victoria: Images Publishing, 2014), 19.

16 For a formally precise, albeit judgmental, comparison of the two houses, see Felix Schwarz, “Betrachtungen zu den Apartments von Ludwig Mies van der Rohe und Philip Johnson,” in *Bauen und Wohnen* 6 (1952), 1–6. A more analytic approach is Michael Hesse, “Philip Johnsons Glashaus in New Ganaan. Moderne als Postmoderne,” in *Wie eindeutig ist ein Kunstwerk?*, ed. Max Imdahl (Cologne: DuMont, 1987), 36–45, here 38–39.

ting framework would stay in place.¹⁷ Johnson's House, by contrast, operates not tectonically but scenographically, as Kenneth Frampton put its.¹⁸

Furthermore, Johnson's design, unlike that of Mies, has neither a loggia spatially recessed from the box nor a terrace in front of it. Unity dominates over differentiation. Yet even in this homogenized design, subtly opposing tendencies lurk in the background. Kenneth Frampton has explored their role in the design process based of ninety-five drawings that Johnson donated to the MoMA in 1976, probably not without ulterior motives.¹⁹ These drawings reveal that, during the entire, slowly advancing design process, the architect nevertheless grappled intensely with the problem of spatial differentiation. In essence, he sought to mediate between opening the enclosed volume to the surrounding space through a loggia, and concentrating the space inward in the form of an atrium or courtyard house. Significantly, Johnson explored this through various solutions that Mies had already developed.

Johnson's models for this exploration included Mies's realized buildings, such as the Barcelona Pavilion, Villa Tugendhat, and Haus Lange, as well as unbuilt projects like the Kröller-Müller and Hubbe Houses. Johnson distilled from his appropriation an integrated, compact solution. This dispensed with both loggia and courtyard, favoring a glassy volume instead of an interlocking arrangement of building masses. At the same time, however, Johnson turned the lawn surrounding the pavilion into a platform that can be understood as an extension of the architecture—and thus as a terrace.²⁰ Its boundary "wall" consists of the edge before the cliff drop. Thus, if the lawn-defined space surrounding the Glass House is understood as architecture, the trans-

17 On Mies's references to Japan, see Inge Andritz, *Mies van der Rohe und Japan* (Salzburg: Mury Salzmann, 2018).

18 Kenneth Frampton, "The Glass House Revisited," in *Philip Johnson: The Glass House*, ed. Kipnis and Whitney, 92–114, here 94. Hesse sees things differently: He understands Mies's emphasis on the structural framework as ensuring that the elevated house will float, while Johnson accepts the logic of loads and supports (as the interplay of floor and ceiling slabs reveals). This thesis, however, fails to recognize that Mies's impression of floating primarily confirms the tectonic structure through negation, without abandoning the structural system, whereas Johnson's glass box—this "celestial elevator" around a cylindrical anchor—creates an almost weightless enclosure that seems to contain nothing but air. See Hesse, "Philip Johnsons Glashaus", 39.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Frampton, "The Glass House Revisited," 92.

parent pavilion itself can be interpreted as the “poured out” volume of a courtyard space recessed from a virtual building. Such inversions of inside and outside are commonplace in the Glass House. The carpet in the living area on the brick floor can also be understood as marking an architectural island or “raft.”²¹ It supports numerous pieces of Mies furniture, including ones from the Barcelona Pavilion and the Tugendhat House. These furnishings present themselves as if raised on a pedestal, yet are simultaneously incorporated into Johnson’s patricidal project. Mies is honored but, more importantly, swallowed up by Johnson’s own work. The Glass House can be read as a large museum showcase or a protective cover (like those over Victorian clocks),²² but above all it displays itself as Johnson’s own central showpiece.

This game of both embracing and rejecting his great contemporary Mies—the father figure who is both invoked and “murdered”—secured Johnson public attention. Above all, it dramaturgically ensured modernist contemporaneity. The references to the gradual evolution of Mies’s modernist spatial concepts are thus transformed into a pattern of oscillation between “inside” and “outside.” This creates a heightened sense of contemporary relevance, even if it includes museumizing tendencies and genealogical references (the father Mies displayed like an exhibit).

The contemporaneity thus generated was anchored in Johnson himself. After all, he had helped Mies rise to prominence in the United States following their first contact in Europe in 1930, paving the way for Mies’s career there. Johnson had arranged Mies’s decisive first US commission—the design of his own New York apartment—which was a cornerstone of the German’s successful emigration in 1938.²³ Further support came through exhibitions and publications, most notably the 1932 MoMA exhibition *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, which publicized European modernism in America.²⁴ Mies received special attention in this exhibition, and Johnson also devoted an essay to him in the exhibition catalog, which established the

21 Drexler, “Opaque and Transparent,” 2.

22 Ibid., 4.

23 See Margret Kentgens-Craig, *The Bauhaus and America: First Contacts, 1919-1936* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 188–89.

24 On Johnson’s work at MoMA and his congenial pairing with the institution’s guiding spirit, Alfred Barr, see David A. Hanks and Friedrich Meschede (eds.), *Partners in Design*. Alfred H. Barr jr. and Philip Johnson: *Bauhaus-Pioniere in Amerika* (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche, 2017).

term “International Style” for the new architecture.²⁵ In 1947 Johnson published the first American biography of Mies, accompanying the exhibition of the same name at the MoMA.²⁶

But Johnson also breaks from his primary reference in the Mies-laden Glass House, employing equally significant references to genealogical lines reaching further back in history. These too are cleverly, almost deviously, deployed as attention-grabbing strategies. They operate in the register of the historically educated and appeal to the culturally literate. We will return to them in a moment.

In the *Architectural Review* of September 1950, Johnson published a text revealing his sources of inspiration—whether genuine or alleged remains unclear.²⁷ Here, too, Mies is named as a reference, and Johnson exhaustively acknowledges his debt in an almost excessive manner. Johnson had placed a brick-built service building in a slightly offset position at the side of his Glass House containing its infrastructure and guest facilities. As a model for this arrangement, he cites the massing of Mies’s above-mentioned IIT buildings. The Farnsworth House is also dutifully listed as a typological inspiration for the Glass Pavilion itself, and the architect mentions the exemplary nature of Mies’s corner solutions and bifurcated support structure. The room arrangement in the slightly offset Guest House opposite is also attributed to Miesian precedent—but in such generic terms that verification is nearly impossible. At one point, however, Johnson distances himself from his great inspiration: The arrangement of built-in cabinets in relation to the brick cylinder in the main house is, according to the architect, more painterly than Mies would ever have tolerated.²⁸ Nonetheless, Franz Schulze has demonstrated that Mies indeed had similar ideas for precisely such an arrangement in preliminary sketches for the Farnsworth House.²⁹

25 Philip Johnson, “Mies van der Rohe,” in *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*. New York, Feb. 10 to March 23, 1932, ed. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., Philip Johnson, and Lewis Mumford (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1932), 111–116.

26 Philip C. Johnson, *Mies Van Der Rohe*. Sep 16, 1947–Jan 25, 1948, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1947).

27 See Philip Johnson, “House at New Canaan, Connecticut,” in *Architectural Review* 108 (September 1950), 152–158.

28 *Ibid.*, 155.

29 Schulze, Philip Johnson, 197.

Over-emphasis on alliance and false emphasis on distance thus stand side by side. More importantly, the register of contemporary references expands even further. The network of paths to and between the two buildings on Johnson's property derives, according to Johnson, from one of Le Corbusier's designs (*Schema du Village*, 1933). Similarly, the relationship between the two blocks—including the sculpture placed between the two buildings (a Lifschitz)—was designed according to theories of the French architectural historian Auguste Choisy (Fig. 61). Choisy had investigated the visual relationships on the Athenian Acropolis,³⁰ an ensemble that is not purely axially symmetrical but has a more complex structure, and he paid particular attention to the mobility of the viewer, including oblique perspectives and overlapping views.³¹ These performative considerations had, in turn, inspired Le Corbusier in developing the choreographic sequences with which he intended to shape the movements and emotions of building users—the so-called *promenade architecturale*.³² Le Corbusier had systematized his own intense Acropolis viewing experiences (dating from 1911) through this concept.³³

This represents a strategic double move on Johnson's part. It strengthens the classical references inherent in his Glass House, such as its placement on a podium, the suggested exterior stairs in front of the door entrances, and the axially symmetrical arrangement of the entrances.³⁴ His design is enno-

30 The Lifschitz sculpture evokes the Athena Promachos, a bronze statue by Phidias that stood between the Propylaea (the entrance gate to the Athenian Acropolis) and the Erechtheion temple. It was hence positioned to the left of the processional route to the Parthenon during the Panathenaic festivals.

31 Auguste Choisy, *Histoire de l'architecture*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1899), 409–422.

32 In *Vers une Architecture* (Paris: Editions G. Crès et Cie., 1923), Le Corbusier reproduces Auguste Choisy's diagrammatic representations of Acropolis views without crediting him, using these diagrams to illustrate his own concept of non-axial building arrangements.

33 Turit Fröbe, "Weg und Bewegung in der Architektur Le Corbusiers," in *Wolkenkuckucksheim* 9, no. 1 (November 2004), <https://www.cloud-cuckoo.net/openarchive/wolke/deu/Themen/041/Froebe/froebe.htm>; Turit Fröbe, *Die Inszenierung eines Mythos. Le Corbusier und die Akropolis* (Gütersloh: Bauverlag, 2017). See also Elisabeth Blum, *Le Corbusiers Wege: Wie das Zauberwerk in Gang gesetzt wird* (Braunschweig: Friedr. Vieweg & Sohn, 1988).

34 Hesse sees this axial position as anchoring a cluster of classic formal relationships in a symmetrical and hierarchical system. See Hesse, "Philip Johnsons Glashauss", 39f.

bled as a result.³⁵ At the same time, oblique perspectives accentuate the character of the Glass House as a pure box and thus as a modernist spatial invention.³⁶ In this way, gestures toward the ancient world are channeled into the broad current of modernist receptions of antiquity, which are no longer purely symmetry-based but rethink the idea of classical wholeness—a powerful contemporary discourse. The Choisy-Corbusier reference distances antiquity in favor of its modern interpretation. Affective impact is also emphasized through Johnson's placement of his surprisingly minimal pavilion against a green backdrop, an environment with which it visually merges, especially when viewed obliquely. It is probably in this sense that Johnson also refers to the “romanticist” or “romantic classicist” Schinkel, especially regarding the exposed positioning of his building volumes.³⁷ He cites as an example the casino that Schinkel built in 1824 on the sloping bank of the Jungfernsee at Glienicke.³⁸ There, Schinkel demonstrated a dramaturgy of surprise—that is, he developed an effective strategy for engaging the viewer. Mies's own enthusiastic reception of Schinkel remains unmentioned as a mediating link—is it assumed to be included or deliberately suppressed?

Johnson followed a different path to his encounter with another central reference: so-called revolutionary architecture, above all the buildings of Claude Nicolas Ledoux. The Austrian émigré Emil Kaufmann, a representative of the Vienna School of Art History, had coined the term in several writings, most notably *From Ledoux to Le Corbusier: Origins and Evolution of Autonomous Architecture* (1933).³⁹ He also presented these ideas in a 1942 lecture delivered at a house that Johnson had built on Ash Street on the Harvard campus that same year (Fig. 62).⁴⁰ Kaufmann argued that revolutionary upheaval and modernism shared design continuity. The architects of the late eighteenth century had achieved the autonomy of individual building parts, thus breaking down baroque unity in favor of elementary components. Johnson saw the separation between his Glass House and its guest house as

35 Drexler, “Opaque and Transparent,” 5.

36 Hesse, “Philip Johnsons Glashaus,” 39.

37 Johnson, *House in New Canaan*, 154.

38 The architect in charge was Ludwig Persius.

39 Emil Kaufmann, *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier. Ursprung und Entwicklung der Autonomen Architektur* (Vienna: Passer, 1933).

40 Reeser Lawrence, *The Architecture of Influence*, 61.

a continuation of this practice. He also considered the geometric purity of his cubic glass pavilion and its interior arrangement—which inscribes a circle within a rectangle—as indebted to these “revolutionary” achievements.⁴¹ After all, the “intellectual revolutionaries” of the period around 1800 had preferred “absolute” basic geometric forms. What is at stake here, as Johnson makes clear, is a narrative of inheritance. The architect places himself in the lineage of a continuing revolutionary movement of upheaval—a common modernist trope. Here, too, the legacy of the past is brought into the present through two determining concepts: teleology and temporal rupture.

Johnson’s textual self-interpretation moves to yet another level with a genuine shift in register. He had already examined his buildings from an aerial perspective to discuss their arrangement and ensemble effects. Yet he further abstracts these diagrammatic views, even aestheticizing them in pursuit of elevation to the level of “art.” The architect draws parallels to the European visual avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s, seeing similarities with compositions by Theo van Doesburg and Kazimir Malevich—works of concrete art and suprematism (Fig. 63).⁴² A Poussin placed in the Glass House’s living area imbues these references with additional historical depth.⁴³ Johnson programmatically chooses a painting by an artist who created classically “timeless” order and established strict harmony between nature and culture: Poussin had organized his paintings according to elaborate grids, condensed his figures into silhouette-like clarity, and framed pictorial objects with *repoussoirs*.⁴⁴ The view from the house’s interior onto the surrounding nature, as well as onto reflections on the exterior window surfaces, now appears an actual continuation of this historical vision.

These references to painterly order elevate the building into the sphere of high art. They transform the architectural order into an aesthetic “second nature.” Moreover, they underscore its autonomy by invoking the abstraction underlying these analogies. Why was Johnson so interested in elevating and autonomizing his work? What did “art,” as pure and detached form, promise, as symbolized by the early modernist visual avant-garde in its “floa-

41 Johnson, *House in New Canaan*, 154.

42 *Ibid.*, 133, 138.

43 Neil Jackson, *The Modern Steel House* (London: Wiley, 1996), 70.

44 Pierre Rosenberg and Keith Christiansen, *Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007), vii.

ting” arrangements? Specific motives can be assumed, beyond a general desire for elevated status. Johnson had resigned from his post as curator of architecture at MoMA in 1934 to pursue a journalistic-political career, courting the emerging American fascist ultra-right.⁴⁵ He first operated in the circle of authoritarian populists like Huey Long. Then he joined the followers of a national fascism with an anti-elitist economic platform, such as Lawrence Dennis. Finally, Johnson disseminated and promoted ideas from the camp of Charles Coughlin, a demagogue who argued in egalitarian terms but agitated with antisemitic slogans. Johnson had observed the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany with undisguised fascination and approval, partly, it has been speculated, owing to the movement’s homoerotic undertones. He even established contacts during his trips to Germany. This proximity culminated in a press tour financed by the Nazi Propaganda Ministry in September 1939, during which Johnson reported sympathetically on the German invasion of Poland. From 1940, and certainly after 1941, against the backdrop of America’s entry into the war, this alliance with the political right increasingly damaged Johnson’s reputation—right-wing groups were monitored by the intelligence services and became the subject of public and legal scrutiny. Johnson the careerist saw his social standing and professional networks threatened, effectively ending this phase of his career. His enrollment at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1941 marked a liberating change of direction. He completed his studies with a built diploma thesis, the aforementioned house at 9 Ash Street, which was uncompromisingly Mies-oriented and a commitment to pure International Style.⁴⁶

We might read more into Johnson’s decision to become a practicing architect—a shift whose meaning is embodied by the solitary glass house on his property in New Canaan, media coverage of which he actively promoted. The house could be understood as a gesture toward transparency through which Johnson attempted to cleanse or whitewash his biography. However, the glass structure he had created through sheer force of will and which he refined into pure form could also be interpreted as continuing his previous

45 The following sections are based on Mark Lamster, *The Man in the Glass House: Philip Johnson, Architect of the Modern Century* (New York: Little, Brown, 2018).

46 For more on the obvious Mies model here—his unbuilt Hubbe House (1934/35, Magdeburg)—see Alex Beam, *Broken Glass: Mies van der Rohe, Edith Farnsworth, and the Fight over a Modernist Masterpiece* (New York: Random House, 2020), 107–108.

commitments: Voluntaristic, Nietzschean ideas had also influenced Johnson's engagement with right-wing ideologies. In these ideologies, populism and elitist contempt for the masses, political activism, and quasi-religious devotion to art coexisted. Art was conceived as both an act of will and an act of purification.

Particularly in this latter sense, architecture could serve as biographical exoneration. Johnson demonstrated strategic acumen here as well: he was careful not to make the purification strategy too transparent. The brick cylinder—opaque and deliberately severed from the Miesian aesthetic—plays a crucial role. Johnson writes:

The cylinder, made of the same brick as the platform from which it springs, forming the main motif of the house, was not derived from Mies, but rather from a burnt wooden village I saw once where nothing was left but foundations and chimneys of brick. Over the chimney I slipped a steel cage with a glass skin. The chimney forms the anchor.⁴⁷

Interpreters consider this enigmatic passage a veiled reference to Johnson's journalistic coverage of the German invasion of Poland (Fig. 64).⁴⁸ This biographical episode compromised Johnson's reputation, yet he strategically appropriated this very blemish in a move that could be perceived as transparent and "honest." At the same time, he transposed the memory of his compromising flirtation with the Nazi regime into the realm of ruin aesthetics, with all its nostalgic and reflective connotations,⁴⁹ and placed it—under the glass skin as a showcase—in a kind of museum. By transferring a biographi-

47 Johnson, "House in New Canaan," 157.

48 Peter Eisenman, "Behind the Mirror: On the Writings of Philip Johnson," in *Oppositions* 10 (Fall 1977), 1–13, here 12; reprinted in Peter Eisenman, *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings, 1963–1988* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 88–105, here 103; also Schulze, *Philip Johnson*, 197.

49 On ruins as media of temporal reflection and allegorical meaning, see Hartmut Böhme, "Die Ästhetik der Ruinen," in *Der Schein des Schönen*, ed. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf (Göttingen: Steidl, 1989), 287–304; and Gérard Raulet, "Die Ruinen im ästhetischen Diskurs der Moderne," in *Ruinen des Denkens, Denken in Ruinen*, ed. Norbert Bolz and Willem van Reijen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 179–214. On the ruin cults of the modern era, see Eva Kociszky, *Ruinen in der Moderne. Archäologie und die Künste* (Berlin: Reimer, 2011).

cal transgression into the register of modern ruin discourse, Johnson established significant interpretive ambiguity. The building's meaning oscillates between explicit reference and nebulous semantic polyvalence. Johnson later confessed to have been morally misguided at the time, characterizing his alliance with the right as "stupidity."⁵⁰ However, his Nazi confession yielded no substantive consequences. He never proactively made public statements or similar gestures. Johnson's handling of this biographical phase remained fundamentally reactive—or purely aesthetic.

Placing his departure from Nazism in the debris field of ruins served not only as exculpation through obfuscation, but as an essential strategic move within the attention economy. Allegorical enigmas from the field of ruin aesthetics ensure visibility and invite interpretation.⁵¹ However, as already indicated, the significance of the Glass House extends beyond deciphering these strategically positioned interpretive cues. The multiple historical and ruinous references also open the structure to future connections that arise once morphologic and paradigmatic boundaries have been crossed.⁵² Johnson himself articulated many such connections in the following decades through "follies" placed on his property, experimental buildings, and representative summaries of his evolving creative phases.⁵³ Despite its self-refer-

50 "I have no excuse [for] such utter, unbelievable stupidity," as cited in Kurt Andersen, "Philip the Great," in *Vanity Fair* 56, no. 6 (June 1993), 154.

51 This applies to a certain extent to historical examples of cylindrical buildings inspired by ruins—for example, the monumental and curiously habitable column in the *Désert de Retz* landscape garden near Marly (1781) and the distinctively crowned cylinders featured in Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's utopian-revolutionary house designs from the 1770s and 1780s.

52 Hesse recognizes the Glass House as marking a pivotal moment. He bases this assessment on Johnson's many subtle reversals of Mies's design principles, the house's emphatically classical appearance filtered through modernity, and its associative evocation of modernist formal innovations. Hesse also perceives a temporal displacement or synchronicity that signals a transition into postmodern architectural discourse—a thesis we have developed above. See Hesse, "Philip Johnson's Glashaus."

53 On these constructions in the context of a history of the "folly," see Celia Fisher, *The Story of Follies: Architectures of Eccentricity* (London: Reaktion, 2022), 365f. Adele Tutter has presented an impressive psychoanalytical reading of the entire ensemble built around the Glass House. Starting with Johnson's own vision of the house as his "diary," she interprets it not only as documentation of a constantly evolving self and an explicitly autobiographical statement, but also as the manifestation of a dream rooted in latent desires, memories, and conflicts. The house's duality of opacity and

rential nature, this demonstrated the Glass House's constructive openness, transposing it into *post-histoire* and its temporal simultaneity.

At least one different story could be told, however, that operates less on psychological or biographical levels. This approach also examines what the Glass House includes or excludes, reveals or conceals—but from a social perspective.⁵⁴ Conceptual artist and theorist Jeff Wall has proposed such a socially critical reading. He interprets the glass cube as a manifestation of repressed social fears and fantasies of domination that are simultaneously exhibited and contained. Here, the gaze of domination is cast back from the outside, transforming the subject of domination into the focal point of an abstract surveillance apparatus.⁵⁵ The structure's stylish contemporaneity

transparency corresponds to the psychoanalytic distinction between latent and manifest content, with the dream serving as mediating hinge. The guiding metaphor here is the house as a symbol of personal integrity, which Freud considered to be one of the most stable symbols in psychoanalytical interpretation. This is supplemented by a more process-oriented metaphor comparing dream work with architectural (re) construction. Like the skeletal, "ruinous" Glass House, the dream recombines found fragments. The analogies observed by Tutter are reinforced by the passion shared by both Johnson and Freud for the relics of classical antiquity, which function as an archaic reservoir waiting to be excavated and recombined. She names specific sources of inspiration from Mycenae that were familiar to Johnson, an expert on antiquity, and which blended with his childhood memories to create overdetermined elements. The question remains, however, whether this reading remains too fixated on motifs and overemphasizes the supposed "legibility" of symbols, rather than recognizing that, as Johnson himself put it, form follows form. See Adele Tutter, "Design as Dream and Self-Representation: Philip Johnson and the Glass House of Atreus," in *Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association* 59 (2011): 509–548. Francesco Dal Co, whose deconstructivist work Tutter is familiar with, has characterized the entire New Canaan ensemble as a kind of autobiographical labyrinth. According to Dal Co, it contains false traces and traps, constituting a space that ultimately lacks a key. The "collectibles" stored in this erratic environment do not coalesce into a coherent representation of the self, and no external vantage point exists from which a meta-reading could operate. See Francesco Dal Co, "House of Dreams and Memories," in *Lotus International* 35, (1982), 122–28.

54 Jeff Wall, "Dan Grahams Kammerspiel," in *Szenarien im Bildraum der Wirklichkeit. Essays und Interviews*, ed. Gregor Stemmerich (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1997), 89–187, here especially 150–187.

55 Wall interprets the chimney cylinder not primarily as a ruin, but as evidence of Johnson's manipulation of the stereotypical embodiment of domesticity. He also examines the curved plate at the chimney's opening, which protects against flying

then derives not from erudite and *aesthetically* “revolutionary” references, but itself constitute the crystallization point of socio-political forces and their historical antagonisms.

Contemporary global developments raise an urgent question that has long remained hidden beneath aesthetic and psychological interpretive layers, and which compels us to reexamine such greenhouses of aesthetic and social modernity through a different lens—that of rising temperatures. This merits separate discussion beyond our current scope. However, one point deserves attention: a tradition notably absent from both Johnson’s own promotion of the Glass House and its critical reception—glass palaces as atmospherically controlled, materially refined, structurally determined spaces.⁵⁶ These structures oscillate between the prosaic fulfillment of infrastructural or commercial functions and the spectacular exposition of utopian visions⁵⁷—concepts whose apparent contrast, viewed from today’s perspective, reveals common ground: their anchorage in the fossil fuel era.⁵⁸ Invoking these constructed bubbles, which can only be air-conditioned with great effort,⁵⁹ as precursors to Johnson’s Glass House would have suggested too direct a lineage and resulted in an unflattering diminishment of his status.⁶⁰

sparks while reflecting viewers in a distorted manner. For Wall, this anamorphic distortion indicates that the forces at work in the Glass House function not only as products of a narcissistic apparatus, but also as vectors of alienating distortion that generate an uncanny double of the self. See Wall, “Dan Grahams Kammerspiel”, 183.

- 56 On this tradition, see John Hix, *The Glass House* (Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press, 1974); John McKean, *Lost Masterpieces: Joseph Paxton, Crystal Palace; Ferdinand Dutert, Palais Des Machines; McKim, Mead and White, Pennsylvania Station* (London: Phaidon, 1999).
- 57 Peter Sloterdijk, *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals. Für eine philosophische Theorie der Globalisierung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), 265–276.
- 58 On further reflections on Mies and Johnson’s glass pavilions as architectural paradigms of the carbon age, see Ute Poerschke et al., “Making the Glass House Habitable: The Debate on Transparency and A. William Hajjar’s Contribution in the Mid-Twentieth Century,” in *In Face Time: The Emergence of the Façade as the Integrative Factor in Holistic Building Design*, ed. Douglas Noble, (Los Angeles, 2016), 1–10.
- 59 On the example of the London Crystal Palace, see Henrik Schoenefeldt, “The Crystal Palace, environmentally considered,” in *Architectural Research* 12, no. 3/4 (2008), 283–294.
- 60 This may appear paradoxical given the Crystal Palace’s comparatively vast scale, but becomes evident when considering the Glass House’s status as a globally recognized architectural icon.

This tradition was therefore excluded from the strategic discourses orchestrated by Johnson and his followers.



Fig. 56.
Philip Johnson, Glass House (exterior), New Canaan, CT, 1948–49.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Glasshouse-philip-johnson.jpg>.



Fig. 57.
Philip Johnson, Glass House (interior), New Canaan, CT,
1948–49. Photo: Simon Garcia. [https://archeyes.com/
philip-johnsons-glass-house-an-icon-of-international-style-architecture](https://archeyes.com/philip-johnsons-glass-house-an-icon-of-international-style-architecture).



Fig. 58.
Philip Johnson, Glass House (interior), New Canaan, CT,
1948–49, Photo: Simon Garcia. [https://archeyes.com/
philip-johnsons-glass-house-an-icon-of-international-style-architecture](https://archeyes.com/philip-johnsons-glass-house-an-icon-of-international-style-architecture).

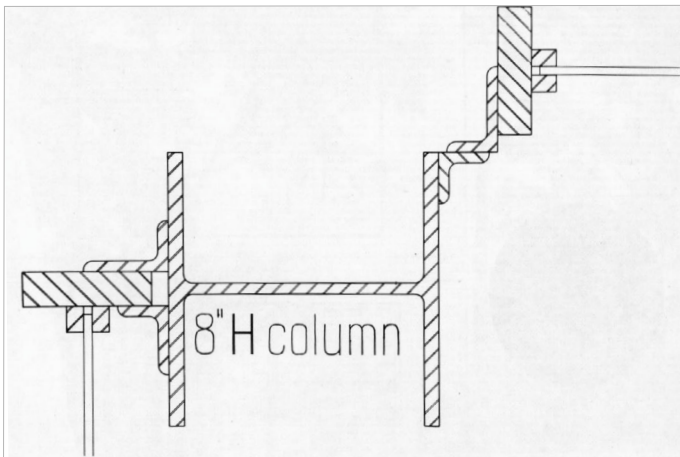
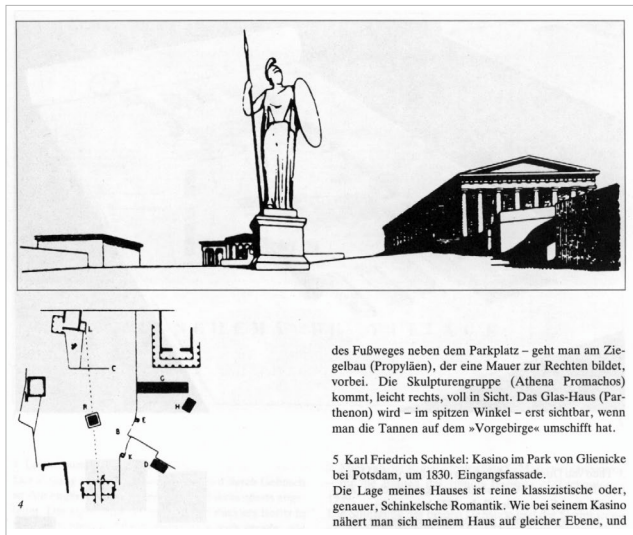


Fig. 59.
Philip Johnson, Glass House (cut through the corner), New Canaan, CT, 1948–49.
From Philip Johnson, "House in New Canaan, Connecticut," *Texte zur Architektur*
(Stuttgart 1982), 130–143, here: 139.



Fig. 60.
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Farnsworth House, Plano, IL, 1945–51. Photo: Victor Crigas. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Farnsworth_House_by_Mies_Van_Der_Rohe_-_exterior-8.jpg.



des Fußweges neben dem Parkplatz – geht man am Ziegelbau (Propyläen), der eine Mauer zur Rechten bildet, vorbei. Die Skulpturengruppe (Athena Promachos) kommt, leicht rechts, voll in Sicht. Das Glas-Haus (Parthenon) wird – im spitzen Winkel – erst sichtbar, wenn man die Tannen auf dem »Vorgebirge« umschifft hat.

5 Karl Friedrich Schinkel: Kasino im Park von Glienicke bei Potsdam, um 1830. Eingangsfassade. Die Lage meines Hauses ist reine klassizistische oder, genauer, Schinkelsche Romantik. Wie bei seinem Kasino nähert man sich meinem Haus auf gleicher Ebene, und

Fig. 61.
Plan and Perspective of the Acropolis at Athens from Choisy's "L'Histoire de l'Art Grecque" from Philip Johnson, "House in New Canaan, Connecticut," Texte zur Architektur (Stuttgart 1982), 130–143, here: 134.

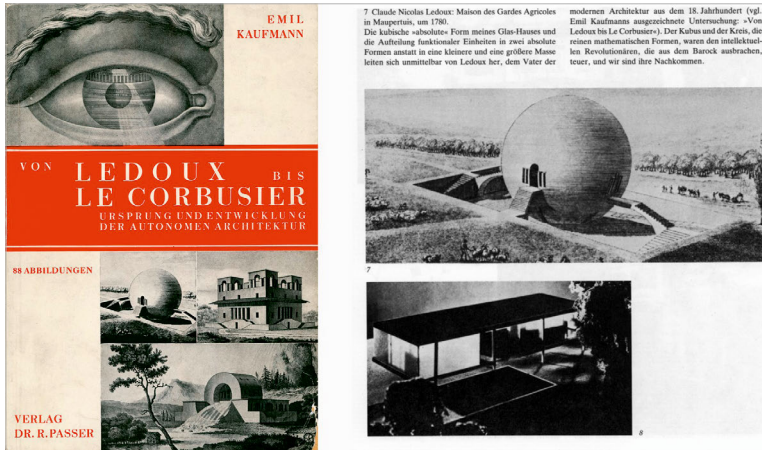


Fig. 62. Emil Kaufmann, Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier. Ursprung und Entwicklung der autonomen Architektur (Vienna: Passer, 1933), cover, and "Claude Nicolas Ledoux: Maison des Gardes Agricoles in Maupertuis, um 1780," from Philip Johnson, "House in New Canaan, Connecticut," Texte zur Architektur (Stuttgart 1982), 130–143, here: 136.

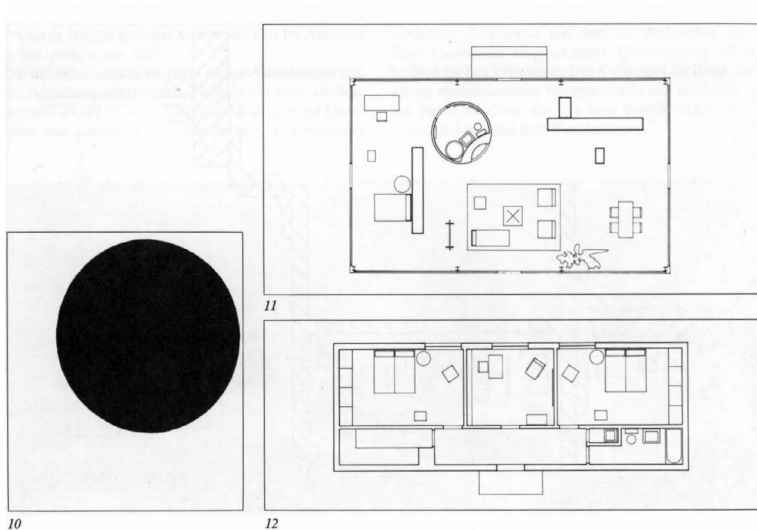


Fig. 63. "Kasimir Malewitsch: Suprematist Element: Circle–1913," "Haus Johnson: Grundriß des Glas-Hauses," and "Haus Johnson: Grundriß des Ziegelbaus," from Philip Johnson, "House in New Canaan, Connecticut," Texte zur Architektur (Stuttgart 1982), 130–143, here: 138.



Fig. 64.
September 1939: An advance detachment of the Wehrmacht in front of a burning farm in Poland (Image: AP), and Philip Johnson, Glass House (exterior), New Canaan, CT, 1948–49.
Photo: Richard Barnes (<http://www.richardbarnes.net/the-glass-house>).

The Architect as Psychologist

Charles W. Moore's Professional Self-Conception and the Conversion of 403 Elm Street¹

Achim Reese

After being appointed chairman of the Department of Architecture at the Yale School of Art and Architecture in 1965, Charles Moore moved into a modern rental house designed by one of his new colleagues. Unhappy with the residence, which he characterized as “definitely not me,”² Moore decided to purchase an old house from the 1860s near the New Haven campus. Over the next several years, he continuously transformed the wooden structure. Even though most of his interventions affected the interior, the modified house became widely known: Besides serving as a recurring party venue for fellow faculty members,³ Moore's 403 Elm Street was featured in international publications—both in the architectural press and a 1969 issue of *Playboy* magazine.⁴

Given that 403 Elm Street—the fourth of eight houses that Moore built or adapted for himself over the course of his life—was exposed to a large audience in this manner, it seems worthwhile to consider it in the light of the tradition of architects' own houses. From this point of view, an examination of the transformations Moore effected may shed light on his profes-

1 This essay is based on the author's PhD thesis, *Orte für das Selbst* (2021), which was published by Birkhäuser as part of the *Bauwelt Fundamente* series in December 2024.

2 David Littlejohn, *Architect: The Life and Work of Charles W. Moore* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 77.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, 81.

nal ethos. Indeed, this approach reveals that Moore conceived of himself as comparable to a psychologist or psychiatrist.⁵

Built Business Cards

In the nineteenth century, designing bourgeois dwellings became a standard task for architects in its own right. As such, the architect's own house has been viewed as a kind of "built business card."⁶ Clients-cum-architects have used the opportunity to design their own residences so as to reflect their approaches to architecture, and with it their professional ethos. In his book *Architekten wohnen*, Jörg Stabenow considers the example of the director's house in Dessau, based on a design by Walter Gropius. Stabenow observes that the architect was not necessarily pushing boundaries, but attempting to distill the mainstream of modernist architecture,⁷ and frames the director's house as an attempt to show the potential for reaching a consensus about the essential features of the movement. This observation corresponds with Gropius's endeavor—characteristic of his directorship of the Bauhaus school and his involvement with The Architects' Collaborative—to propagate teamwork instead of solitary design.

Over the years, Gropius came to epitomize the "father figure" of a modernism that a subsequent generation of architects would consider overly dogmatic. The same year that Moore bought 403 Elm Street, Robert Venturi's book *Complexity and Contradiction* and Aldo Rossi's work *L'architettura della città* laid the theoretical foundations for architectural postmodernism. With this in mind, postmodernism can be seen not only as a recourse to traditional forms or typologies, but also as an attempt to reset the architectural profession—as Sylvia Lavin argued in her 2020 book *Architecture Itself and Other Postmodernization Effects*.

Postmodern architecture, Lavin claims, should be regarded as a reaction to institutional constraints that came into being in the United States

5 Cf. Kevin Keim, *An Architectural Life: Memoirs & Memories of Charles W. Moore* (Boston: Bulfinch Press / Little, Brown, 1996), 129; cf. Littlejohn, *Architect*, 19.

6 Cf. Jörg Stabenow, *Architekten wohnen: Ihre Domizile im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Verlag Bauwesen, 2000), 13.

7 *Ibid.*, 141.

following World War II. According to Lavin, architects had found themselves degraded to “bureaucrats, mostly anonymous workers operating collectively in ways designed to suppress personal expression in favor of expeditious results.”⁸ Postmodern architects, by contrast, tried to distinguish themselves as creative individuals. They hence advocated the view that every design had to be regarded as the expression of an individual genius: “[P]ostmodernism’ first began to appear in the mid-1960s to refer to the critique of modernism as a dogma but eventually became a catch-all for the heterogeneous formal and stylistic attributes that were held together by the notion that architectural work expressed the unique imagination of a single architect.”⁹ Given that Moore is considered one of America’s most influential postmodernists, it seems particularly promising to scrutinize the renovation of his New Haven house with an eye to interrogating the professional self-conception that guided his work.

A Fun House

After Moore took over 403 Elm Street, the most striking modification he made that was visible from the street was placing a metal object by artist Fred Hearst next to the entrance.¹⁰ He also constructed a new timber wall to shield the rear garden from an adjacent hotel. Far more spectacular, however, were the alterations Moore made to the interior (Fig. 65). The architect initially intended to gut the house entirely, in line with what he described as the usual procedure of the time.¹¹ Realizing, however, that he would hardly gain any space this way, Moore instead decided to open up the floors in three places and insert two-story plywood towers into these apertures. The fact that he assigned no specific function to the towers testifies to the long-lasting impact exerted on Moore by the architect Louis Kahn. As in earlier projects, Moore—who taught alongside Kahn at Princeton from 1958 to 1959—availed

8 Sylvia Lavin, *Architecture Itself and Other Postmodernization Effects* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2020), 19.

9 *Ibid.*, 21.

10 Cf. Littlejohn, *Architect*, 81.

11 Cf. Charles Moore, “The Yin, the Yang and the Three Bears,” in *Charles Moore: Buildings and Projects 1949–1986*, ed. Eugene Johnson (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 16.

himself of the concept of “served spaces” and “servant spaces,” which Kahn and Anne Tyng had introduced with their Trenton Bath House in Ewing Township, New Jersey.

Given the impossibility of defining these shafts by their function, Moore gave a proper name to each of the towers. The structure beside the entrance, rising from the basement to the ground floor, bore the name “Howard,” after a dog he once knew in New Orleans.¹² The tower close to the northwest exterior wall, connecting the entrance level to the upper floor, was called “Beringaria,” having the wife of Richard the Lionheart as its namesake—or “an early Cunard liner named after her, or one of Charles’ cats.”¹³ The third tower, spanning the entire height of the rear annex, was named “Ethel.”

While the towers helped structure the interior of the house, the cutouts in their double-layer plywood walls afforded spectacular vistas. While Beringaria’s window-like openings, partially equipped with stained glass, followed the layout of the façade behind, the circular segments cut from the walls of Howard and Ethel were intended to induce an altered perception of space: “What the circles did was make it possible within the limits of the little tubes to have circles of eighteen foot diameter, a size that you would scarcely think you could afford for a piece of furniture for a house so small and funny.”¹⁴

Moore’s 1977 book *Body, Memory, and Architecture* attests to his intense preoccupation with matters of spatial perception. Introduced by the architect and his co-author, the sculptor Kent Bloomer, as a “product of our joint efforts to teach fundamentals of architectural design,”¹⁵ the publication is based on the assumption that modernism in many ways neglected patterns of human perception. As a praiseworthy exception, the authors mention gestalt psychology: “This brilliant group of theorists was able to demonstrate ... that in fact irrational forces in the act of perceiving reacted on and transformed the object being perceived.”¹⁶ Just like Geoffrey Scott, who in his 1914 publication *The Architecture of Humanism* emphasized the “distinction between

12 Cf. Littlejohn, *Architect*, 78.

13 *Ibid.*

14 Cf. Keim, *An Architectural Life*, 127.

15 Kent Bloomer and Charles Moore, *Body, Memory, and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), ix.

16 *Ibid.*, 31.

the appearance of bigness and the feeling of bigness a building gives,”¹⁷ the cutouts within Howard and Ethel can be seen as an attempt to manipulate spatial perception through the application of gestalt psychology’s “Law of Closure”: As beholders completed the missing segments in their minds, they were meant to imagine shapes too big for the space, thus receiving an impression of a far larger interior.

But it was not just the towers that were “done with an eye to [making] the place, the dinky little place, look giant.”¹⁸ A cardboard cutout of the actress Shirley Temple, known for her short stature, served the same purpose.¹⁹ Similarly, the decision to extend the Corinthian columns—employed in the basement as spolia—through jack posts should not be seen as a merely pragmatic solution to guarantee the sturdiness of the old house. Rather, extending the columns served to counteract the impression of the ceiling’s low height. In the same vein, a *trompe l’oeil* painting of a dome positioned over the architect’s bed functioned to perceptually widen the space.²⁰ However, not every feature of the lush decoration served this purpose. The digits from one to six that could be found in the entryway allegedly originated in a dream experienced by Moore’s employee Bill Hersey.²¹ Moore later claimed that he used the numbered Masonite boards to show how much he was in debt. Even more personal biographical details are to be found in the portraits of two of his ancestors or the neon “42” sign, which was given to Moore as a birthday present on October 31 1967.²²

A London Model?

It hardly comes as a surprise that 403 Elm Street has been compared to the house built by British architect John Soane for himself in London at the turn of the nineteenth century.²³ The two residences, separated by an ocean and

17 Ibid., 32.

18 Keim, *An Architectural Life*, 172.

19 Ibid.

20 Cf. Littlejohn, *Architect*, 80.

21 Cf. Keim, *An Architectural Life*, 172.

22 Cf. Littlejohn, *Architect*, 80.

23 Ibid., 79.

one-and-a-half centuries, both feature multifaceted, partially two-story spaces and illusionistic tricks that, just like the extraordinary collections of their proprietors, were kept hidden behind inconspicuous façades (Fig. 66). Moreover, Moore is reported to have said that Soane's house on Lincoln's Inn Fields could have been built by himself, if only he had more taste.²⁴

The two architects' houses were also both subject to continuous alteration. Moore is said to have ceaselessly transformed his house, even in the presence of guests.²⁵ Photographs of 403 Elm Street seem to affirm such accounts: While a picture of the architect's bed taken by Norman McGrath, for example, shows the illusionistic dome, earlier images reveal cotton clouds and hovering *putti* in its place. Shots of Berengaria at different times attest that the tower was equipped variously with a disco ball and a Mexican lantern from the eighteenth century.²⁶

The transformations Soane made to his London house over the decades were even more comprehensive. According to Carsten Ruhl, Soane strove to present the beholder with an extensive project of "self-musealization."²⁷ Conceiving his residence as an autobiography built in stone, Soane attempted to showcase his architectural genius through the *mise-en-scène* of a variety of exhibits²⁸—ranging from works of antiquity and their copies to pictures by painters of his acquaintance, a lock of Napoleon's hair, and a portrait of Fanny, his wife's pet dog.

Soane's seemingly disparate collection is given meaning solely through the biography of its owner. The ambition to stage his personality is evident in the placement of Soane's own portrait bust, lit by a skylight and

24 Cf. Charles Moore, Gerald Allen, and Donlyn Lyndon, *The Place of Houses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 296. In his essay "Schinkel, Soane, and Jefferson," published posthumously, Moore counts Soane among the architects active around 1810 whose recourse to the past could still be considered exemplary (cf. Keim, *An Architectural Life*, 220–234).

25 Cf. Littlejohn, *Architect*, 77: "Actually, it was never 'done.' He kept changing it as long as he lived in it—sometimes during parties—using the house as a full-scale laboratory for experiments in space, color, optical effects, and visual wit."

26 *Ibid.*, 78–79.

27 Cf. Carsten Ruhl, "Autobiographie und ästhetische Erfahrung: John Soanes Künstlerhaus in Lincoln's Inn Fields," in *Ein Haus wie Ich. Die gebaute Autobiographie der Moderne*, ed. Salvatore Pisani and Elisabeth Oy-Marra (Bielefeld: transcript 2014), 129–56, 135, my translation.

28 *Ibid.*, 137, my translation.

juxtaposed with a cast of the Apollo Belvedere. According to Ruhl, Soane introduced himself as a “heaven-born architect” whose genius is illuminated by the splendor of Apollo, the God of light and leader of the muses.²⁹ If Moore’s house in New Haven followed this model, it would not only exemplify the self-conception of a profession convinced of its intellectual significance and proudly referring to its own tradition; in accordance with Sylvia Lavin’s assessment, it would also underline the importance of outstanding artistic genius.

When 403 Elm Street is compared to the Soane House, however, it becomes clear how cheap the materials were that Moore used in his alterations. Furthermore, unlike his British counterpart, Moore never sought to negotiate a Parliamentary Act that would see his collection preserved after his death by opening the house to the public as a museum. Finally, in contrast to the development of the Soane House, Moore’s New Haven transformations were not prompted by the needs of an ever-growing collection. Instead, in an interview with Heinrich Klotz and John Wesley Cook, Moore made clear that he remodeled his house without any plan in mind, simply following his intuition: “When I did the first layer of remodeling—moving the bathroom and putting in the stairs and cutting the holes—I still didn’t know what I was going to do with the plywood. . . . It was done piece by piece. When I started in the entrance hall, I had no idea what the rest would be like.”³⁰ This description of an almost unconscious process of transformation suggests that we should take another model into consideration.

As If Built in a Dream

Moore’s account in the aforementioned interview suggests he intended to emphasize the affinity between his public transformation of 403 Elm Street and the almost vegetative formation of the house built over several decades by Carl Gustav Jung on the shores of Lake Zurich in Bollingen (Fig. 67). In his memoir *Dreams, Memories, Reflections* (*Erinnerungen, Träume, Gedanken*), published for the first time in 1962 and released in English the year after, the

29 Ibid., 147, my translation.

30 Heinrich Klotz and John Wesley Cook, *Conversations with Architects* (London: Lund Humphries, 1973), 245.

Swiss psychiatrist recounts that he built his so-called Tower “in a kind of dream.”³¹ Driven by the need “to achieve a kind of representation in stone of my innermost thoughts and of the knowledge I had acquired,”³² Jung, in his own words, followed only “the concrete needs of the moment.”³³

Jung describes how, in the beginning, he only wanted to erect a kind of primitive hut. But even before it was finished, he decided to build a circular, two-story house instead, which was completed in 1923. Over the following years he added a “central structure . . . with a tower-like annex”³⁴ that would be extended in 1931. However, this didn’t mean that the structure—which Jung adorned with his family coat of arms, as well as that of his wife and sons-in-law, adding a stone tablet into which he chiseled the names of his male ancestors for good measure³⁵—was completed. Jung explained that, in 1935, he felt the desire for “a piece of fenced-in land,”³⁶ and decided to construct a loggia and a courtyard. Finally, following his wife’s death in 1955, Jung added another story to the middle section, turning it into a third tower. At the end of this transformation process, which Moore and co-authors Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon described in their 1974 book *The Place of Houses*,³⁷ the residence in Bollingen, just like the house in New Haven, consisted of three towers and an enclosed garden.

Nonetheless, we might question if Moore really was just following spontaneous ideas when transforming 403 Elm Street. Records from Moore’s archive suggest organized design and intent in line with a particular conception of the architect’s role, not outright spontaneity. Alongside plans dating up to April 5 1966,³⁸ invoices show that Moore received comprehensive material deliveries between mid-April and June of the same year.³⁹ Rather than

31 Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 225.

32 *Ibid.*, 223.

33 *Ibid.*, 225.

34 *Ibid.*, 224.

35 *Ibid.*, 232.

36 *Ibid.*, 224.

37 Cf. Moore, Allen, and Lyndon, *Place of Houses*, 129.

38 Cf. Charles Moore, *Plans of the Moore residence in New Haven, April 5 1966*, Charles W. Moore Archives, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas at Austin.

39 Cf. *Batter Lumber Co., Inc., Invoice for wood supplies to Charles W. Moore*, undated, Charles W. Moore Archives, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas at Austin.

indicating his striving for architectural self-realization, Moore's adaptation of the New Haven house demonstrates a professional self-conception of the architect as a kind of psychiatrist or psychologist. This observation parallels the opinion of his biographers. Kevin Keim, for example, underlines that "Moore listened. He had the ability to convey to others that what they were saying was important. Like an architect-psychologist, he absorbed what they did, where they enjoyed going, what they liked to collect—turning an interaction into a process of self-realization for the clients."⁴⁰

In *The Place of Houses*, Moore, Allen, and Lyndon describe the necessity of figuring out the client's "dreams and fantasies"⁴¹ in order to incorporate them into an individual house. In contrast to the modernist quest for universal and functional answers to the housing question, Moore and his colleagues encouraged their readers to follow their individual predilections—without, however, neglecting cultural customs or general human, "archetypal" needs.⁴² Both the recollections of Moore's clients and the judgements of critics suggest that such an approach indeed informed the architect's practice.⁴³ Moreover, it was only through this procedure, we might conclude, that Moore's much-cited aim could be achieved—that is, the creation of places that not only let the people know where, but who, they are.⁴⁴

If in the design process Moore took consideration of his clients' own self-realization—as Keim suggests—then this marks a contrast to Lavin's description of late postmodernism. Furthermore, it is clear that Moore even attributed political significance to his Jungian approach. When, following a lecture at Harvard University in 1974, he was asked whether he considered his work political, Moore answered: "I like to think that the 20th century is probably inhabited by Freudians and Marxists and some think that improvement is going to come by social action and others think that it is going to

40 Keim, *An Architectural Life*, 129; cf. Littlejohn, *Architect*, 19: "Moore can listen to clients—at least to those he likes—remarkably well, rather like a good psychiatrist."

41 Moore, Allen, and Lyndon, *Place of Houses*, 144.

42 Charles Moore, "Shape," in *Dimensions: Space, Shape, and Scale in Architecture*, ed. Charles Moore and Gerald Allen (New York: Architectural Record Books, 1976), 12.

43 Cf. Keim, *An Architectural Life*, 132; cf. Heinrich Klotz, *Moderne und Postmoderne* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1984), 180; cf. Littlejohn, *Architect*, 234.

44 Cf. Charles Moore, "Plug It In, Rameses, and See If It Lights Up, Because We Aren't Going to Keep It Unless It Works," in *Perspecta* 11 (1967), 34.

come by individual action. So that leaves me not a Marxist but a Jungian and I don't think that means apolitical."⁴⁵

Mass Society and Counterculture

In her introduction to Jung's work, authorized by the psychiatrist himself, Jolande Jacobi identifies the "perfection of [one's] own personality"⁴⁶ as the aim of analytical psychology. Referring to Jung's essay "Integration of the Personality" ("Die Wirklichkeit der Seele"), she emphasizes the hardships that accompany this striving toward wholeness:

The evolution of the personality is at once blessing and curse. One must purchase it dearly—for it brings with it isolation. 'Its first consequence is the conscious and unavoidable exclusion of the individual from the undifferentiatedness and unconsciousness of the herd.' It means not only isolation, however, but at the same time fidelity to own's own law. 'Only he who can deliberately say 'Yes' to the power of the destiny he finds within him becomes a personality,' and only such a personality is able to find its true place in a collective, only it is truly able to form a community, i.e., to be an integral part of a group of human beings and not merely a cipher in the mass, which always consists only of a sum of people and never can become, like the community, a living organism that receives life and bestows life.⁴⁷

After 1945, critical discourse in the United States and Western Europe frequently referred to conformist postwar society as a "herd" or "mass"—as exemplified by Jung and Jacobi. Moore's position in this debate becomes obvious from a book review entitled "The Shapes of Our Time," published in the *Architectural Record* in 1957. Discussing *Problems of Design* by architect and designer George Nelson, Moore harshly objected to the author's theses. Most

45 Charles Moore, Typescript of the lecture series "Flights from the Dialectic," Lecture of March 7 1974, 19, Charles Moore Foundation, Austin.

46 Jolande Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung: An Introduction with Illustrations* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 77.

47 *Ibid.*, 123–124.

of all, he took offense at the lecture “The Enlargement of Vision,” in which Nelson calls upon his colleagues to adapt to a new *Zeitgeist*: No longer should architects try to counter or even bemoan the advancing degradation of the individual, but rather they should embrace it as an opportunity.⁴⁸ Strongly rejecting this proposition, Moore referred to William Whyte’s study *The Organization Man*.

A criticism of Americans’ conformity, Whyte’s book is just one of many publications—including those by the Frankfurt School—that exposed the shortcomings of a technocratic mass society.⁴⁹ Yet while different ideological camps agreed in their critique, the proper way to respond was generally disputed. While intellectuals such as Erich Fromm advocated a profound transformation of both the political system and the economic order, authors like Whyte were convinced that “any real change will be up to the individual himself.”⁵⁰ The so-called counterculture of the 1960s might be considered to have combined both approaches, addressing the individual person while still aiming to transform society at large. Although the phenomenon emerged in different places, one countercultural hotspot was the Bay Area, where Moore taught at the University of California at Berkeley from 1959 to 1965.

However difficult it may be to precisely define 1960s counterculture (named, incidentally, after Theodore Roszak’s 1969 book *The Making of A Counter Culture*),⁵¹ Fred Turner has tried to demarcate it from the New Left: “If the New Left turned outward, toward political action, this wing turned inward, toward questions of consciousness and interpersonal intimacy, and toward small-scale tools such as LSD or rock music as ways to enhance both.”⁵² Developing another explanatory approach in their introduction to the book *Imagine Nation*, Peter Braunstein and Michael Doyle stated:

48 Cf. George Nelson, “The Enlargement of Vision,” in *Problems of Design*, ed. George Nelson (New York: Whitney, 1957), 59–74.

49 Cf. Andreas Reckwitz, *Subjekt* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2010), 123.

50 William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (London: Penguin, 1963), 372.

51 Cf. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, “Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and ’70s,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ’70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5.

52 Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 31.

The lever . . . would need to be positioned so as to shift the culture, and the culture would be moved one person at a time. If and when enough people had transformed themselves, the result would be like a magnetizing piece of iron: its energy becomes concentrated when the polarity of a sufficient quantity of individual molecules is realigned. The dominant culture could hardly help but be changed when thousands, perhaps millions of people formerly in its thrall incrementally aligned their values and actions to contradistinguish themselves from it.⁵³

Emphasizing the above-mentioned preoccupation with the personal, Roszak stated that, compared to sociology, psychology was gaining in importance.⁵⁴ He emphasized that Jung, elsewhere considered obscurantist, was embraced by the counterculture.⁵⁵

Now and Then

Although the self-conception of the “architect-psychologist” is particularly evident in Moore’s designs for houses, it also informs his larger projects. In line with the ideas developed by members of Team 10, Moore hypothesized an analogy between the house and the city. While the notion of the house as a little city is very obvious in *Body, Memory, and Architecture*,⁵⁶ Moore’s designs for urban spaces attest to an aim to design squares as rooms in the open air. For example, Eugene Johnson mentioned the similarities between the sequences of oval spaces that Moore and his team designed for the Beverly Hills Civic Center and a project by Francesco Borromini for the Palazzo Carpegna in Rome.⁵⁷

More successful than his translation of formal principles between buildings and urban plans, however, were Moore’s attempts to apply his psycho-

53 Braunstein and Doyle, “Historicizing the American Counterculture,” 10.

54 Cf. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 64.

55 *Ibid.*, 52n4; *ibid.*, 144.

56 Cf. Bloomer and Moore, *Body, Memory, and Architecture*, 46–49.

57 Eugene Johnson, “Performing Architecture: The Work of Charles Moore,” in Charles Moore: *Buildings and Projects 1949–1986*, ed. Eugene Johnson (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 88.

logical method to participatory planning. One of the projects that Moore and his colleagues at the Moore Ruble Yudell office designed in collaboration with future users was the Episcopal church of St Matthew in the Pacific Palisades. Moore described his approach as an “Ecclesiastical Rorschach test,”⁵⁸ referring to eponymous inkblot technique of psychiatrist Herman Rorschach: He confronted parishioners with a sequence of two sacral buildings at a time to gauge their reservations and preferences. (Meanwhile, the way Moore described the challenge of involving quarreling factions in the planning process also bears comparison to group therapy.) The most important aspect of user participation was most likely Moore’s desire to overcome technocratic planning and instead give future users an impression of personal agency. Recalling Jolande Jacobi’s remarks on Jungian psychology, we might say that the developed personality—to be promoted by the architect-psychologist’s tailor-made house—is a prerequisite for such communal collaboration.

While in many ways Moore’s approach to participatory planning still appears clear-sighted and exemplary, 403 Elm Street no longer bears witness to the architect’s self-conception: After a series of eight burglaries within a few months, Moore gave up the house in 1971, relocating both his home and his office to Essex, Connecticut. Following his departure, the house was sold to a couple whose marriage, according to Moore, was saved by the architecture.⁵⁹ Another subsequent owner, however, despised Moore’s interventions and returned the house to its *status quo ante*.

58 Charles Moore, “Participation, California Style,” in *Language of Architecture: Lectures, Seminars and Projects*, Urbino 1981, ed. International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design (Florence: Sansoni, 1982), 55.

59 Cf. Littlejohn, *Architect*, 81.

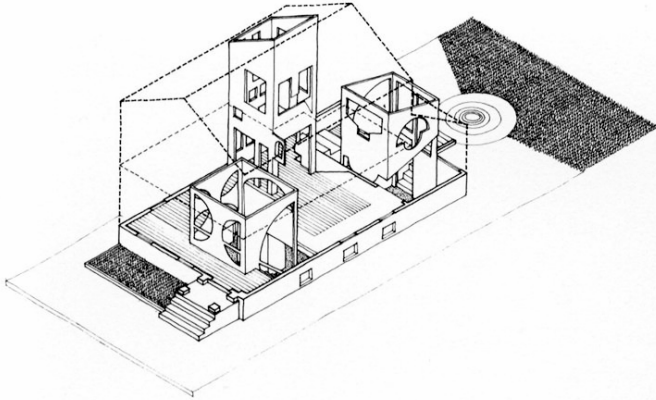


Fig. 65.
Charles W. Moore, Moore House, New Haven CT (1966–1971).



Fig. 66.
John Soane, Soane House, London (1792–1825). Engraving by Mason Jackson,
published in the Illustrated London News.



Fig. 67.
Carl Gustav Jung, Bollingen Tower, Bollingen (1923–1955). Photo by Martin Gledhill.

Non-Referential Architecture?

Tracing a Paradox of Contemporary Discourse

Ole W. Fischer

Introduction

In 2018 Swiss architect Valerio Olgiati and Swiss-American theoretician Markus Breitschmid published *Non-Referential Architecture*. Supposedly Olgiati's idea, with the bulk of the writing by Breitschmid, the book proposes a way of building that claims to be free from ideological influences and contextual references. This approach is purportedly suited to contemporary society, which no longer has faith in secure truths or shares common values. Rather than lament the loss of identity and orientation, the authors invite their readers to rethink present cultural indifference as liberating—as an opportunity to imagine architecture exclusively from within. The authors propose that architecture need not refer to studies of historical masterworks or vernacular traditions, but can be created from individual thought alone. It can exhibit both form-generating and meaningful properties, and address the spatial perception of the viewer so as to offer them an “existential foothold.”

This essay explores the intellectual underpinnings of Olgiati and Breitschmid's “non-referential architecture”: phenomenology and autonomous architecture. Phenomenology bracketed history by proposing existential truths and naturalizing certain forms of being-in-the-world as “timeless,” while autonomous architecture—inaugurated during the heyday of post-modernism—invited us to rethink architectural design in terms of pure syntactic rules, rather than reference-ridden semiotics. Like the advocates of “non-referential” architecture, the proponents of autonomy called for a retreat from social responsibility, use, context, material, and construction—

from the “exterior” fact that humans dwell in buildings—so as to create an “architecture about architecture” that instead explores the “interiority” of the discipline. The paradox they faced remains today: How can architecture escape conventions and canonized knowledge while at the same time being fully immersed in disciplinary protocols?

“Non-Referential” What?

A small 125-page book with large type and only one image appeared in 2018 and introduced a new term into contemporary discourse: “non-referential architecture.”¹ The work of Valerio Olgiati, a Swiss architect and professor at the Accademia in Mendrisio, and Markus Breitschmid, a Swiss-American theoretician based at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, the book immediately became infamous among architecture students. The authors pitched their book explicitly at architectural practitioners—not “interpreters, critics, and historians”²—and hence omitted any references to secondary literature. The first edition sold out quickly, and there has since been a third English print run, as well as German, Italian, and French translations.³ (Fig. 68 and Fig. 69)

The term “non-referential” originated in pragmatics—a branch of linguistics—and describes those aspects of an utterance that do not primarily *refer* to something in the world, but play a *practical role* in the immediate context of its use. The cry “Help!” does not refer at all, but seeks to elicit help for the speaker. “It’s raining” or “There is smoke”—while pointing to something in the world—also have a practical function in warning or alerting us

1 Valerio Olgiati and Markus Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture* (Basel: Simonett & Baer, 2018).

2 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 9. They continue: “Keeping this approach in mind, the book refrains from appearing too scholarly and including everything that scholarly academic texts typically contain. We consciously decided that, ideally, the examination at hand would mention no names.”

3 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 1st ed. (Basel: Simonett & Baer, 2018); 2nd ed. (Zurich: Park Books, 2019); 3rd ed. (Zurich: Park Books, 2021); *Nicht-Referentielle Architektur*, trans. from English by Miriam-Seifert-Waibel (Zurich: Park Books, 2019; 3rd ed., 2021); *Architettura Non-Referenziale*, trans. from English by Doriana Comerlati (Zurich: Park Books, 2019); *Architecture Non-Référentielle*, trans. from English by Damian Cortés (Marseille: Cosa Mentale, 2022). Unless otherwise stated, references to the book are to the first edition.

about a problem or danger. Some languages have honorific markers that do not change the *content* of what is communicated, but acknowledge the social hierarchies occupied by participants in the conversation—an example of “pure” indices.⁴

As such, the term “non-referential” should not be confused with “abstract” or “non-representational” as used in modern art and architecture discourse. Yet Olgiati and Breitschmid essentially employ it in this manner for buildings that are not “derived from a common social ideal” or which represent “a symbol of something outside themselves.”⁵

The authors assert that “non-referential architecture” responds to the diverse, pluralistic, and polyvalent “non-referential society” of the globalized twenty-first century. They claim that our current individualized lifestyle de-emphasizes religious, cultural, and historical relationships and operates without shared values and beliefs. While this state of affairs is generally seen as a loss, Olgiati and Breitschmid claim to be part of the first generation to embrace this fragmentation and heterogeneity as a form of liberation, viewing the individual person as an “artist of the self.”⁶ They ask architects to provide an adequate response to contemporary society and portray them as “early adopters” of cultural trends, in contrast to philosophers, who are characterized as “late” (with reference to Oswald Spengler).⁷ The authors allude to “the end of grand narratives”—an absence of any comprehensive meta-discourse—without reference to Jean-François Lyotard,⁸ and reject both a multicultural model of coexistence (that is, “postmodern” integration) and its modernist counterpart of enlightenment rationalism and the welfare

4 “Pragmatics,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pragmatics#Nonreferential_uses_of_language (accessed March 18, 2023).

5 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 13.

6 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 16. Perhaps this is an indirect reference to Friedrich Nietzsche’s artistic voluntarism. It is not unproblematic that Olgiati and Breitschmid take the rise of populism in Western democracies as proof of the dissolution of consensual belief systems in “non-referential societies,” yet still interpret this as “liberating” and “full of new possibilities.”

7 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 8.

8 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979); English translation: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on*

state. Instead, they posit a “realism without interpretation”⁹ for a “non-ideological world,” in which architecture is liberated from history and meaning. In doing so, Olgiati and Breitschmid adopt an explicitly “non-political,” non-interventional, and “non-ideological” stance, focusing on architecture rather than solving “larger societal problems.”¹⁰ They want to observe, understand, and challenge the *status quo* and propose a model—echoing historical conceptions—of the architect as author, creative mind, thinker, and builder in a “non-referential” world beyond “modernity” and “postmodernity.” That is, they seek to place the architect beyond theoretical concepts that supposedly still occupy the profession.¹¹ I will return to this question below.

Olgiati and Breitschmid position themselves firmly against contemporary architectural debates on socially engaged practice.¹² Prominent examples include the exhibition and catalogue *Small Scale, Big Change* at MoMA 2010, the Pritzker Prize awarded to Francis Kéré in 2022, Yasmeen Lari’s 2023 RIBA gold medal, and the 2023 Biennale di Venezia “Africa: The Laboratory for the Future,” curated by Lesley Lokko. Similarly, the authors strictly reject contemporary themes of sustainable development, climate crisis, and the Anthropocene. They criticize a “moralist” attitude and reject the economic, ecological, and political as viable bases for architecture.¹³ Instead, they claim these considerations are “non-essential” to architectural design, which they understand primarily as a form of “projecting” (literally throwing forth—*progettare* in Italian).¹⁴ If this sounds like solipsistic *l’art pour l’art*, they are

Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

9 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 16.

10 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 11. Of course, we can object that any non-political position is already a political position—one of pluralistic liberalism (cf. Thomas Kuhn). See also the critique of deconstructivism as “non-political” by Mary McLeod, “Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism,” in *Assemblage* 8 (February 1989), 22–59, where she attacks Peter Eisenman and autonomous architecture.

11 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 12.

12 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 11. The authors employ the German pejorative term “Weltverbesserer,” potentially with reference to the play by Thomas Bernhard, *Der Weltverbesserer* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).

13 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 17.

14 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 17

quick to assure that architecture was never more socially relevant than today, since a non-referential society requires “buildings that possess general validity and common value.”¹⁵ In the face of a crisis of reference, symbolism, and representation—supposedly the result of diversity and pluralism—architecture must provide sense and meaning—albeit so-called “inner-architectural meaning” (as opposed to extra-architectural or multi- and transdisciplinary meaning). This they find contained in “first and foremost the conception, construction, and building of rooms; it deals with scenography and movements through rooms.”¹⁶ Since Olgiati and Breitschmid understand architecture as an “existential” and “metaphysical” human foothold, it must be directed at “sensual experience prior to intellectual interpretation,” and hence at the individual observer or user of a supposedly “purely architectonic object.”¹⁷ Inner-architectural meaning, they claim, touches the human observer directly through their senses in a physical and psychological manner that can be considered independent of individual background, culture, class, education, gender, beliefs, and values. Yet, knowingly or not, they thereby employ a universalist trope already present in modernism: seeking to “speak” beyond both elite culture and regional or national barriers via abstraction, function, and technology.¹⁸

References Throughout: Paraphrase and Paratext

Olgiati and Breitschmid claim to have crafted their argument in the most general, “self-evident manner,” based purely on observation, practice, and indisputable facts—completely *ex novo*. They hence make no explicit reference to other authors.¹⁹ Yet their characterization is inaccurate for a number of reasons.

15 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 19.

16 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 14. I will return to the dualism of built space and perception below.

17 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 16; and again in the third edition, p. 26: “A building exists only for itself.”

18 See, for example, Walter Gropius, ed., *Internationale Architektur*, *Bauhaus Bücher* no. 1 (Munich: Albert Langen Verlag, 1925), 5.

19 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 10.

First of all, *Non-Referential Architecture* does contain a series of direct references:

- ▶ Oswald Spengler on early/late adopters;²⁰
- ▶ Friedrich Nietzsche's aphorisms and his meditation on the (ab)use of history²¹ and post-Christian society;²²
- ▶ Martin Heidegger and his onto-phenomenology;²³
- ▶ Robert Venturi, his book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), and the notion of meaning and context;²⁴
- ▶ Aldo Rossi, his book *L'architettura della città* (1966), and specifically the concept of the "autonomy of architecture" as a discipline;²⁵
- ▶ Peter Eisenman ("syntax"), Bernard Tschumi ("event"), Peter Zumthor ("civilizing innocence"), Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron ("speci-

20 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 8; Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Wien: Braumüller, 1918).

21 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 10–11; Friedrich Nietzsche, "Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen. Zweites Stück: Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben" (1874), in Friedrich Nietzsche: *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 1, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin/Munich: Walter de Gruyter/dtv, 1988), 243–334. An exegesis of Nietzsche's text on contemporaneity and the sense of history is beyond the scope of this paper.

22 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 31. Nietzsche proclaims the death of god in the third book of *The Gay Science* (1882). See: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Book 3, § 125, in Friedrich Nietzsche: *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 3, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin/Munich: Walter de Gruyter/dtv, 1988), 480–82.

23 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 18, with a direct quote: "The building is in the stone." Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1960), originally published in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), 1–66, here 4: "Das Bauwerk ist im Stein. Das Schnitzwerk ist im Holz. Das Gemälde ist in der Farbe. Das Sprachwerk ist im Laut. Das Musikwerk ist im Ton."

24 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 19, 29ff; Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966).

25 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 19; Aldo Rossi, *L'architettura della città* (Padova: Marsilio, 1966); English translation: *The Architecture of the City*, trans. Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman, introduction by Peter Eisenman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).

fic form”), and Rem Koolhaas (“the generic”)²⁶—all of which Olgiati and Breitschmid summarize as different attempts at “liberating” architecture from images and the symbolic, while claiming that none of these “theories” would have “accepted the polyvalent world affirmatively”,²⁷

- ▶ Alberto Giacometti;²⁸
- ▶ The idea of architecture as a metaphysical shelter, taken from Barnett Newman,²⁹ who follows Heidegger’s contrast of the term “room/Raum” with the rational and geometric “space/*spatium*”;³⁰
- ▶ Frank Gehry and Antonio Gaudí, whom they compare in a discussion on “newness” in architecture—the first supposedly being engaged with his

26 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 19–20; Peter D. Eisenman, “Notes on Conceptual Architecture: Towards a Definition,” in *Design Quarterly* 78/79 (1970), 1–5; Bernard Tschumi, “Space and Events,” in *The Discourse of Events*, ed. Bernard Tschumi and Nigel Coates (London: Architectural Association, 1983), reprinted in Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 141–149; Peter Zumthor, “Eine Anschauung der Dinge,” in *Architektur Denken* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1997), 8–26; Jacques Herzog, “Das spezifische Gewicht der Architekturen,” in *Archithese* 12, no. 2 (1982), 39–42, reprinted in Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, “Das spezifische Gewicht der Architekturen,” in *Herzog & de Meuron 1978–1988: Das Gesamtwerk*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Mack (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1997), 204–206; Rem Koolhaas, “The Generic City” (1994), in *S,M,L,XL: Office for Metropolitan Architecture*, ed. Jennifer Sigler, photography by Hans Werlemann (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 1248–1264; and a Rem Koolhaas lecture at Harvard GSD October 4th 2016.

27 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 20.

28 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 3rd ed., 28.: “The best thing about them [sculptures] is that one touches them.”

29 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 66. See also Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks*, and Barnett Newman, quoted in Richard Shiff, “To Create Oneself,” in *Barnett Newman: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York and New Haven: The Barnett Newman Foundation and Yale University Press, 2004), 3: “Life is physical but it is also metaphysical—only those who understand the meta can understand the physical.”

30 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 67, with reference to Martin Heidegger’s lecture “Bauen Wohnen Denken” at the 1951 “Darmstädter Gespräch,” published in *Mensch und Raum: Das Darmstädter Gespräch 1951*, ed. Otto Bartning (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt, 1952); reprinted in *BauweltFundamente* 94 (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1991). The buildings of Borromini and Mies van der Rohe supposedly have “little to do with geometry” (Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 69).

time, the second against his time, depending on how architects are taken to understand “society’s sensibilities”;³¹

- ▶ A whole slew of references related to “contradiction” (a term itself indebted to the aforementioned Venturi):
 - ▷ Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* on distinguishing difference from otherness.³²
 - ▷ Immanuel Kant and the *Critique of Judgement*, which they take to describe a three-step process of sensual stimuli (1) that trigger a person’s imagination (2), leading to conceptualization (3). “Beauty,” according to the authors’ reading of Kant, results from this passage from imagination to conceptualization (and back).³³ They refer to the work of Mark Rothko as shifting between understanding and inaccessibility in a way that can produce “sense” from a painting or building alone (most likely referring to the Rothko Chapel in Houston). As a second example, Olgiati and Breitschmid refer to an archetypal house—as in a child’s drawing without a roof—which reminds the informed reader of Atelier Bardill by Olgiati in Scharans, Switzerland, 2002–07.³⁴ This might trigger the observer to contemplate the house as a shelter.
 - ▷ Gottfried Semper’s *Stoffwechseltheorie* (named in German!), a theory of material change, such as from timber to stone in the Greek Temple of antiquity,³⁵ or in the former capital city of the Mughal empire Fatehpur Sikri in Uttar Pradesh, India (under Akbar I, reign 1556–1605). The latter is one of Olgiati’s favorite examples of reddish imbued concrete, one of his preferred materials.
- ▶ Vitruvius, the most classical of references.³⁶

31 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 81.

32 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 96; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 10.1054b.

33 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 96–97; Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).

34 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 98–99.

35 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 99–100; Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder praktische Ästhetik: ein Handbuch für Techniker, Künstler und Kunstfreunde*, vol. 1, *Die textile Kunst für sich betrachtet und in Beziehung zur Baukunst* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1860), 233, 431.

36 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 125; Marcus Vitruvius Pollio,

Secondly, the book also contains indirect, implicit references to theories and authors, where Olgiati and Breitschmid employ well-known phrases and concepts as commonplace theoretical tropes without explicitly referring to their sources or contexts. We already encountered an example in their invocation of Lyotard's "end of grand narratives" without attribution. Further references of this kind include:

- ▶ Heidegger, via the phrase "metaphysical homelessness,"³⁷ and Nietzsche through the term "post-Christian" society;
- ▶ Louis Kahn and the notion of "ordering the world" through architectural design;³⁸
- ▶ "The second Enlightenment" with regard to contemporary society after modernity and postmodernity;³⁹
- ▶ Kant, through "the thing itself" (*Das Ding an sich*) and the concept of transcendental aesthetics;⁴⁰
- ▶ Karl Marx, via the term "superstructure" with regard to social ideologies, albeit without its dialectical counterpart of "base structure";⁴¹
- ▶ Max Weber, through the phrase "disenchantment of the world" (*Entzauberung der Welt*) and his theory of modernity and modern society;⁴²

De architectura libri decem, trans. Frank Granger, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–1934).

- 37 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 110; Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977).
- 38 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 3rd ed., 17; Louis Kahn, "Order and Form," *Perspecta* 3 (1955): 46–63.
- 39 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 3rd ed., 32–33, probably with reference to Ulrich Beck, who along with "second modernity" and "reflexive modernity," also employed the term "second Enlightenment."
- 40 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 26–27, 110–111; Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781/1787), ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).
- 41 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 3rd ed., 24; Karl Marx, "Vorwort," in *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (1859), in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, vol. 13 (Berlin: Dietz, 1971), 7–11.
- 42 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 32; Max Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf" (1919), in *Schriften 1894–1922*, ed. Dirk Kaesler (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2002), 474–513.

- ▶ Hal Foster, when mentioning the volume *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* as hallmark of postmodernist theories in the 1980s;⁴³
- ▶ Peter Bürger, again by citing the title of a book (*Theory of the Avantgarde*) without naming its author;⁴⁴
- ▶ The term “spatial creation” and the notion of empathy aesthetics, which are probably derived from August Schmarsow;⁴⁵
- ▶ “Incidental space” as the opposite of the “idea and intended experience of space,” a reference to the authors’ Swiss colleague Christian Kerez and his installation at the 2016 Biennale di Venezia Swiss Pavilion;⁴⁶
- ▶ “Symphonic relationships” between rooms, an idea that can be found in both Schmarsow and Kahn, and similarly the description of architecture as petrified or frozen music, a metaphor that reaches back to the romanticism of Schopenhauer and Schelling;⁴⁷
- ▶ The term “deconstruction,” a clear reference to Jacques Derrida.⁴⁸

Thirdly, Olgianti and Breitschmid refer to the historical categories of “modernity” and “postmodernity,” which they simplify and essentialize into a polar

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- 43 Olgianti and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 32; Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), with essays by Jean Baudrillard, Douglas Crimp, Hal Foster, Kenneth Frampton, Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, Rosalind Krauss, Craig Owens, Edward W. Said, and Gregory L. Ulmer (in lieu of Jacques Derrida). The collection has a strong connection to the neo-Marxist art and culture journal *October*.
- 44 Olgianti and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 32; Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).
- 45 Olgianti and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 37–38, and also 60, where space is described as the “raw material of architecture,” and spatial perception as an inborn human capacity, supposedly universally shared across all people, periods, cultures. On empathy theory, see August Schmarsow, *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung* (Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann, 1894).
- 46 Olgianti and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 60; Sandra Oehy and Christian Kerez, eds., “Release Architecture: Incidental Space,” in *ARCH+ 224* (July 2016).
- 47 Olgianti and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 60; Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vol. 2, *Ergänzungen zum dritten Buch*, § 39 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 582; Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, “Philosophie der Kunst” (1802/1803), in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985).
- 48 Olgianti and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 71; Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967).

opposition. They reduce the “modern project” to its “political” aspects, understood as both liberal and Marxist,⁴⁹ and claim this caused a(n oedipal?) reaction from the postmodernists they have already listed (Venturi, Rossi, Foster, Bürger, et al.). Yet Olgiati and Breitschmid reject the postmodernists’ “critical discourse” as still trapped within Enlightenment rationality. They claim it reflects an ideology incapable of describing and analyzing contemporary society, which they interpret as diverse, pluralistic, polyvalent, individualized, non-consensual, and liberal. The authors hence announce the obsolescence of the concepts of modernity and postmodernity and proclaim a historical caesura within the structure of society and its relationship to architecture—especially in terms of how it generates “meaning”. The buildings of non-referential architecture

have to be significant in a world that does not embrace significance. It is a fundamental shift away from an architecture that offers its inhabitants a way of participating in a life-affirming known totality they believe in, and move [sic] toward an architecture that offers inhabitants a way to build a life-assuring totality that they believe does ultimately not exist.⁵⁰

The historical “break” that Olgiati and Breitschmid declare repeats the narrative of various modern avant-gardes and assumes Hegel’s teleological conception of history.⁵¹ At the same time, they propose a “solution” for the other “break” that has occurred between form and meaning: generating architectural significance in the absence of common social values, beliefs, and references. Here, again, they need to rehearse concepts from existing architectural theory. The authors call for the independent, absolute, singular building that responds to “something existential about [a] person’s life.”⁵² They explicitly warn against mistaking this position for (neo)liberal relativism, but trust in the immanent qualities (even if they do not use this term)

49 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 21.

50 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 22.

51 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 61: “non-referential architecture does not aim for consonance . . . it requires a break in the sense of a caesura.” See also their discussion of the principle of “newness” in architecture, which by and large follows avant-garde arguments, on 75–84; similarly, in the third edition, 33: “the non-referential world . . . is also no longer historical in its nature.”

52 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 3rd ed., 25.

of physical presence and aesthetic experience. In doing so, they borrow from two distinct schools of thought: the disciplinary autonomy of architecture⁵³ (by emphasizing a sensual, contemplative mode of architectural engagement over a functional programmatic one) and phenomenology (by opposing individual aesthetics to universal rationalism and social values).⁵⁴ These two interpretative models both originate in a critical re-evaluation of modernist functionalism and rationality during the postwar period, yet they have traditionally been located on different ends of the intellectual spectrum: (post) structuralism and architectural phenomenology, respectively.

We can see from the traces in their text that Olgiati and Breitschmid's understanding of "architectural autonomy" is informed by Aldo Rossi and Peter Eisenman, who reacted against both modernist functionalism and the then-popular semiotics of architecture. In the 1960s and '70s, Rossi and Eisenman applied ideas from structural linguistics to architecture. They searched for abstract rules by examining the transformation of urban forms over time (the fixed structures, morphology and typology of the European city)⁵⁵ and by looking at the syntactic operations of pure architectural elements (e.g. point, line, plane, volume, column, wall, plate, opening, and their addition, subtraction, rotation, and superposition as identified in modern designs of Le Corbusier and Terragni). Eisenman dubbed these operations the "self-referentiality" of architecture.⁵⁶

Olgiati and Breitschmid's reliance on phenomenology is already clear from their references to Heidegger. Their focus on sensual spatial experience, embodiment, materiality, essentialist oneness, and individual existential meaning hence comes as no surprise. However, phenomenological writers

53 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 14: "no discipline other than architecture itself has the ability to contribute anything of consequence to these fundamental architectural conditions."

54 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 27. In opposition to the claim that sensual experience lies beyond cultural, intellectual, class, religious, gender or other differences, current psychology argues that experience itself is shaped by all these factors.

55 Cf. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*.

56 Peter Eisenman, "Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential Sign," in *Oppositions* 15/16 (Spring 1979), 118–128; Peter Eisenman, *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1963 (published Basel: Lars Müller, 2006).

typically do consider the importance of place, context, and history, drawing on vernacular sources and discussing the supposed organic unity and authenticity of regional cultures. For this reason Jorge Otero-Pailos argued that the “phenomenological turn” runs parallel to and partially overlaps with postmodernist architecture.⁵⁷

While the structural rigor of autonomous architecture seems at odds with the experiential, sensual approach of phenomenology, Olgiati and Breitschmid combine them in an attempt to overcome the “deficiencies” of each. Where a purely structural reading of architecture runs the risk of abstract “emptiness” and nihilist meaninglessness, phenomenology compensates by charging a room with existential “sense-making.”⁵⁸ And where the subjective and regional limitation of a phenomenological search for presence, wholeness, place, culture, and context leads architecture to an overreliance on the tactile qualities of “story telling”⁵⁹—and hence referentiality—this can be overcome through the “subjective universality” of the autonomous structure’s physical presence.⁶⁰ Olgiati and Breitschmid even pay homage to “deconstruction,” which they claim introduced the coexistence of contrary meanings. They also allude to Eisenman in saying that deconstruction became accessible to architecture through syntactic operations, although they criticize the merely formal results of analyzing superimpositions, dislocations, computational fluidity,⁶¹ and parametric digital design.⁶² Instead, Olgiati and Breitschmid posit that both deconstruction and phenomenology converge in the “oneness” of the architectural object independent of external references:

[I]t is testimony to the overarching current of the polyvalent non-referential world that—even if they come from supposedly opposed poles,

57 Jorge Otero-Pailos, *Architecture's Historical Turn: Phenomenology and the Rise of the Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

58 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 24.

59 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 69–70. Perhaps there is a nod to Kenneth Frampton and Peter Zumthor here.

60 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 26.

61 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 70–71, although the reference to digital tools and curvilinearity seems to target Greg Lynn and UNStudio more than Eisenman himself.

62 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 109–110.

such as phenomenology and deconstruction—architectural theories ultimately aimed for the same thing: the dissolution of the reduction of the experience of space inherent in a geometrizing system that operates by disjunctions of being either this or that. ...Non-referential architecture ...is unconcerned with meaning—it is concerned with possibilities.⁶³

One direct consequence of this blending of phenomenology and autonomy is a decidedly anti-historical stance. Olgiati and Breitschmid consider history “extra-architectural” and reject common categories such as names of the architect, client, builders, historical period, style, context, and even the idea of a building’s function or program.⁶⁴ Instead, they proclaim that architecture deals exclusively with “space constellations” (a hidden reference to Schmar-sow) and should hence be studied purely formally, not socially.⁶⁵ The authors suggest the term “genealogy” in opposition to “history,” taking the term from Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault:

[G]enealogy presents basic physical facts, such as information about the dimension of rooms, the materials a room is built with, the measurements of columns, the placement and size of openings, the thickness of walls, how a person enters a room, etc.⁶⁶

63 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 71.

64 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 39: “[I]t is often advantageous for the architect if nothing is known about the civilization that erected a given building. It is actually better for an architect to not know who commissioned a building, why it was built, and what program and function it served.”

65 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 37–38. We might also detect a reference to formalism in architectural history, as developed by Heinrich Wölfflin, Paul Frankl, and Alois Riegl—and subsequently Clement Greenberg, Rudolf Wittkower, and Colin Rowe.

66 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 40; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift* (1887), in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 5, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 245–412; Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire” (1971), in *Dits et Écrits*, vol. 2, ed. Daniel Defert, François Ewald, and Jacques Lagrange (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 136–156.

This formal analysis of architectural elements supposedly uncovers the “universal genetics of space.”⁶⁷ In this respect, it resembles Eisenman’s search for the “deep structure” of architecture in the late 1960s, inspired by Noam Chomsky’s transformational generative grammar.⁶⁸ Yet Olgiati and Breitschmid draw a different conclusion when they claim that this formal reading of spatial order should not be interpreted “intellectually,” but “emotionally”⁶⁹—and not only by observers and users, but also by architects. The authors argue from a distinctively “pragmatist” perspective and insist on an “architectonic idea,” by which they mean the “form-generative” and “sense-making” aspect of buildings. We should, they claim, be able to express this “holistic idea” with one sentence or phrase without relying on general criteria like size, building program, type, shape, and construction. To bring home their point, they describe a three-step design process, which they present in a strictly deductive manner: Start with an “architectonic idea” (e.g. “secluded garden”—a reference to Olgiati’s holiday home Villa Além in Portugal), choose an “ordering system” (e.g. rectangular garden enclosed by four walls), and finally devise a “concrete architectonic formulation” (material, color, size, type of plants, etc.).⁷⁰ This approach stands in stark opposition to the complex feedback loops discussed in design studies, which project structures onto sites to deal with complex problems.⁷¹ (Fig. 70, Fig. 71, Fig. 72)

Built Work: Homage to...

A thorough discussion of the multiple references employed by Valerio Olgiati’s own bureau in Flims goes well beyond the scope of this essay. However, a few motifs can be pointed out. First, Olgiati echoes the sculpted minimalism of Atelier Zumthor in the nearby Chur—and thereby also the materi-

67 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 42: “[D]ifferent people perceive space identically, irrespective of the time and civilization in which they lived.”

68 Thomas Patin, “From Deep Structure to an Architecture in Suspense: Peter Eisenman, Structuralism, and Deconstruction,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 47, no. 2 (November 1993): 88–100.

69 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 44.

70 Olgiati and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, 101–108, on the principle of “order”, here 101. Note the earlier reference to Kahn.

71 Cf., for example, Nigel Cross, *Designerly Ways of Knowing* (London: Springer, 2006).

alism and institutional formalism of Louis Kahn. Second, he also exhibits the influence Peter Eisenman's neo-modern elementarism, focused on the design process, the conceptual art of architecture, and its syntactic rules of wall, opening, column, etc. We could also speak here of second-order referentiality, since Eisenman's work—and that of other architects belonging to the so-called neo-avantgarde of the 1960s and '70s—points back to the historic modernism of De Stijl, Le Corbusier, and Terragni. Yet Olgiati's oeuvre enhances these references with a phenomenological sensitivity to material, construction, technique, and surface—for example, in the early Schulhaus in Paspels (1996–98), the Gelbes Haus in Flims (1997–99), the Atelier Bardill in Scharans (2002–07), and the National Park Visitor Center in Zernez (2002–08). In his more recent Villa Além in Portugal (2012–14), designed as his own weekend retreat, there are obvious references to the idea of the walled oriental garden (paradise), as well as to Louis Kahn's Salk Institute in La Jolla, California (1959–65) and Luis Barragán's Fuente de los Amantes in Atizapán de Zaragoza, México (1964–69). Some critics also see resemblances to Casa Malaparte, Capri, by Adalberto Libera (1938–42). One again we see references on top of references—and let us not forget the aforementioned reddish sandstone architecture inspired by Fatehpur Sikri.

Let's Get Personal: History, Genealogy, and Biography

Even if we have reservations regarding a biographical reading of architectural work, it is worth noting that Valerio Olgiati's (*1958) father Rudolf (1920–1995) was a well-known regional modernist architect in Flims, Grison, Switzerland. Rudolf Olgiati combined elements from the vernacular tradition with modernism, in particular making multiple references to Le Corbusier. While many of his buildings are predominantly white and abstract, they draw on local references, images, and objects found in the Alpine canton of Grison. Rudolf Olgiati's work has hence been considered regionalist, site-specific, contextual, and culturally embedded.⁷² Valerio Olgiati studied at the ETH Zurich during the 1980s, left Switzerland and moved to Southern

72 Cf. Thomas Boga, *Die Architektur von Rudolf Olgiati: Dokumentation zur Ausstellung an der Eidgenössischen Technischen Hochschule Zürich vom 16. Juni – 7. Juli 1977*, reprint (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010).

California, before returning to Flims in the 1990s. There, he radically transformed the old “Gelbes Haus,” a public postal building, into a museum for local history (1997–99) that housed many objects donated by his father upon his death in 1995. While I have discussed the motif of “skinning” the building elsewhere,⁷³ we could also interpret Valerio Olgiati’s non-referential theory and work in relation to his father’s shadow. A long shadow is also cast by another father figure—this time an intellectual one. At the ETH Zurich, Valerio was a member of the infamous “analogue architecture” class lead by Fabio Reinhart and Miroslav Šik (1983–91), which was distinguished by a specific kind of postmodernism drawing on Aldo Rossi’s realism and use of analogies. Students under Šik’s tutelage created large-scale perspective drawings (“architectural images”) in wax crayon, depicting ordinary architectural situations. They embraced “dirty realism” by drawing buildings that were deeply connected to specific places, to popular culture, and a carefully chosen set of architects including Sigurd Lewerentz, Gunnar Asplund, English Arts and Crafts practitioners, Otto Wagner, and Jože Plečnik. At the same time, they employed strategies of estrangement by focusing on anonymous vernacular architecture, desolate urban peripheries, and sinister (post)industrial landscapes like those found in Bernd and Hilla Becher’s photographs or the films of Wim Wenders, Jim Jarmusch, and Michelangelo Antonioni. Against this background, Valerio Olgiati’s non-referential approach can be read as a form of liberation from both regionalist and analogue architecture—a way of killing the father.⁷⁴

Coda: Contemporaneity or Endless Loops of References? Post-Postmodernism Redux

When we place Breitschmid and Olgiati’s non-referential “theory” and Olgiati’s own architectural work within a historical continuum, we arrive at several preliminary conclusions.

73 Ole W. Fischer, “Die Gedanken tragen weiss. – Drei Häuser, ein Bild und der Mythos,” in *TransAktion* (Zürich: gta Verlag, 2003), 130–137.

74 It is worth noting that personal matters have also intervened between the two authors: Markus Breitschmid and Valerio Olgiati are involved in court proceedings, where

First, despite their strong rejection of modern and postmodern architecture, the authors rely on existing narratives: the notion of historical “breaks,” avant-garde claims to “newness,” etc. Like postmodernism’s relationship to modernism, their position appears oedipal: they can easily define what they oppose—in this case, their predecessors—but struggle to provide a positive definition of “non-referentiality.” Venturi’s influence on Olgiati—complexity, linguistics, images, the everyday—cannot be overestimated, yet he works against this via autonomy and syntactic abstract formalism in the manner of Rossi and Eisenman. Like Eisenman’s exercises in systematically unravelling the cube through transformative geometric operations, losing and finding authorship in endless process work, Olgiati insists on the “architectural idea” as a purely cerebral project (like playing chess in one’s head) before drawing the first line on paper or screen. He describes the design process as unfolding this idea into structural order, material, space, and built form without external references—yet supposedly always connected to reality. However, it remains unclear what kind of “reality” this entails, since social questions, politics, history, context, technological issues, the economy, and ecology are explicitly excluded—as are client, program, and site. What distinguishes Olgiati’s approach from the theoretical positions of Eisenman and Rossi is his reliance on a phenomenological metaphysics of presence and existence (Heidegger) and on transcendental ideas of truth and beauty (Kant)—positions that contradict both each other and the (post)structuralist theories of his predecessors.

In a sense, Breitschmid and Olgiati’s “non-referential” architecture can be seen as a kind of anti-Baudrillardian quest—a struggle against the “empty” or “floating” signifier and against simulation without a referent in

the theoretician sued the architect in a defamation case. Breitschmid took action after Olgiati commented on social media that Breitschmid’s single-family residence in Riner, Virginia was a “distorted version of [his] design.” The dispute arose because Breitschmid had initially asked the architect to provide a sketch for an architectural idea they had discussed (the “Manahoac House”), but after receiving cost estimates, switched to a local design firm for design and execution. See “Judge Sides with Valerio Olgiati in Defamation Suit Brought by Markus Breitschmid over Virginia House; Case over Fees Is Ongoing,” in *The Architect’s Newspaper*, January 2024, <https://www.archpaper.com/2024/01/judge-sides-with-valerio-olgiati-in-defamation-suit-brought-by-markus-breitschmid-over-virginia-house-case-over-fees-is-ongoing/> (accessed January 31, 2024).

reality.⁷⁵ Yet they still cling to a postmodern notion of architecture as language or textual system. Perhaps we can compare the contradictory theory and practice of “non-referential” contemporaneity—caught in paradoxical relationships with historical references—to the emergence of the “post-digital” over the last decade. The so-called post-digital image replaced the computer-generated imagery (CGI) of the 1990s and 2000s, which aimed for photo-realistic renderings, with a more imaginative, artificial, and estranged form of representation. Yet, despite its name, the post-digital uses digital tools to mimic the complex pictorial traditions of hand-made architectural drawings and collages from the 1970s and 80s in a form of neo-postmodernism, or postmodern revival. References still abound.

75 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981); English translation: *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills,” in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 52–68.

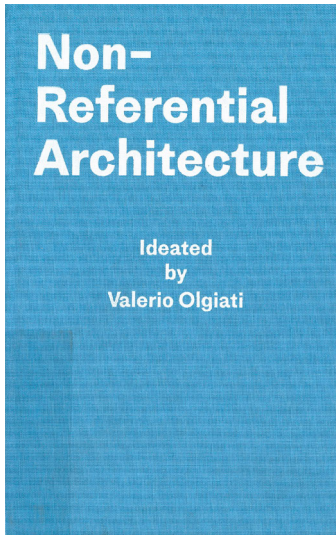


Fig. 68.
Valerio Olgiati and Markus Breitschmid,
Non-Referential Architecture, 3rd ed.
(Zurich: Park Books, 2021), cover.

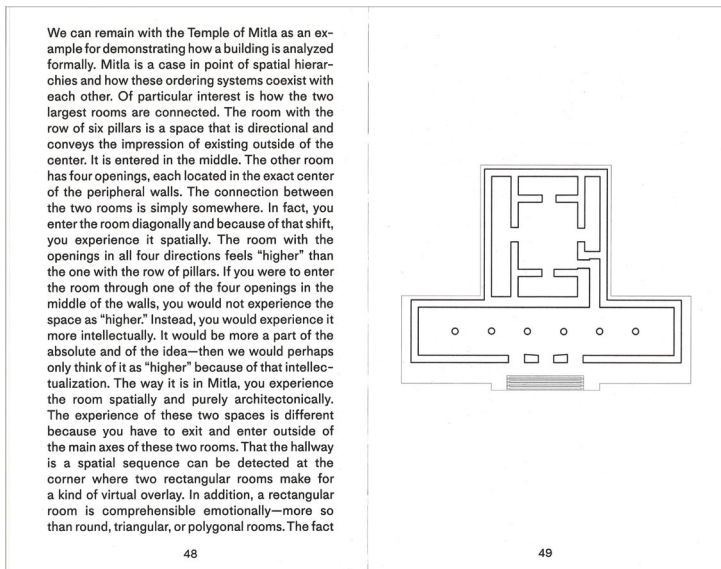


Fig. 69.
Double spread from Olgiati and Breitschmid, Non-Referential Architecture, 48–49,
showing the only image in the entire book: a plan of the Zapotec temple in Mitla,
Mexico.



Fig. 70.
Valerio Olgiati, Villa Além, Alentejo, Portugal, 2012–14, courtyard. Courtesy of Archive Olgiati.

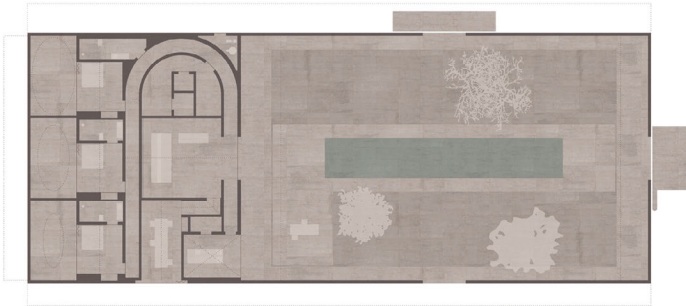


Fig. 71.
Valerio Olgiati, Villa Além, Alentejo, Portugal, 2012–14, plan. Courtesy of Archive Olgiati.



Fig. 72.
Valerio Olgiati, Villa Além, Alentejo, Portugal, 2012–14, section. Courtesy of Archive Olgiati.

Translation - Metaphor

Adapting a Reference to Different Narratives

The Garden City, Ankara, and Contemporaneity

Hande Tunç

Introduction

The first half of the twentieth century marked a historical threshold of critical transformations in both architectural and Turkish history, particularly regarding the construction of a new society and its citizens. The garden city movement, first introduced by Ebenezer Howard in his 1898 book *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, advanced theoretical and spatial explorations aimed at uniting city and countryside and reorganizing European society according to new settlement patterns in architecture and urbanism. Thirty years after these discussions began in England and spread across Europe, the garden city concept emerged in Turkey as an important reference when German architects were invited to plan Ankara, which became the focal point of the Republic of Turkey's ideological and spatial modernization initiatives. However, the use of this reference as a tool for modernization created significant challenges for Ankara and Turkey, which had not undergone the same social and urban processes as England and Germany.

This study examines the transformation of the garden city concept as it was employed in the ideological, social, and spatial construction of the Republic of Turkey and Ankara. This article extends the discussion initiated by Esra Akcan's *Architecture in Translation* by focusing on the ideological and spatial reinterpretations of the Garden City model in Ankara. It reveals the

tension between reference¹ and contemporaneity by analyzing the problems encountered owing to social, cultural, and political differences when transforming a universal reference into a regional one. In this study, the term reference denotes a framework of reinterpretation through which a model or idea is recontextualized within distinct ideological and spatial settings. I focus on three key examples that aimed to create a contemporary society in Ankara: the city's early urban planning strategies, the Bahçelievler housing settlement, and the Atatürk Forest Farm projects, each developed within the framework of the garden city concept. These examples, designed by German architects interpreting Ebenezer Howard's ideas, evolved into new locally-specific versions that retained traces of the original concept while developing under the influence of their own historical conditions. By contrasting each project's social aims, processes, components, and methods with the core ideas of the garden city concept, I hope to understand the conceptual shifts experienced by the idea of the garden city when brought to Ankara.

This study is organized into three sections. First, it explores the origins and development of the garden city concept in England and Germany. Second, it examines the socio-spatial factors that accelerated Ankara's rise to capital status after the Republic of Turkey was established. Third, it analyzes the examples in Ankara within the garden city framework through three different perspectives: urban planning, residential area, and recreational farming area.

The Garden City (England and Germany)

Despite having no professional experience or formal training in the field, Ebenezer Howard left an indelible mark on urban planning. Howard left school at fifteen and began working as a clerk. At twenty-one, he traveled to Nebraska, where he initially attempted farming.² However, his experiences working as a court reporter and newspaper stenographer in Chicago provi-

1 In this study, the term 'reference' denotes a framework of reinterpretation through which a model or idea is recontextualized within distinct ideological and spatial settings.

2 See Robert Beevers, *The Garden City Utopia: A Critical Biography of Ebenezer Howard* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 5.

ded new insights that inspired him to return to England in 1876 and pursue a different career path. These diverse experiences, and his unconventional background, provided the foundation for his work in urban planning and architecture, culminating in his groundbreaking garden city concept. Howard's seminal work *Tomorrow: The Peaceful Path to Real Land Reform* was first published in 1898 and revised in 1902 under the title *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, preserving the essential elements of his proposal. In this text, Howard addressed social and economic issues such as the "land question"—including rural depopulation and urban overcrowding in the late nineteenth century—and outlined his vision for a perfect society.³

A diverse array of thinkers and concepts influenced Ebenezer Howard's innovative vision of garden cities.⁴ Among these, Edward Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward* (1888) offered a compelling portrayal of a society that had evolved into a socialist utopia, focusing on ideals of equality, nationalized industry, and reduced working hours. Howard was also influenced by utopian socialists like Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, who promoted collective ownership and cooperation as an alternative to prevailing socioeconomic systems. Howard's idea of shared land use in garden cities aligned with Thomas Spence's call for nationalizing land under collective municipal ownership, first expressed in a 1775 lecture to the Philosophical Society of Newcastle-on-Tyne and later published as *Property in Land Every One's Right*. Furthermore, Edward Gibbon Wakefield's identification of urban overpopulation as the primary cause of socioeconomic problems—such as proletarian poverty and unhealthy living conditions—and his proposal for establishing overseas colonies reinforced Howard's concerns about urban congestion and the need for alternate settlement patterns. Finally, James Silk Buckingham's idea of the "model town," introduced in *National Evils and Practical Remedies* (1849), provided Howard with insights into planned settlements.⁵ The concentric circular arrangement of Howard's garden city is very similar to the concentric square layout of the model town. While all these ideas were refe-

3 Jean-Yves Tizot, "Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Idea and the Ideology of Industrialism," in *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, no. 87 (Spring 2018), <https://journals.openedition.org/cve/3605>.

4 Lewis Mumford, "The Garden City Idea and Modern Planning," introductory essay to Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (London: Routledge, 2007), 29–30.

5 Tizot, "Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Idea."

rences for Howard's garden city concept, his work itself became a perennial reference for the garden city movement, which sought solutions to contemporary problems in England.

The Garden City in England

Howard developed his ideas in response to the challenges that nineteenth-century urbanization had created in London and other urban centers, where growing industrialization placed tremendous strain on labor markets. Large-scale rural-to-urban migration, particularly to London, had exacerbated these problems and created an unsustainable situation. Howard suggested a straightforward solution: reintegrating people into the countryside. His vision included a balanced population distribution between rural and urban areas—creating an ideal living environment that harmoniously combined the benefits of both—and addressing the economic and social issues resulting from excessive urbanization.⁶ Howard's garden cities were ultimately intended to bridge the divide between rural and urban areas.

Howard explained his ideas with the visual aid of the “Three Magnets” diagram (Fig. 73). The diagram illustrated a third option beyond the limitations of town and country alone—one that combined the benefits of active urban life with the beauty and pleasure of the countryside.⁷ Comparing a city to a magnet and its citizens to pins, he argued that planner should identify the elements that make urban areas alluring and build places that create stronger magnets to attract people back to rural areas. Howard's carefully planned and illustrated garden city scheme, described in *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, began with purchasing a large parcel of land measuring 24,000 acres. This circular project area was divided into six zones by boulevards radiating outward from the center (Fig. 74). Notable public buildings surrounded the central circular garden, including the municipal building, concert and conference hall, theater, library, museum, gallery, and hospital. The “Crystal Palace,” described as a circular glass structure for diverse commercial activities, also served as a winter garden. Along the outer ring, factories, warehouses, dairy farms, and markets were arranged alongside the circular

6 Ruşen Keleş, “Sunuş,” in *Yarının Bahçe Kentleri* (Istanbul: Daimon Yayınları, 2019), 8–9.

7 Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, 45–47.

railway that encircled the entire city. Through this railway system, residents could sell their goods within or beyond the city limits, creating new market opportunities for various professions and farmers while fostering a community with enhanced purchasing power and regular employment in healthier environments.⁸ In his book, Howard suggested a comprehensive model encompassing every aspect from functional distribution and spatial utilization to economic planning to development process.

Five years after the book's publication, in 1903, the Garden City Pioneer Company was established to realize the first Garden City. After thoroughly analyzing several locations, the company bought 3,818 acres of land near Letchworth to begin its mission. The firm assigned Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, architects and urban planners, the task of developing Letchworth's town center. The project's primary objectives were to establish a development area featuring improved and affordable housing, industrial zones to increase job opportunities, and parks and green open areas for recreational purposes. Thus, the first garden city was created.

The Garden City in Germany

The discourse and initiatives stemming from Ebenezer Howard's work transcended both his efforts and England's borders. Tenements in Germany, known as *Mietskaserne*—collective accommodation with units arranged on either side of a central corridor—became the subject of criticism towards the end of the nineteenth century for their uncontrolled urban sprawl, narrow courtyards without light and air, lack of privacy, and unhealthy living conditions. In this context, Howard's garden city model became a significant source of inspiration for German housing complexes. The German Garden City Association (DGG; *Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft*), founded in Berlin in 1902, emerged in response to Germany's unhealthy and high-density living conditions. Its primary goals were to reestablish inhabitants' connection with nature, promote social reform and land-use policies through garden city principles, and decentralize industry to distribute economic activity

8 Ibid.

across the region.⁹ Consequently, garden city concepts and ideas to the garden city were quickly adopted in Germany.

The *Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft* expressed ideas that closely resembled those of Howard. Like Howard's concept, the garden city was portrayed in DGG publications as a settlement constructed on low-cost, communally owned land that provided advantageous production conditions for industry and crafts, with a substantial portion of the land reserved for green spaces and agriculture. Like Howard, the DGG's primary objective was establishing independent, self-sufficient small towns that were not economically dependent on the city. Nevertheless, with the exception of Dresden Hellerau, German garden cities developed more as settlements addressing the housing needs of larger cities than as autonomous communities. Some garden city experiments in Germany failed to meet all the requirements for agricultural and industrial components owing to local financial and infrastructural conditions.

Aware of the challenges inherent in these experiments, Hans and Bernhard Kampffmeyer developed different approaches and definitions that catered to varying needs. First of all, Bernhard Kampffmeyer outlined six requirements for a settlement to be classified as a garden city: the land must be owned by the public; the focus should be on garden-related activities; the settlement must be planned and controlled; the production area must be sufficiently developed to support urban self-sufficiency; industry must be distributed throughout the country; and the city must be encircled by agricultural areas.¹⁰ Subsequently, he clarified the differences between German garden cities and Howard's concept of the garden city, sparking discussions within the DGG regarding the definition of various new terms such as *Gartenvorstadt* (garden suburb), *Gartensiedlung* (garden settlement), and *Gartendorf* (garden village). Hans Kampffmeyer, in distinguishing the garden city from the *Gartenvorstadt*, emphasized the importance of political and economic self-sufficiency as well as agricultural land on the periphery. *Gartenvorstadt* was defined by Emil Behnisch, writing in the journal *Gartenstadt* in 1913,

9 J. Bosch Abarca, "The Periphery of the German City: From the Garden City to the Modern Siedlung," in *VLC arquitectura: Research Journal* 7, no. 1 (2020), 1–32, 16.

10 Teresa Harris, *The German Garden City Movement: Architecture, Politics and Urban Transformation, 1902–1931* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2012), 119.

as a settlement supporting a city of moderate size, and the *Gartendorf* as a miniature garden city.¹¹

The appearance of these examples in Germany, which respond to different requirements from those in England, has allowed new interpretations of garden cities to arise that diverge from Howard's original idea. The emergence of new terminologies and interpretations has also paved the way for reconsidering the garden city in terms of the social and economic conditions within Ankara's urban context.

Ankara

Social and Spatial Construction of the Republic of Turkey

After the proclamation of the Republic in Turkey, the gap between existing conditions and the society people desired was enormous. For this reason, building a nation on the remnants of the Ottoman Empire really did mean pursuing a utopian vision.¹² Ankara, designated as the new capital, became the focal point for creating new social spaces and constructing new ideologies. The Republic pursued two spatial strategies: transforming the country into a nation-state and positioning cities as bastions of modernity.¹³ Besides declaring Ankara the capital, the first strategy also involved developing railway networks, establishing industries in small cities, and disseminating modern values throughout Anatolia via community centers (*halk evleri*—people's houses).

Ankara, planned by Hermann Jansen and influenced by Ebenezer Howard's garden city and Camillo Sitte's "picturesque" approach, was considered a model for all cities seeking to become contemporary living spaces. In addition, rural areas and villages across a large part of the country gained

11 Esra Akcan, *Çeviride Modern olan: Şehir ve Konutta Türk-Alman İlişkileri* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2009), 59.

12 Joel S. Migdal, "Finding the Meeting Ground of Fact and Fiction: Some Reflections on Turkish Modernization," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 252–59, 258.

13 İlhan Tekeli, *Tasarım Mimarlık ve Mimarlar* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2011), 221.

importance as part of modernization strategies to ensure national integration and disseminate the ideals of the Republic. Raising awareness and educating the people through the *halk evleri* was an important part of the country's development plans. The endeavor to establish a social and spatial balance between rural and urban areas also brought ideal village projects and plans to the forefront. A notable example among these projects is the "Ideal Republic Village" (1937), the idea for which is attributed to Kazım Dirik, despite the architect remaining unidentified (Fig. 75). Not only did it feature a circular plan, but its spatial organization also bore similarities to Howard's garden city.¹⁴ The plan, which comprised of circular zones, featured a square in its center, public buildings like schools, village halls, cooperatives, and hotels in the first circle, residences in the second circle, and expansive facilities like nurseries, guilds, sports fields, and factories in the outermost circle. References to the garden city were certainly not confined to this project. Throughout Ankara's transformation into the capital, the garden city concept remained relevant across various spaces and scales.

The Construction of Ankara and the Realization of an Urban Utopia

The Republican leadership pursued an ambitious modernization agenda: catching up with the West through Enlightenment ideals, joining capitalist development and industrialization, building a nation-state with democratic institutions, and creating an educated citizenry.¹⁵ Ankara's transformation into a modern capital became the key vehicle for achieving these cultural, economic, and political goals. As soon as it was declared the capital, Ankara quickly began rapid urban development aimed at making it the Republic's showcase city. According to Sibel Bozdoğan, the founders of the Republic saw Ankara as a *tabula rasa* where they could realize their grand ideals—and endeavored to reshape it accordingly.¹⁶ Unlike Istanbul, which symbolized

14 Zeynep Eres, *Türkiye'de Planlı Kırsal Yerleşmelerin Tarihsel Gelişimi ve Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Planlı Kırsal Mimarisinin Korunması Sorunu* (PhD diss., İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, 2008), 143.

15 İlhan Tekeli, "Türkiye'de Cumhuriyet Döneminde Kentsel Gelişme ve Kent Planlaması," in *75 Yılda Değişen Kent ve Mimarlık*, ed. Yıldız Sey (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 1–24, 1

16 Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 68.

the Ottoman past, Ankara would represent the future—modern, progressive, and thoroughly national. This new capital would demonstrate the possibilities of Republican reform and serve as a reference city for the entire nation. Furthermore, the construction of Ankara would serve as an ideological tool for social transformation, with its social spaces becoming vehicles for these changes. Thus, the first phase of a modernization project initially focused on the capital but intended to encompass the entire nation was launched through nation-building and a modern city in Ankara.

Specific projects undertaken in Ankara—such as the Bahçelievler housing settlement and the Atatürk Forest Farm—were all part of this broader transformation, aimed at the construction not just of a modern city, but of modern citizens. Like the Ankara plan itself, these projects also bore traces of Enlightenment ideals, the ideas of their own era, and the garden city model.

Examples

The Garden City and the Planning of Ankara

The first planning efforts to create Ankara as an ideal city began in late 1923 after it was declared the capital. Carl Christoph Lörcher's report was delivered to the Şehremaneti (municipal administration) in May 1924. Lörcher was also the first to reference the garden city in these documents: He tried to combine modern urban planning principles with symbolic meaning and introduced elements of the garden city concept that would later be implemented in both Ankara and the Bahçelievler plans prepared by Hermann Jansen.¹⁷ The planning process for Ankara, initiated by Lörcher and continued by Jansen, spanned several years owing to social, political, and economic pressures (Fig. 76 and Fig. 77). Despite numerous revisions during this period, the garden city concept endured and influenced the design of various areas throughout the overall plan.

According to Lörcher's initial plan, Ankara was to feature two-story, low-density row houses, with each home having a large backyard adorned with

17 Ali Cengizkan, "Ankara 1924 Lörcher Planı Raporu," in *Belleten* 67, no. 248 (2003), 153–92, <https://doi.org/10.37879/belleten.2003.153>, 157.

ample greenery, emphasizing harmonious living alongside nature. However, Lörcher's most controversial decision was planning Ankara for a population of only 150,000 to 200,000 people. This density proved far too low for the rapidly growing population. In combination with demands for more green spaces and the high cost of restoring Ankara Castle, this led to the plan's abandonment before its full implementation. The impact of Lörcher's plan on Ankara was thus fleeting, prompting the search for a new approach.

Three experienced urban planners—Hermann Jansen, Leon Jausseley, and Josef Brix—were invited to Ankara by the municipality to prepare preliminary reports for the city's new planning competition. Hermann Jansen won the competition in 1928 and began the planning process. He maintained the garden city characteristics that Lörcher had introduced, emphasizing green spaces and garden houses. Like his fellow German Lörcher, Jansen was familiar with the garden city concept and how it had been developed in Germany. Although Jansen redesigned the city for a denser population, he remained as faithful as possible to Lörcher's plan. Defending his design, Jansen stated that it reconciled two fundamental needs of modern life: proximity to nature and the benefits of urban living—the “rural” and “urban”. For Jansen, Ankara represented the third magnet in Howard's theory.¹⁸ Like the Republic's ideological goal of uniting the countryside and the city, the new capital would act as a magnet, combing the best features of both.

Nonetheless, Howard's garden city model and Ankara diverged in fundamental ways. First of all, Ankara symbolized an escape from Istanbul, while Howard's garden city represented an escape from industrial cities generally. The aim was to relocate the new administrative and symbolic center of the Republic away from Istanbul, not to solve the problems of industrialization and urban crowding that had motivated Howard. The decision to embody the new nation-state's revolution in a new city stemmed from political rather than social reform motives—unlike Howard's response to the crowded and unhealthy living conditions caused by unplanned urbanization and industrialization. Unlike Howard's residents, who organized cooperatively, Ankara's development was government-funded and directed.¹⁹ Also un-

18 Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 35.

19 Esra Akcan, *Çeviride Modern olan: Şehir ve Konutta Türk-Alman İlişkileri* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2009), 70.

like Howard, Jansen planned agricultural zones on the periphery of the city as recreational rather than productive areas, and he organized housing by social class, following German examples. This was, therefore, an ideal city plan designed to eliminate future problems for a society still completing its industrialization and urbanization, rather than one responding to existing urban crisis, as in Howard's case.

Ankara thus represents the second transformation of the garden city concept, whose meaning had already changed during the transition from England to Germany, and then again from Germany to Turkey. Despite deviating significantly from the original concept, Turkey's founding leaders were eager to incorporate it into their designs to serve the ideology and goals of the new republic. The concept was embraced insofar as it supported the Republic's founding aims: promoting social development, providing a model for other cities in Anatolia, fostering both rural and urban development, and creating educated citizens who would become agents of social change. The main goal was to shape social life through the planned development of the capital and the construction of a modern physical environment, thereby achieving the social transformation needed to establish the Republic's reforms.²⁰ In this way, the concept of the garden city was transformed into a locally-specific version, shaped by its own time and conditions and serving as a reference for modernization in Ankara's ideological, social, and spatial construction.

The Garden City as a Residential Area

The Bahçelievler Housing Cooperative was an exemplary implementation of garden city principles, distinguished from other housing projects of its time by its focus on providing mass housing for Ankara's bureaucratic class away from the city center. Housing became an urgent need after the declaration of Ankara as the capital, owing to the city's rapid population growth, which affected all citizens, but especially civil servants. Following the economic crisis of the 1930s, this situation became even more concerning. As urban land speculation emerged, the state encouraged cooperatives as a rapid and

20 H. Çağatay Keskinok, İrmak Yavuz Özgür, and H. Eren Efeoğlu, *Jansen ve Ankara: Planlar-Yazışmalar* (Ankara: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2023), 2.

economical solution. Just as the garden city concept had influenced various German housing projects, it continued to shape the Bahçelievler project through both the cooperative model and Hermann Jansen's influence as designer of Ankara's master plan.

Nevertheless, implementing the garden city idea in the housing sector required new justifications within a society that had not completed its industrialization process.²¹ One justification concerned scale: The urban scale has been reduced to the neighborhood scale, following German examples. Given Ankara's size, creating a new garden city connected to the city center was nearly impossible. Another issue involved differences in social life. Various publications recommended detached homes with gardens over apartments, citing the loss of privacy in apartments and the disruption of the traditional lifestyles. The cooperative concept, chosen as a solution, was itself an institution emerging within industrial society, similar to the garden city. While cooperatives typically served as organizational forms where weaker segments of society (the low- and middle-income working class) attempted to overcome difficulties with their own resources, Bahçelievler was an initiative organized by the relatively well-situated upper classes. However, all these justifications, not based on reactions developed through lived experience or a strong desire for a new lifestyle, hindered the adoption of this housing and settlement typology, leading to significant future problems for the settlement.

Before encountering these issues, the construction process of Bahçelievler began in 1935 with Jansen's initial sketch of 300 houses (Fig. 78). The land plan was subsequently modified in two stages—first by Jansen, then by a local architect—to accommodate participants' demands. Following these revisions, the project reached its final form in 1936, with single and twin houses positioned on the land's periphery and row houses in the inner sections (Fig. 79 and Fig. 80). Communal facilities including schools, markets, tennis courts, swimming pools, playgrounds, and a casino were integrated in the central area to serve all residents.

Examination of the process reveals that homeowners' demands were unusually luxurious compared to cooperative housing designs in Europe. These demands were closely associated with the participants' strong societal

21 İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Bahçeli Evlerin Öyküsü: Bir Batı Kurumunun Yeniden Yorumlanması* (Ankara: Kent-Koop Yayınları, 1984), 127–135.

position and upper-class sensibilities. These factors generated demands exceeding the cooperative's fundamental needs. The cooperative organization in Ankara, originally intended to produce social housing for the low-income population following European practices, thus transformed into a civil servant cooperative featuring luxury housing and facilitating investment property acquisition.²² When population growth in the 1950s prompted authorities to raise the regional height limit to five stories, homeowners seeking profit from rising property values accelerated the process of converting their houses into apartments. Bahçelievler homeowners' willingness to abandon the social and practical features of their homes for financial gain reflected their failure to embrace the significance of these aspects. Consequently, the Bahçelievler project reached the end of its lifespan after three decades. Owing to these socio-political challenges, the idea of creating residential areas based on the garden city concept—where each house has its own garden and common areas serve the entire community, as Jansen had exemplified in Germany—faced difficulties establishing a local manifestation. Although this process ultimately replaced the area with high-rise residential buildings, it provided valuable lessons about the obstacles encountered when adapting a supposedly universal reference to local contexts.

The Garden City as a Recreational or Farming Area

As part of Ankara's significant urban development initiatives, Atatürk established the Atatürk Forest Farm (originally named *Gazi Orman Çiftliği*) on May 5, 1925, spanning approximately 20,000 acres. The primary aim of the project was to foster collective intelligence by educating agricultural laborers and cooperatives according to Republican ideology while enhancing productivity through science and technology. Planned development of the farm began in 1934 with Swiss architect Ernst Egli, a central figure in shaping Ankara's architectural identity in the early days of the Republic through the design and realization of significant public buildings. This was followed by Hermann Jansen's more comprehensive planning from 1936. Modern ar-

22 Ömür Mumcu Uçar, *Sınır Kavramına Mekansal Bir Yaklaşım: Ankara Bahçelievler Yerleşiminde Sınırlara Bağlı Bir Analiz* (PhD diss., İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, 2005), 80.

rangements in housing, agriculture, and production were introduced to the Atatürk Forest Farm primarily through Egli and Jansen's plans.

Examining the settlement plan reveals that the southern end of the settlement axis featured the *Kuleli Köşk*, a towered pavilion built in 1926 that was described in the publication *Mustafa Kemal Paşa Hazretleri'nin Ankara Çiftlikleri* as a farm administration building flanked by two residences for senior staff.²³ It was demolished shortly thereafter, while the northern end housed the Gazi Train Station, which connected the area to the city. Employee and worker dwellings were positioned on both sides of the east–west axis, delineated by the elementary school's main gate in the east and the planned main gate of the Weekend Hotel in the west. This planning reflected Jansen's focus on two main objectives: first, reorganizing social activities in and around the Beer Factory to align with vehicular and pedestrian pathways and create public spaces (Fig. 81),²⁴ and second, enhancing existing worker and employee dwellings in quantity and quality to create communal living areas (Fig. 82). The positioning of the two main axes and the arrangement of their units were shaped by these two fundamental objectives.

The first axis, extending from north to south, accommodated public spaces including terraces, restaurants, cafes, a plaza for winter ice skating, an amusement park, a concert hall, and an open-air cinema. The second axis, extending from east to west, featured housing for workers, employees, and their families. This residential area was intended as more than mere housing—it was designed as a commune for agricultural laborers and their families who united behind shared goals and worked together to meet social responsibilities. Consequently, facilities supporting social life, including schools for workers' children and training spaces, were integrated into this area.

Jansen approached the Atatürk Forest Farm Project as a complex addressing residential, production, and recreational needs. Given Jansen's conception of his Ankara plan as a modern garden city, Atatürk Forest Farm represented a small-scale embodiment of this ideal, with its comprehensive functions, planning, and built environment. The principles Jansen arti-

23 Leyla Alpagut, "Marmara Köşkü: Atatürk için Modern Çiftlik Evi," in ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Dergisi 29, no. 1 (2012), 69–94, 72.

24 Leyla Alpagut, "Hermann Jansen için Ankara'da yeni bir görev: 'Gazi Orman Çiftliği' planlaması," in Ankara Araştırmaları Dergisi 5, no. 1 (2017), 1–26, 18–19.

culated in his 1936 notes on Ankara—including aspirations for modernity, responsibility for youth and public welfare, and the implementation of contemporary technology—also characterized Atatürk Forest Farm.²⁵ The farm evolved into a symbolic complex where the Republic's progressive ideals became visible and practical, extending beyond merely creating an integrated rural-urban social space for Ankara residents. Atatürk Forest Farm aimed to transform existing feudal structures through several mechanisms: integrating production with consumption, linking education with employment opportunities, developing agricultural production, and continuing research to support agricultural enhancement.²⁶ It thus functioned as a collective production and recreation space for the dissemination and transformation of ideology, embodying social change and new public life. The farm became a significant example of how new production methods and urban practices converged to create a new societal narrative. Consequently, Atatürk Forest Farm maintained value both as an innovative application of garden city principles and as a component of the nation's modernization movement.

Conclusion

The construction of Ankara served as the focal point of the Republic of Turkey's ideological and spatial modernization initiatives. However, using the garden city as a modernization tool revealed significant distinctions between Turkey and the pioneering garden city examples in Germany and England. I examined this via the examples of Ankara's urban planning process, the Bahçelievler Housing Settlement, and the Atatürk Forest Farm projects—reference spaces developed within the garden city framework.

Let us consider two significant points at the conclusion of this study. Firstly, it is imperative to clarify the reasons for selecting the garden city as a modernization tool. These include: the quest for an approach that would unite and advance society by combining rural and urban areas in response to modernization demands; the desire to choose a relatively recent urban plan-

25 Ibid.

26 H. Çağatay Keskinok, "Bir Özgürleşme Tasarısı Olarak AOÇ," in *Bir Çağdaşlaşma Öyküsü: Cumhuriyet Devriminin Büyük Eseri Atatürk Orman Çiftliği* (Ankara: Koleksiyoncular Derneği, 2005), 70–90.

ning concept appropriate to the historical period; the aspiration to create Ankara as a spatial magnet that would attract people by embodying garden city principles; and the concern, especially among German architects, given their extensive experience, with preventing potential problems that a non-industrialized country might face during industrialization.

The second crucial point concerns why Ankara's garden city examples differ from others. These projects transformed into new local versions of the garden city that bear traces of the original concept but developed under their own historical conditions. They hence diverged from European garden city examples and acquired new meanings. This divergence stems from Turkey's incomplete industrialization and lack of clearly defined social classes—the newly established republic had not yet confronted the social and spatial problems present in Europe. Unlike its predecessors, the primary aim in the construction of Ankara was to design a capital city that would serve as a reference for other cities in a country requiring social, cultural, and economic development across all regions and segments. While England's Letchworth addressed industrial overcrowding and Germany's garden cities provided worker housing, Turkey's applications—Ankara's master plan, the Bahçelievler settlement, and Atatürk Forest Farm—served primarily as symbols of Republican modernization and national development. The garden city concept necessarily evolved into different forms, concepts, and scales when confronted with Ankara's specific situation and realities. The projects examined here ultimately reveal the inevitable tension between borrowed references and locally-defined contemporaneity.

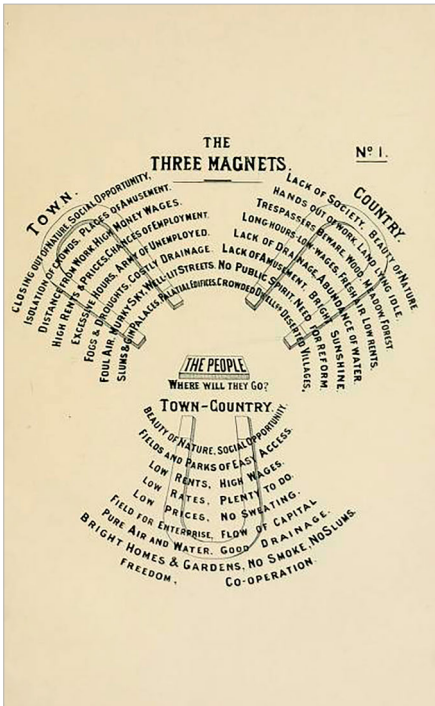
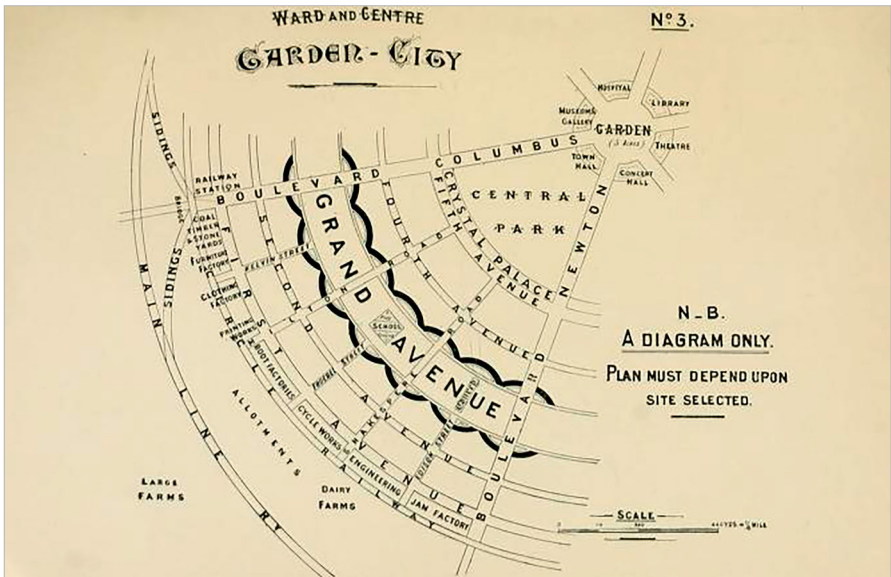


Fig. 73. – Fig. 74.
 Ebenezer Howard's three magnets diagram and garden city plan from Garden Cities of To-morrow (1902). Source: Archive.org, public domain.
 Ebenezer Howard's three magnets diagram and garden city plan from Garden Cities of To-morrow (1902). Source: <https://archive.org/details/gardencitiesoftoomorrow/page/n10/mode/1up>, Archive.org, public domain.



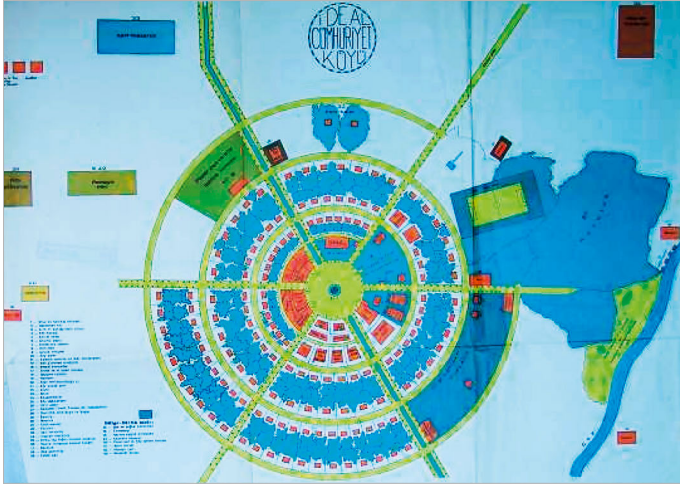


Fig. 75. Plan of the Ideal Republic Village. Originally published in Afet İnan, *Devletçilik İlkesi ve Türkiye Cumhuriyetinin Birinci Sanayi Planı 1933* (1972), as cited in Zeynep Eres, "Türkiye'de Planlı Kırsal Yerleşmelerin Tarihsel Gelişimi ve Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Planlı Kırsal Mimarisinin Korunması Sorunu" (PhD diss., İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, 2008).

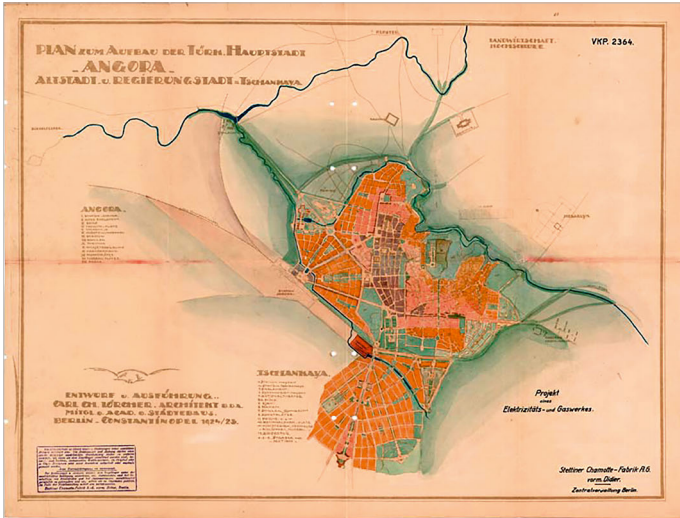


Fig. 76. The 1924–1925 Ankara Master Plan, by Carl Christoph Lörcher. Image sourced from Ali Cengizkan, *Ankara'nın İlk Planı: 1924–1925 Lörcher Planı: Kentsel Mekân Özellikleri, 1932 Jansen Planı'na ve Bugüne Katkıları, Etki ve Kalıntıları* (Ankara: Arkadaş Yayınları, 2004).

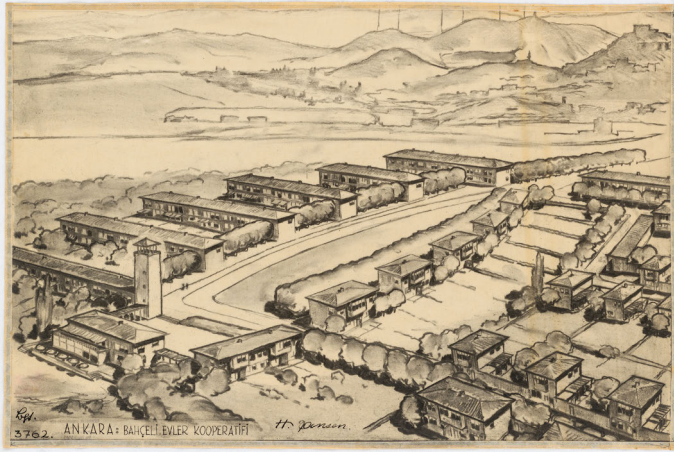


Fig. 79. – Fig. 80.
Sketches of Bahçelievler Housing Cooperative, designed by Hermann Jansen (1936). Source: Technische Universität Berlin, Architekturmuseum, Inv. Nr. 23083 and Inv. Nr. 23090, <https://architekturmuseum.ub.tu-berlin.de>.

Contemporaneity as Creative Difference

On the Use of Philosophical Concepts in the Architectural Discourse of the 1990s

Frederike Lausch

This paper begins with a widely recognized publication that might prompt readers to think, “Oh, not again!” I would likely respond similarly, and this reaction serves as the starting point for my topic: how an architecture theory elite distinguishes itself through philosophical references, disseminates its discourse widely, and establishes a notion of contemporaneity intended to influence architectural discourses worldwide. The publication in question is the 1993 *Architectural Design* (hereafter AD) issue “Folding in Architecture,” in which editor Greg Lynn and other contributors like Peter Eisenman drew extensively on French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* (1988), as well as *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (1980), written together with psychoanalyst Félix Guattari.¹ In his foreword to the AD issue, Kenneth Powell observed that architects were using Deleuze’s concept of the fold as an intellectual justification for designs that could more straightforwardly be described as “organic.” Such a description, he noted, would evoke Frank Lloyd Wright and similar associations inscribing them into a lineage of past work.² To present their work as “new”—as belonging to a contemporaneity that resisted connections to the past—architects therefore sought

1 Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), originally published as *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1988); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), originally published as *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980).

2 Kenneth Powell, “Unfolding Folding,” in *Architectural Design* 63, no. 3/4 (1993), 7.

out novel words, concepts, and references. The success of this endeavor depended on promotional strategies, networks, and dissemination platforms that established what Germans call *Diskurshoheit* (discourse sovereignty).

My dissertation, defended in 2019 and published in 2021, examined the architectural discourse of the 1990s, particularly as influenced by Anyone Corporation, a self-proclaimed international network founded in 1990 in New York City.³ I analyzed how Anyone Corporation members translated Deleuze and Guattari's concepts into architectural theory and design. To understand how "foreign" concepts transfer to architecture, I used translation as an analytic category that revealed differences, power imbalances, and the opportunities for interdisciplinary exchange. Drawing on cultural theorist Doris Bachmann-Medick, this approach decomposed traditional narratives into distinct stages: understanding, misunderstanding, mediation, and resistance.⁴ Using translation theories, I emphasized contact zones, transformation zones, conflict zones, and the staged connections between architecture and philosophy. By referring to Deleuze, Anyone Corporation members positioned themselves as architecture's intellectual elite. Philosophical references thus became tools for social distinction and identity construction. While I would approach this research differently today, my fourth chapter on conflict zones provides a starting point for exploring philosophical references in architecture and how they relate to contemporaneity.

This paper begins with a concise introduction to Anyone Corporation, then briefly explores translation theories and Deleuzian concepts with regard to reference and contemporaneity so as to better understand what I term "conflict zones." I examine how conflicts in translating philosophy into architecture reveal not just disciplinary struggles but also how references give an impression of contemporaneity. My methodological approach relies on discourse analysis, taking as its primary sources Anyone Corporation publications and the writings of its members, like the "Folding in Architecture" *AD* issue. These are contextualized with secondary literature by

3 Frederike Lausch, Gilles Deleuze und die Anyone Corporation: Übersetzungsprozesse zwischen Philosophie und Architektur (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2021).

4 Doris Bachmann-Medick, "Introduction: The Translational Turn," in *Translation Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009), 9.

François Cusset, Karen Burns, Douglas Murphy, Claire Colebrook, Andrew Ballantyne, Élie During, Sylvère Lotringer, and Douglas Spencer.⁵

Anyone Corporation

Anyone Corporation was founded as a professional network by the editor Cynthia C. Davidson and her husband, architect Peter Eisenman, along with Japanese architect Arata Isozaki and Catalan architect Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió. It is a non-profit organization dedicated to the dissemination of architectural discourse and theory, a commitment that continues today. My focus is specifically on the 1990s. Davidson described Anyone Corporation's goal as follows: "To advance the knowledge and understanding of architecture and its relationships to the general culture through international conferences, public seminars, and publications that erode boundaries between disciplines and cultures."⁶ According to its self-description, Anyone Corporation operated through three main channels: first, the Any conferences held annually in different cities worldwide from 1991 to 2000, with published proceedings (Fig. 83); second the journal ANY, published from 1993 to 2000 (Fig. 84) and followed in 2003 by *Log*, still published by Anyone Corporation; and third, the "Writing Architecture" series with MIT Press, initiated in 1995 and still ongoing to the present day (Fig. 85). The term "any," signifying indeterminacy or undecidability,⁷ alluded to "French post-structuralism." François Cusset aptly characterized this as a distinctly

5 Cathelijne Nuijsink is currently working on a research project on Anyone Corporation entitled "Unlocking the 'Contact Zone': Towards a New Historiography of Architecture": <https://www.nsl.ethz.ch/en/projekt/unlocking-the-contact-zone-towards-a-new-historiography-of-architecture/> (accessed February 9, 2024).

6 Anyone Corporation, "About," www.anycorp.com/about-anyone-corporation (accessed June 7, 2015).

7 "The idea of undecidability, which was in the air, fueled the theoretical basis of the Anyone project. Since it was to take place in the ten years prior to the end of the century, or the end of the millennium, the idea of undecidability not only suggested that nothing was fixed in terms of architectural thinking but also that both history and the future could be seen as undecidable, that is, as no longer fixed referents." Cynthia C. Davidson, "An(y)alysis: Cynthia Davidson Talks with Herself," September 25, 2004, for *Parametro*, no. 252/253 (2004), http://architettura.it/files/20040925/index_en.htm (accessed April 3, 2017).

US-American phenomenon, amalgamating the theories of French thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva.⁸ This amalgamation created a homogeneous school of thought that erased the specific characteristics of these theorists. It deployed them somewhat indiscriminately to critique universal structures and anthropologically constant principles, emphasizing the contingency of social structures and discourses, as well as their connection to specific power formations. At the same time, “any” was an acronym for “architecture New York.” Thus, although the network was positioned as global, New York served as its center. Anyone Corporation’s network was extensive (Fig. 86), but it was not a homogeneous group of like-minded people. Rather, it presented itself in the 1990s more generally as a Western, internationally influential and distinguished elite that built networks and secured intellectual influence through elaborate theoretical discussions. Anyone Corporation aimed to disseminate its ideas and open architectural discourse to other disciplines.

When Davidson wrote about the Any project, her attempt to establish architecture as a host for transdisciplinary discussions became clear:

Inviting other disciplines to join a discussion on architecture allows architecture to see itself through other disciplines, but still does not establish it as a host. It is when other disciplines project notions such as critical theory in literature and philosophy into architecture, using architecture as a source or reference, that architecture becomes a host for critical thought.⁹

The idea of crossing disciplinary boundaries by referring to architectural discourses and objects in other disciplines—and vice versa, generating knowledge on both sides—expressed a desire for transdisciplinarity and the exploration of contact zones. The panel titles of the fourth Any conference in Montréal demonstrate this approach, with “The Province of Architec-

8 François Cusset, *French Theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis* (2003; repr., Paris: La Découverte, 2005), 18 and 291ff. See also Johannes Angermüller, *Why There Is No Poststructuralism in France: The Making of an Intellectual Generation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 3.

9 Cynthia C. Davidson, “Any Story,” in *Lotus*, no. 92 (1997), 95.

ture in Thought” followed by “The Installation of Architecture in Science and Technology,” “The Charge of Architecture in the Arts,” and “The Residence of Architecture in Politics,” among others.¹⁰ The focus was always on the place of architecture in other disciplines. Equally, these debates explored the significance of those disciplines for architecture. In particular, discussions were fostered by inviting numerous participants from different disciplines to the Any conferences. French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who attended only the first conference in 1991 in Los Angeles, described the result as follows: “I’m always struck by what happens at such a table as this. With the aleatory conjunction of discourses and people, we try to find a meaningful way of organizing the discussion between presentations with people who are not prepared to meet.”¹¹ Turkish architect Fatih Ugurla said of the eighth Any conference in Ankara that sociologist Saskia Sassen raised important architectural questions that she did not answer architecturally, but which encouraged him to ask sociological questions as an architect.¹² Sassen herself appreciated that the Any conferences allowed her to experiment in other domains.¹³ In this case, both benefitted from the contact of disciplinary fields that were usually separate. Behind this desire for transdisciplinarity lay the idea that architecture could be most productive precisely at the margins of its own discipline, and that profitable exchanges occur across this threshold in particular.

The Any conferences were seen as places where architecture and philosophy came together intensely. In the 1990s, the desire to promote a “new” approach to architecture was connected to a star cult around Deleuze—with Guattari in brackets, as he was to some extent treated as a side character. It is not too far-fetched to say that Deleuze, who never attended an Anyone Corporation event, dethroned Derrida as the main philosophical reference point. Anyone Corporation publications are filled with concepts from Deleuze (and Guattari): smooth spaces, bodies without organs, rhizomes,

10 See Cynthia C. Davidson, ed., *Anyplace* (New York: MIT Press, 1995).

11 Jacques Derrida, discussion statement, in Cynthia C. Davidson, ed., *Anyone* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 169.

12 Fatih Ugurla, discussion statement, in Cynthia C. Davidson, ed., *Anytime* (New York: MIT Press, 1999), 142.

13 Saskia Sassen, discussion statement, in Cynthia C. Davidson, ed., *Anymore* (New York: MIT Press, 2000), 138.

folds, abstract machines, diagrams, virtuality, etc. This phenomenon was well observed within Anyone Corporation circles, leading occasionally to critical (self-)reflection. For example, the Japanese cultural critic, philosopher, and economist Akira Asada remarked at the sixth Any conference in 1996 in Buenos Aires that he did not want to jump on “the bandwagon of Deleuze and Guattari.”¹⁴ Similarly, at the fourth Any conference, the architect Bernard Tschumi criticized the veritable cult of philosophers and the replacement of Derrida by Deleuze: “I don’t think the issue here is Deleuze versus Derrida inasmuch as none of these individuals has attempted to construct these kind of totalizing systems such oppositions imply.”¹⁵ Tschumi’s argument hit an essential point: the so-called “philosophers of difference,”¹⁶ such as Derrida and Deleuze, positioned themselves against essentialism, fixed identities, and rigid systems. When translated into architectural discourse, however, they seem to have been treated as just such fixed entities— as stable source texts that could be systematically translated and as authoritative reference points that could legitimize architectural designs.

Accusations of Mistranslation

The concept of conflict zones involves the premise that translations are often accompanied by controversies in which translators are accused of “contaminating” the translated text. In response to this, or in part anticipating such criticism, they develop strategies to justify transformations. Both accusations and the defense strategies provide insight into negotiation processes concerning relationships and boundaries between the translated text and the translator. Despite translation theories like that of Walter Benjamin—who characterized translation as a form in its own right that is in no way inferior to the text preceding it, but which even enables it to live on¹⁷—translation processes often involve imbalanced power relations. Cultural theorist

14 Akira Asada, discussion statement, in Cynthia C. Davidson, ed., *Anybody* (New York: MIT Press, 1997), 47.

15 Bernard Tschumi, discussion statement, in Davidson, ed., *Anyplace*, 42.

16 John Rajchman, discussion statement, in Davidson, ed., *Anyone*, 90.

17 Walter Benjamin, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV/1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 11.

Gudrun Rath points to imagined hierarchies between cultures, but the same could be said of disciplines: “The permeability of a cultural system for cultural expressions of another system depends on its position in relation to other cultures and the associated social perception of the ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ of the systems in question.”¹⁸ The assessment of a translation depends to some extent on these power relations, determining whether it is seen as enriching or inadequate and whether its “contamination” of the original work is regarded as revolutionary or disfiguring.¹⁹ In this last sense, there is no shortage of accusations in architectural discourse that architects have misunderstood Deleuze and Guattari’s theories, never read them at all, or translated them incorrectly—and thereby depoliticized them and distanced themselves from their social ideals.

Architectural theorist Karen Burns describes how the so-called “Yale School”—a group of literary theorists at Yale University strongly influenced by Derrida, including Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and in part Harold Bloom—was accused of depoliticizing him—and how the architectural discourse has faced similar accusations: “[D]ebates and remarks on the architectural ‘mistranslations’ of Derrida emerged within a few short years of the intense formal interchange period in architectural deconstruction (1984–1988).”²⁰ She rightly calls this phenomenon a translation problem. Accusations of “contamination” fueled fears of possible inferiority—of translations to the translated, of architecture to philosophy—which in turn provoked compensatory and defensive strategies among architects. In interdisciplinary processes of translation and reference, a dilemma emerged wherein the desire for a shared foundation coexisted with the instinct to safeguard architecturally distinctive elements.²¹ Architect and critic Jeffrey Kipnis wrote in “Folding in Architecture”:

18 Gudrun Rath, *Zwischenzonen: Theorien und Fiktionen des Übersetzens* (Vienna and Berlin: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2013), 22. My translation.

19 *Ibid.*, 7–8.

20 Karen Burns, “EX LIBRIS: Archaeologies of Feminism, Architecture and Deconstruction,” in *Architectural Theory Review* 15, no. 3 (2010), 249.

21 See Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2009), 256.

However provocative or invaluable as resources these studies in philosophy or science are, it must be said that neither provide the impetus for a New Architecture, nor the particulars of its terms and conditions. Rather, these have grown entirely out of architectural projects and developments within the discipline of architecture itself.²²

Faced with the architectural translation of Deleuze's philosophy, architects frequently attempted to assert the autonomy of architecture vis-à-vis philosophy. The numerous controversies at Anyone Corporation conferences are characterized by these simultaneous processes of rapprochement and demarcation.²³

In *Differences*, which appeared in 1997 in the "Writing Architecture" series, Ignasi de Solà-Morales distanced himself from the translation of Deleuze's philosophy into architecture:

Despite my very evident debt to Deleuze's thinking . . . I would like to distance myself unambiguously from those who in recent years have instrumentalized his thought. A certain fashion . . . has seized upon the dazzling images of his thought, either as forms to be directly visualized in new architectures or as verbal metaphors with which to beautify a conventional, if not vulgar, way of thinking.²⁴

He addressed the two most important points of criticism. Firstly, he mentioned the instrumentalization of philosophical concepts, which led to architectural translations of forms associated with these concepts, but not their content—especially their political content. Secondly, he noted the use of Deleuze and Guattari's terminology as buzzwords without proper knowledge of their philosophy and with the aim of promoting architectural designs that drew on the authority of trendy theorists. These two criticisms were raised both within Anyone Corporation and from outside. The accusations of inadequate background knowledge, misunderstanding, and

22 Jeffrey Kipnis, "Towards a New Architecture," in *Architectural Design* 63, no. 3/4 (1993), 42.

23 See section 4.3 of Lausch, *Gilles Deleuze und die Anyone Corporation*.

24 Ignasi de Solà-Morales, *Differences: Topographies of Contemporary Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 9.

mistranslation led to various defensive strategies on the part of Anyone Corporation members.

Unavoidable Creative Difference

One important defense against accusations of mistranslation is connected to Deleuze's philosophy, especially his conceptualization of referentiality. In *Différence et répétition* (1968), Deleuze criticized the domination of identity and representation over difference. Identity is problematic insofar as it is understood as fixed and unequivocal: "All identities are only simulated, produced as an optical 'effect' by the more profound game of difference and repetition."²⁵ Representation, according to Deleuze, adheres to identity since it is characterized by four aspects: identity of the concept (model and copy are designated by the same term), analogy of judgement, opposition of predicates (for instance, the model is three-dimensional, the copy two-dimensional), and resemblance of the perceived.²⁶ Deleuze contrasted the repetition of identities with pure "difference in itself" and complex "repetition for itself." If difference is not understood as difference from an identity or between identities, but as difference internal to an identity,²⁷ then the concept of identity itself opens up to diversity²⁸: "difference in itself" makes the existence of diverse individuals possible in the first place because, being immanent to every being, it creates a unique expression of potential qualities as concrete characteristics. According to Deleuze, it is infinitesimal difference, something barely perceptible, that distinguishes beings—which are always in transition—and leads to multiplicity.²⁹ By contrast, philosophy's traditional concept of difference as contradiction treated of entities as essentially,

25 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xix; originally published as *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968). I cite English translations of Deleuze while acknowledging their inherent differences from the original.

26 *Ibid.*, 34.

27 *Ibid.*, 121.

28 *Ibid.*, 222.

29 Cf.: "Everywhere the differences between multiplicities and the differences within multiplicities replace schematic and crude oppositions." *Ibid.*, 182.

logically separate from one another.³⁰ Deleuze's concept of "repetition for itself" is based on "difference in itself." Traditionally, repetition is understood as "repetition of the Same, explained by the identity of the concept or representation," while "repetition for itself" "includes difference, and includes itself in the alterity of the Idea, in the heterogeneity of an 'a-presentation'."³¹ "Repetition for itself" emerges from difference and reveals singularity—and it has a political dimension in terms of how individuals become (social) subjects:

The struggle for a modern subjectivity passes through a resistance to the two present forms of subjection, the one consisting of individualizing ourselves on the basis of constraints of power, the other of attracting each individual to a known and recognized identity, fixed once and for all. The struggle for subjectivity presents itself, therefore, as the right to difference, variation and metamorphosis.³²

This "right to difference" serves as a defense of transformations in translation—and was repeatedly invoked at the Any conferences. In this respect, Derrida's participation also served the architectural community (indeed, Deleuze and Derrida have much in common in their understanding of difference). At the first Any conference, Derrida declared that architecture both translates and resists the translation of "foreign" elements into itself: "I do not want a translation to be possible. That would be the end of any event."³³ According to translation theories like Benjamin's, an untranslatable element always remains, so that there is necessarily a difference between the translated and the translation. For Derrida, this difference enables the emergence of an event. Tschumi put it similarly at the fourth Any conference: "At the same time, if any theoretical discourse is to be used, it is also to be abused. Here we love philosophy because it is the site of the invention of those assemblages, those promiscuous collisions."³⁴ The fact that every translation neces-

30 *Ibid.*, 46 and 189.

31 *Ibid.*, 24.

32 Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 105–106; originally published as Foucault (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1986).

33 Derrida, discussion statement, in Davidson, ed., *Anyone*, 90.

34 Tschumi, discussion statement, in Davidson, ed., *Anyplace*, 42.

sarily entails difference, especially when it is a translation from the medium of writing into that of architecture, was thus used as an argument against accusations of mistranslation. In this sense, the inevitability of difference makes architecture “immune” to the criticism that it misunderstands or “contaminates” philosophy.

According to Burns, criticism of mistranslation can only be made against the background assumption that a flawless translation is possible: “This difference in rewriting is not inherently problematic unless the new iteration/interpretation/difference is disguised and authority and legitimacy sought for the unstained translation.”³⁵ In some respects, the architects admitted to having problems understanding philosophical arguments or even to misunderstanding concepts. After lectures by philosophers John Rajchman, Elisabeth Grosz, and Sylviane Agacinsky, Peter Eisenman made the following statement at the fourth Any conference:

I want to tell the three philosophers how much I enjoyed hearing them discourse on architecture and philosophy and their relationship. I suffer from a certain jet lag as an architect trying to respond to their papers. Reading them in advance probably wouldn't have helped because it takes me years merely to misread philosophy, let alone respond to it.³⁶

Eisenman had already stated with regard to Derrida's writings that he had undoubtedly misread them.³⁷ Similarly, Isozaki remarked emphatically at the first Any conference that he always misunderstands Derrida.³⁸

However, according to Eisenman, misreading is by no means problematic because it is ultimately a form of creativity.³⁹ Kipnis addressed this in his introduction to *Written into the Void*, a collection of writings by Eisenman from 1990 to 2004:

35 Karen Burns, “EX LIBRIS,” 249.

36 Peter Eisenman, discussion statement, in Davidson, ed., *Anyplace*, 43.

37 Cf. Eisenman: “J'ai sans doute mal lu l'œuvre de Derrida, mais mal lire c'est finalement une façon de créer et c'est en lisant mal que j'arrive à vivre dans la réalité et que je pourrais travailler avec lui.” Quoted in Andrew Benjamin, “Eisenman and the Housing of Tradition,” in *Oxford Art Journal* 12, no. 1 (1989), 47.

38 Arata Isozaki, discussion statement, in Davidson, ed., *Anyone*, 89.

39 See note 37.

Readers well studied in Derrida will no doubt find this practice exasperating, since the words and ideas the architect puts in the philosopher's mouth rarely offer a rigorous representation of the philosopher's actual position and can deviate markedly from it. . . . [It] is helpful to remember while reading these texts [of Eisenman] that the accuracy of the architect's reports of Derrida's thought does not in the end matter to the architect's own conjunctures. Eisenman does not seek to derive authority or force from his representation of Derrida's position; like any speculation in dialogue form, the reports are but rhetorical devices to help the architect clarify his own position.⁴⁰

According to Eisenman and Kipnis, a creative approach to theory does not require accurate reading or correct understanding because philosophical texts serve architects as sparring partners in the creation process. Philosophy here is not a quest for knowledge, but a source of inspiration and an impetus for creation.

If, according to Kipnis, the author's name does not grant authority, why are philosophers' names used as references at all? According to architect and publicist Douglas Murphy, this represents an intellectual elitism in which famous philosophers' names are employed to lend "gravitas" to personal opinions.⁴¹ This does not correspond to Eisenman's own assessment, as he explained at the first Any conference: He did not care whether the idea of the gaze came from the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot or from himself, because the fact was that it had been triggered in him by reading Blanchot's book.⁴² Eisenman's argument could be traced back to "The Death of the Author" (1967), in which Roland Barthes shifted the focus away from fixed authorial meaning and emphasized the plurality of textual voices that are mobilized in writing, and especially in reading. The reader is not uncovering the author's intent, but becomes the site where the interplay of cita-

40 Jeffrey Kipnis, "Introduction: Act Two," in Peter Eisenman, *Written into the Void: Selected Writings 1990–2004* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xxviii.

41 Douglas Murphy, *The Architecture of Failure* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012), 106.

42 Eisenman, discussion statement, in Davidson, ed., *Anyone*, 240.

tions and codes that exceed the author's intention unfolds.⁴³ However, for Eisenman this did not mean that the names of authors should no longer be mentioned. Rather, they continued to appear as witnesses to architects' philosophical engagement. The philosopher's name ultimately served Anyone Corporation members as a tool for social distinction, allowing them to present themselves as a theoretical, sophisticated architectural elite.

Difference as a Sign of Contemporaneity

The introduction to the second panel of the ninth Any conference in Paris stated that US architects had gained conceptual strength through their theoretical knowledge and were hence able to look at their own discipline differently—even if their theoretical investigations did not always escape a certain schematism and childlike simplicity.⁴⁴ At this point, Anyone Corporation acknowledged a misunderstanding that, nonetheless, did not lead to uncertainty among architects, but rather strengthened their resolve. After all, Tschumi explained, it was inevitable that the exchange between philosophy and architecture, and between France and the USA, would bring about transformations:

Most of the Any conferences have been about imports and exports—about importing from other disciplines into architecture, and exporting from architecture into other areas of knowledge. Anymore [the conference] in Paris is also about importing: from France to America, or from America to France. This implies mixing, compressing, expanding, informing, deforming. It is about heterogeneity and hybrid bodies rather than homogeneous purity, about the singular rather than the generic.⁴⁵

43 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," trans. Stephen Heath, in *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142–48; translation of Barthes's revised version published as "La mort de l'auteur," in *Manteia*, no. 5 (1968), 12–17. Barthes's essay was first published in English, trans. Richard Howard, in *Aspen*, no. 5+6 (1967).

44 See panel introduction, in Davidson, ed., *Anymore*, 49.

45 Bernard Tschumi, "Import and Export," in Davidson, ed., *Anymore*, 162.

Tschumi implied here that—in the light of a philosophy of difference, multiplicity, and transition—concepts such as “faithful translation” or “accurate reproduction” are not only no longer relevant, but must be understood as absolutely erroneous. Cultural theorist Claire Colebrook expressed this best when she wrote: “[It] might also seem that a fidelity to Deleuze is a crime against the thinker of difference.”⁴⁶

Another clear strategy for legitimizing potential mistranslation involved claiming that Deleuze himself treated and reinterpreted the works of other thinkers without inhibition. Philosopher John Rajchman, one of the key intermediaries between Deleuze’s philosophy and architectural discourses,⁴⁷ explained at the eighth Any conference that Deleuze primarily sought new readings of philosophical figures like Henri Bergson and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz that could be productively applied to contemporary concerns.⁴⁸ US literary critic Fredric Jameson took this assessment further when he declared:

What Deleuze does with these things is more brutal and exciting. He doesn’t just understand Leibniz and then show us how Leibniz can be. He seizes what he wants and fabulates a whole new fresh Leibniz in his own image; it’s very exciting and a very contemporary practice. . . . If someone told me that Deleuze’s Leibniz was historically incorrect this would not be terribly disheartening for me. . . . We don’t have to be bored by these things that are being offered us—we can do something new.⁴⁹

Jameson’s argument was clear: Since Deleuze’s own “brutal” treatment of philosophers leads to something “new,” architects should be permitted—even encouraged—to treat Deleuze (and Guattari) with equal brutality to create novelty. This position drew support from Deleuze’s own words in “*Lettre à un critique sévère*”:

I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it

46 Claire Colebrook, “Introduction,” in Adrian Parr, ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 6.

47 See chapter 2.4 in Lausch, *Gilles Deleuze und die Anyone Corporation*.

48 John Rajchman, discussion statement, in Davidson, ed., *Anytime*, 246.

49 Fredric Jameson, discussion statement, in Davidson, ed., *Anytime*, 246.

to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed.⁵⁰

Andrew Ballantyne refers to this passage in *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects* (2007), concluding that the history of philosophy is a history of “buggery or immaculate conception.” He remarks: “I think that this is something that architects are already inclined to do, whether or not the author has given permission for it. Creative misunderstanding, or misprision, is legitimate behaviour in the Deleuze-and-Guattari-world.”⁵¹ Here again, misunderstanding is associated with creativity. Jameson and later Ballantyne argued that creative freedom in the appropriation of concepts from Deleuze (and Guattari) is legitimate because it serves the production of novelty and follows Deleuze’s own “invitation” to “take the philosopher from behind,” producing a monstrous child. Indeed, in his metaphorical language Deleuze unmistakably reflects a masculinist approach to philosophical practice—an approach that architects embraced.

Architects drew on this particular facet of Deleuze. The classically philosophical, analytical, and systematic Deleuze, who wrote treatises on Immanuel Kant and David Hume, disappeared in architects’ image of him as a “French post-structuralist.” Instead, they foregrounded his experimentation with non-philosophical theories and works, his “monstrous way” of dealing with philosophers, his free associations, and his creative language. Philosopher Élie During described this similarly, although he did not refer to architectural discourse:

[T]he consensual image that is all too naturally attached with the name of Deleuze appears to be largely a matter of fabrication. Some would like to fancy him as a freelance conceptual expert, a universal provider of tool

50 Gilles Deleuze, “Letter to a Harsh Critic,” trans. Martin Joughin, in *Negotiations 1972–1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 6; originally published as “Lettre à Michel Cressole,” in *La Quinzaine littéraire*, no. 161 (1973), 17–19, and in Michel Cressole, *Deleuze* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1973), 107–18; republished as “Lettre à un critique sévère” in *Pourparlers 1972–1990* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1990).

51 Andrew Ballantyne, *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects* (London: Routledge, 2007), 15 and 100.

kits . . . , but Deleuze is more complex. As a bricoleur philosopher, he is at once trendy and academic, accessible and remote, so very French and so American.⁵²

For architects, references to a “trendy” philosopher, along with insistence on difference in translation processes, became signs of contemporaneity.

References as Tools

Beyond his invitation to bear the monstrous children of philosophers, architects used a second Deleuzian theory to legitimize their free approach to his concepts: the idea of theory as a toolbox. Deleuze formulated this much-quoted notion in a conversation with Michel Foucault, published under the title “Les intellectuels et le pouvoir” (1972):

A theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself. . . . it was Proust, an author thought to be a pure intellectual, who said it so clearly: treat my book as a pair of glasses directed to the outside; if they don't suit you, find another pair; I leave it to you to find your own instrument, which is necessarily an instrument for combat. A theory does not totalize; it is an instrument for multiplication and it also multiplies itself.⁵³

Deleuze argued that the connection between theory and practice had to be rethought. Practice had previously been regarded as either the application of theory or the inspiration for theory, and this hierarchy had to be abandoned. Rather, practices and theories in the plural should be thought of as interconnected relays that need each other and energize each other: “No theory can develop without eventually encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for

52 Élie During, “Blackboxing in Theory: Deleuze versus Deleuze,” in Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen, eds., *French Theory in America* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 178–179.

53 “Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze,” in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 208; orig. pub. as “Les intellectuels et le pouvoir,” in *L'Arc* 49 (1972), 3–10.

piercing this wall.”⁵⁴ Both Tschumi in *ANY 3* and Solà-Morales at the ninth Any conference referred to these statements. They served as legitimation for using theoretical concepts as tools in their practice, believing that this would generate new architectural ideas that could in turn serve as tools for theory. Solà-Morales even linked this to the demand that disciplinary separation between theorists and architects—which Manfredo Tafuri saw as a necessary prerequisite for the ability to criticize⁵⁵—must be overcome:

For years a kind of advanced academicism believed that the proof of intellectual honesty was that the architectural theoretician was not contaminated by contact with practice. . . . The Any conferences were organized by a group of people who believed in the need to move beyond the specialized divisions between theory and practice between the purveyors of foundational paradigms and the more or less brilliant executors of the ideas of those theoretical cadres.”⁵⁶

Solà-Morales presented Anyone Corporation as embodying the theory–practice relationship that Deleuze had conceptualized: Its members break through the walls that philosophy and architecture have come up against and expand the spaces of both disciplines.

When architects faced accusations of instrumentally applying Deleuze (and Guattari) to architecture, Deleuze’s understanding of theory as a toolbox provided the perfect defence. It seemed to legitimize doing whatever one wanted with their concepts. However, interpreting the toolbox metaphor as an invitation to direct application in architectural objects contradicts Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence that their concepts should not serve as models. Cultural theorist and editor Sylvère Lotringer illustrated this misunderstanding in “Doing Theory” (2001):

Deleuze and Guattari made a great effort not to leave behind them any ‘model’ that could be simply applied, even discouraging all too eager di-

54 Ibid., 206.

55 Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, trans. Giorgio Verrecchia (New York: Harper & Row, 1980; orig. pub. 1968), 141ff.

56 Ignasi de Solà-Morales, “Practice³: Theory, History, Architecture,” in Davidson, ed., *Any*, 68–69.

sciples to follow their paths instead of finding their own. ‘Applying theory’: this kind of hands-on, hand-to-mouth attitude, of course, has little to do with what they themselves advocated as ‘pragmatic philosophy.’ What they meant by that wasn’t a philosophy calling for a separate ‘praxis,’ or ‘use value,’ but on the contrary for a kind of experimentation directly engaged in reality and responding in the present, without any preconceived idea, to the singularity of the situation.⁵⁷

This argument reveals that the toolbox involves far more than a unidirectional application of concepts in architectural form. Rather, it demands continuous thinking engaged with specific situations—perhaps testing concepts in practice by allowing theoretical concepts to illuminate current architectural practice while simultaneously using practice to reflect on the theoretical concepts themselves. This approach could be described as a genuine confrontation with contemporaneity and the particularities of a specific, localized, and contextualized situation. Such theory–practice–reality connections were certainly not achieved when philosophical references merely justified design practices that attempted to present Deleuze (and Guattari’s) concepts in architectural form. The designs in the “Folding in Architecture” AD issue, as formal representations of the fold, exemplify this problem.

Conclusion

The proclamation of a “new” architecture that referenced Deleuze stemmed from more than the simple replacement of one philosophical star with another. Deleuze did take Derrida’s place in a discourse focused on famous personalities—creating an architectural-historical narrative that evolved from “historicism” through “classical modernism,” “postmodernism,” and “deconstructivism” into “folding architecture.” However, the “new” itself played a central role in Deleuze’s philosophy. In connection with the event and repetition as differentiation, he called for the concept of identity to be replaced by “difference in itself.” As a result, everything that exists and becomes is singular and thus, in a sense, always “new.” Architectural theorist

57 Sylvère Lotringer, “Doing Theory,” in *French Theory in America*, ed. Lotringer and Cohen, 155–56.

Douglas Spencer addressed the stylization of Deleuze in architectural discourse as the guardian of the “new”: “Deleuze, modelled as a philosopher of the ‘new’, was made amenable to an architecture seeking to establish an image of novelty for itself. For the ‘new architecture’, the ‘new’ was doubly significant. It distanced the discipline from recent trends and it underscored its allegiance to a philosophy of becoming.”⁵⁸ References to Deleuze merged his concept of the “new” as singular with the “newness” of contemporary architecture itself.

The case of Anyone Corporation demonstrates how interdisciplinary references function similarly to references to the past in establishing normative models. Philosophical concepts were treated as models to be referenced in writing and represented in architectural designs, becoming translatable originals and referenceable objects. The goal of these translations—and especially the ensuing, unavoidable mistranslations—was contemporaneity understood as creative difference. Contemporaneity was thus constructed not through non-referentiality, but through philosophical references that established the idea of repetition as differentiation, making referentiality itself a generator of singularity. This form of contemporaneity was not interested in direct engagement with reality or the particularities of specific, localized, and contextualized situations. Instead, it emerged from a quest for novelty that refused connection to previous architectural thought and design. This quest demanded new vocabularies and references, which the members of Anyone Corporation found in “French post-structuralism.”

58 Douglas Spencer, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism: How Contemporary Architecture Became an Instrument of Control and Compliance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 60.



Fig. 85. The first nine publications of the “Writing Architecture” series from MIT Press, initiated in 1995 and still ongoing. Image by the author, with covers from Anyone Corporation.

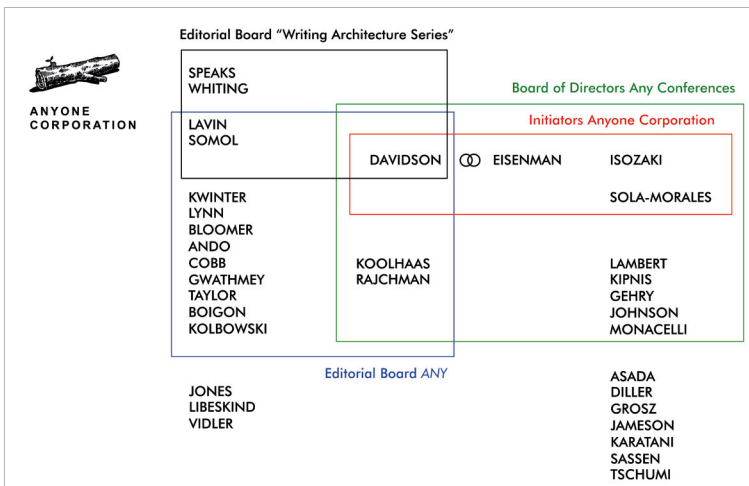


Fig. 86. Diagram of Anyone Corporation's network, based on publications of conference proceedings, the journal ANY, and the “Writing Architecture” book series. Image by the author.

Architecture Caught in Metaphorical Reference

Sarah Borree

Shortly before the 2025 Oscars, the popular design and architecture podcast 99% *Invisible* released an episode inspired by the film *The Brutalist*, which had been nominated for 10 awards that year. Rather than just providing a review of the film which follows the life of fictional architect László Toth, the episode also discusses a number of other fictional architects. “The job of architect has often been depicted in movies, even though the practice of architecture is not very cinematic,” the host Roman Mars muses. “It’s mostly meetings and such. But it is a romantic profession that lends itself to high drama and strained metaphors,” he adds.¹ Indeed, metaphors that draw on architecture in one way or another are both copious and ubiquitous. We speak about ‘foundations being established’, ‘walls being put up’, ‘facades people hide behind’, ‘pillars of society’ or ‘putting things under one roof’, among many other expressions. Equally common are references to the architecture of an organization when discussing its structure, or to people as ‘architects’ of plans, agreements, political decisions or events.

On account of their prevalence, such metaphors warrant a closer look. Considering the image of architecture that architectural metaphors conjure up and preserve, this essay asks whether and how architectural metaphors shape debates regarding the changing and expanding tasks, roles and responsibilities of architects and architecture as we understand and perceive them today. What reciprocal implications might they have for architectural

¹ Roman Mars and Martín Gonzalez, “The Brutalists,” 99% Invisible, February 2, 2025, 40min., 7 sec., <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/617-the-brutalists/>, accessed April 20, 2025.

practices and scholarship, and for a general understanding of architecture and architectural processes? Following a brief overview of metaphor more generally—and conventionalized metaphors specifically—I turn to the role of architectural metaphors and examples of how the figure of the architect is used metaphorically in contemporary culture. Thus connecting different strands of inquiry rather than pursuing a mere stock-take of the phenomenon, this essay aims to delineate and bring into perspective a nexus of questions and challenges that merit further attention: metaphors, the image of the architect, and the ongoing debate regarding the changing role and responsibility of architects and architecture today.

Thinking of Metaphors

According to Nelson Goodman, “[m]etaphor permeates all discourse, ordinary and special, and we should have a hard time finding a purely literal paragraph anywhere.”² Journalist and author James Geary even provides concrete numbers, claiming that we use metaphors “for every ten to twenty-five words, or about six times a minute.”³ Regardless of their exact frequency, metaphors are an integral part of our communication. Even though we rarely give them much thought in everyday life, or reflect on how exactly they work and to which effect, we have a general understanding of what a metaphor is. Until the twentieth century, metaphors were predominantly seen as a rhetorical trope or linguistic adornment employed to make an argument more convincing, or to convey spiritual thought. Particularly in the sciences and philosophy, they were criticized for being imprecise, and even potentially misleading, on account of diverting attention from or concealing actual facts.⁴ This view changed as the capacity of metaphors to express meaning which is impossible to communicate in literal terms was increasingly

2 Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis, New York, Kansas City: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1968), 80.

3 James Geary, *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World* (New York; London: Harper Perennial, 2012), 5.

4 Mark Johnson, “Introduction: Metaphor in the Philosophical Tradition,” in *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, ed. Mark Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 12.

acknowledged. Today, metaphors are considered a generative and important means through which we relate to and make sense of the world.⁵

Metaphors prompt us to draw on our existing knowledge about something—a source domain—to engage with something more abstract or unfamiliar to us—a target domain. The relationships they thereby establish do not make literal sense. Shakespeare's description of the world as a stage and its inhabitants as players is a well-known example. The resulting incongruity in a metaphor compels us, as Mark Johnson puts it, to take an "imaginative leap in which we see how two previously unassociated systems of implications fit together to reveal an underlying unity."⁶ In other words, metaphors have a generative quality. They instigate a process of interpretation that can facilitate understanding of what is novel, difficult to comprehend, or when literal terms are insufficient to convey what we mean. Metaphors can encourage us to explore something from a different, and perhaps not readily obvious, perspective. As metaphors thus shape our thinking, and help us engage with and situate ourselves in the world, they are epistemologically relevant.

Metaphors that work propose narratives we can comprehend and adopt. While they possess intersubjective validity and might appear more or less plausible, no metaphor can be more correct than another. Each remains but one of many possible ways of framing a situation or, as Meryl Altman puts it quite aptly, metaphors have only a "truth effect" not a "truth value."⁷ Metaphors work by referring to existing, shared knowledge and are hence embedded in specific socio-cultural frames of reference.⁸ As such they are inevitably shaped by the knowledge, opinions, prejudices, hierarchies, and structures of the particular context they originate in. Therefore, our ability to understand a metaphor is contingent on familiarity with this context. Metaphors are hence never universal and they are neither objective nor innocent either, as each metaphor organizes information and gives priority to some

5 *Ibid.*, 17.

6 *Ibid.*, 40.

7 Meryl Altman, "How Not to Do Things with Metaphors We Live By," *College English* 52, no. 5 (1990): 496.

8 Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan, "Introduction: Writing Worlds," in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Texts and Metaphors in the Representation of Landscape*, ed. Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan (London: Routledge, 1992), 12.

aspects or qualities while disregarding others.⁹ They therefore have perspectives, opinions, and structures inscribed in them that, even though they are not always obvious, are reconfirmed and consolidated whenever a metaphor is used. Metaphors hence play a role in promoting, naturalizing, preserving, and perpetuating perspectives on a wide range of topics, from social groups to objects and places.

This effect is particularly powerful and has broad implications in the case of conventionalized metaphors. These are metaphors that have turned into established figures of speech or concepts through repeated use and general acceptance. Metaphors of this kind are also referred to as ‘dead’, ‘frozen’ or ‘historical’ metaphors, as they no longer necessitate or encourage any interpretive activity when employed.¹⁰ Rather, they are commonly understood in a certain way so that their appropriate use can be learned without fully understanding or being aware of their metaphorical origins or the references they make. Conventionalized metaphors have thereby lost their generative quality. What may have begun “as an interesting analogy, spills over into a proposition about how something ‘is.’”¹¹ Rather than provoking us to look at a situation from a new angle, they become “a conventional part of our conceptual systems” and can carry forward, normalize, and consolidate the historical views and opinions inscribed in them, without this ‘ideological freight’ being always apparent.¹² They hence continue to shape views and opinions even if the socio-historical context from which a metaphor once emerged has changed.

The far-reaching and lasting implications metaphors can have in respect to the consolidation of social, cultural, or disciplinary hierarchies, norms and practices have been highlighted particularly prominently in fields such as feminist, postcolonial, and social studies. However, they are also present and have been addressed—explicitly and implicitly—in architectural research. Jos Boys, for example, considers metaphors a key mechanism in

9 Dennis Hollier, “Architectural Metaphors,” in *Architectural Theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 192.

10 George Lakoff discusses different types of conventionalized metaphors and the problematic implications of referring to them indiscriminately as ‘dead.’ See: George Lakoff, “The Death of Dead Metaphor,” *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 2, no. 2 (1987).

11 Altman, “How Not to Do Things with Metaphors We Live By,” 496.

12 Lakoff, “The Death of Dead Metaphor,” 3.

perpetuating the assumption that social values or qualities can be “literally engraved into the physical arrangements and representational qualities of three-dimensional space.”¹³ Another example is the edited volume *Deserts Are Not Empty*, even though it is not actually focused on the matter of metaphor but the “anthropogenic processes of construction and destruction that have occurred in various deserts over the past century.”¹⁴ These processes are shown as being closely connected to the characterization of deserts as barren and uninhabitable places, which disregards the deserts’ existing inhabitants, and the various activities taking place there, while also concealing and legitimizing the occupation and exploitation of the lands as well as the obliteration of its people and nature. The common metaphorical use of the term ‘desert’ for spaces seen as lacking resources, amenities, or infrastructure in everyday speech reflects the notion of deserts as empty and therefore available to be appropriated, developed and civilized, yet thereby confirming and perpetuating a simplified, Western and colonial perspective of deserts. This example then illustrates vividly how examining the way metaphors are used in writing and everyday speech “can help us discern dominant and structured ways with which people conceive of aspects of reality.”¹⁵

Metaphors in Architecture—Architecture in Metaphorical Thinking

By now a considerable body of research confirms the relevance of metaphor to architectural thinking and explores the implications of the various metaphorical practices involved.¹⁶ Metaphors allow architectural professionals

13 Jos Boys, “Beyond Maps and Metaphors? Re-Thinking the Relationships between Architecture and Gender,” in *New Frontiers of Space, Bodies and Gender*, ed. Rosa Ainley (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 206.

14 Samia Henni, “Against the Regime of ‘Emptiness,’” in *Deserts Are Not Empty*, ed. Samia Henni (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 12.

15 Carl Jon Way Ng, “Metaphor,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*, ed. John Flowerdew and John E. Richardson (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2017), 215.

16 See, for example: Sarah Borree, Stephanie Knuth, and Moritz Röger, eds., *Metaphorical Practices in Architecture: Metaphors as Method and Subject in the Production of Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2023); Rosario Caballero, *Re-Viewing Space: Figu-*

to engage with other disciplines and incorporate knowledge from them into their work.¹⁷ They play a vital role in the discussion and evaluation of the built environment and have long informed both architectural and urban design processes.¹⁸ According to Andri Gerber, metaphors were also an important means for architecture, as a discipline lacking a clearly defined and stable identity, to consolidate and position itself historically.¹⁹ While references to language and music had dominated architectural discourse during the Renaissance, the early twentieth century saw a surge in comparisons with art and sculpture, which were followed by scientific and technological metaphors.

At the same time, architecture and architectural concepts have long been used metaphorically, both in everyday language and in more specialized fields like science and philosophy. Particularly the capacity of architectural metaphors to structure, but also to concretize and ground abstract thought, has been the subject of scholarly interest. Highlighting the vital role of architectural metaphors in this respect, architectural historian and theorist Mark Wigley, for example, claims that philosophy could in fact “only define a part of itself as nonmetaphorical by employing architectural metaphors.”²⁰ The status of architecture as metaphor, he continues, was different from that of others, since it was the “foundational metaphor” for philosophical discourse. There would be a close bond between philosophy and architecture, a “complex and restless dynamic” of interdependence. The Japanese philosopher Kojin Karatani, addressing the centrality of architectural metaphors for philosophy in a similar vein, speaks of a “will to architecture” in Western philosophy,

rative Language in Architects' Assessment of Built Space (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2006); Andri Gerber and Brent Patterson, eds., *Metaphors in Architecture and Urbanism: An Introduction* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013).

17 See, for example: Antoine Picon and Alessandra Ponte, eds., *Architecture and the Sciences: Exchanging Metaphors* (New York, N.Y.; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003); Peter Galison and Emily Thompson, *The Architecture of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999).

18 See, for example: Simon Unwin, *Metaphor: An Exploration of the Metaphorical Dimensions and Potential of Architecture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019).

19 Andri Gerber, “Introduction,” in *Metaphors in Architecture and Urbanism: An Introduction*, ed. Andri Gerber and Brent Patterson (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 28.

20 Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1997), 18.

as they had provided philosophers with “a way of grounding and stabilizing their otherwise philosophical systems.”²¹ However, Karatani also addresses the constraints that architectural metaphors can impose, a point equally raised by Dennis Hollier, a scholar of French language and culture. Referring to the role of architectural metaphors beyond the boundaries of philosophy, Hollier acknowledges that architecture would provide a vocabulary by means of which things could be systematized and thereby rendered widely legible. However, “anything resembling play, exteriority, or alterity” would be suppressed in the process.²² Martyn Dade-Robertson’s study *The Architecture of Information* discusses this issue in a more concrete context. While spatial and architectural metaphors were of great historical importance by providing the structure for the design of and interaction with virtual information environments, the constraints imposed by the physical and material world no longer apply to these environments. The result was a battle between their potentials in respect to the organization of information on the one hand, and the need for us to be able to interact with them through spatial metaphors on the other.²³ Regardless of the respective main interest of the aforementioned studies, what emerges here as well as in other studies concerned with the qualities and functions of architectural metaphors, is an emphasis on their material, structural, and consolidating qualities. This can also be detected in their use in everyday discourse.

Architectural metaphors, like all metaphors, primarily serve as a conceptual framework to understand other domains. However, their focus and reliance on material, structural and organizing qualities aspects of architecture also refers to a specific image of architecture and the architectural profession which, in turn, raises the question how the prevalent metaphorical use of architectural vocabulary outside of the architectural context retroactively affects disciplinary discourse on architecture. Could architectural metaphors—in particular their use in everyday language—, contribute to a perpetuation of established images of and expectations towards architecture

21 Kojin Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 5.

22 Hollier, “Architectural Metaphors,” 193.

23 Martyn Dade-Robertson, *The Architecture of Information: Architecture, Interaction Design and the Patterning of Digital Information* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011).

and the architectural profession and make it more difficult to change views, standards, and processes?

Architecture and Architectural Metaphors

The reporting on *Project 2025*, a right-wing initiative to radically reshape government institutions in the USA that was extensively and heatedly discussed in the media during the runup to the 2024 US presidential election, provides a good example for the metaphorical use of architectural terms in everyday culture. Devised by the conservative think tank the Heritage Foundation, the *Project 2025 Presidential Transition Project* presents a wide range of suggestions on topics including migration, the economy, education, and foreign affairs, all aiming to “put America back on track.”²⁴ Characterized by the BBC as “a 900-page policy ‘wish list’ ... that would expand presidential power and impose an ultra-conservative social vision,” it caused widespread political and public outrage.²⁵ In public discussions of the initiative, Russell Vought, one of the central figures behind *Project 2025*, was frequently referred to as its ‘lead architect.’²⁶

The term ‘architect’ is frequently used to refer to people tasked with solving a complex and demanding issue, often politicians, analysts, or managers. The tasks they deal with require them to have analytical but also creative skills, maintain a high level of oversight, and devise and implement a structured, complex, and detailed plan that often has far-reaching ramifi-

24 <https://www.project2025.org/>, accessed April 4, 2025.

25 Mike Wendling, “Project 2025: The right-wing wish list for Trump’s second term,” *bbc.com*, February 14 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c977njnvq2do>, accessed April 4, 2025.

26 See, for example: Stephen Groves, “Senate Confirms Project 2025 Architect Russell Vought to Lead Powerful White House Budget Office,” *Associated Press*, February 7, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-russell-vought-confirmation-budget-project-2025-7d1c476694176876256e95cecbd49231>; Isabell Jacobi, “Ich will den Deep State zerstören—Der Architekt des Project 2025 zieht die Fäden in der Trump-Regierung,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, February 8, 2025, <https://www.nzz.ch/international/russell-vought-bestaetigt-trump-und-das-kontroverse-project-2025-ld.1870023>; Max Chafkin, “Behind Trump’s Imperial Presidency (and Elon) there’s Russell Vought,” *Bloomberg.com*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2025-russell-vought-doge-musk-trump/>, all accessed April 28, 2025.

cations. The Oxford English Dictionary defines an architect first of all as a “person who designs buildings, preparing plans and overseeing construction” and “[m]ore generally: a person who constructs buildings; a builder.”²⁷ However, the entry also addresses the term’s importance and prevalence beyond the realms of the building profession by listing as additional definitions a “person who designs and creates a complex structure or system; a person who organizes material into a particular structure or plan”, a “person who is responsible for devising, planning, and realizing a particular goal; a person who contrives the achievement of a desired result” and “[i]n extended use: something which shapes or influences a situation, state of affairs, etc.”²⁸

When portrayed as the architect, rather than author of *Project 2025*’s plan, or as one of the ‘heads’ behind it (to use another metaphor), Vought’s characterization summons and foregrounds the above-mentioned qualities. The same applies to other historical and contemporary figures referred to as architects, such as Frances Perkins, the first female US presidential cabinet secretary and central architect of the New Deal, or the architects of the Good Friday Agreement.²⁹ However, the term is also utilized in the context of more abstract societal as well as historical movements and events, for instance in the case of ‘architects of terror’ which has been used to describe Maximilien Robespierre, Heinrich Himmler, Joseph Stalin or — more recently — the Wagner group, amongst others. There is also historian Paul Preston’s book *Architects of Terror* which examines the ‘construction’ of the dictatorship in Spain under Franco.³⁰

This small sample already points to the vast variety of architectural metaphors and their use, which I want to draw attention to here. Just as there

27 Oxford English Dictionary, “architect (n.),” <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5313478274>, accessed 20 March, 2025.

28 In 2019, the entry in the OED online edition was expanded to include a sub-entry on the use of the term ‘architect’ in computing under the header ‘additional sense.’ Ibid.

29 See for example: Hannah Steinkopf-Frank, “Frances Perkins: Architect of the New Deal,” JSTOR Daily, <https://daily.jstor.org/woman-architect-of-the-new-deal/>, accessed April 20, 2025; “Architects of the Good Friday Agreement: Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement,” <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/committees/33/committee-on-the-implementation-of-the-good-friday-agreement/architects-of-the-good-friday-agreement/>, accessed July 1, 2025.

30 Paul Preston, *Architects of Terror: Paranoia, Conspiracy and Anti-Semitism in Franco’s Spain* (London: William Collins, 2024).

are architects of terror, there are also architects of peace. Outside the world of politics and political news, we encounter ‘decision architects,’ whose role is to guide individuals or groups towards determining the best possible outcome for a given task or problem. There is also the phrase ‘architect of success,’ which is used to refer to people who have achieved remarkable feats—for example, in sport or business—but also applied to a wide spectrum of attitudes or activities, from ‘discipline’ or ‘pain’ to ‘action’ and ‘hard work’—all being architects of success. Not surprisingly, such metaphors are particularly frequent in the context of self-improvement, such as in book titles or on inspirational posters and even coffee mugs.

Some of these more ‘extended’ metaphorical uses of the term architect—to pick up the OED’s terminology—may indeed appear rather strained, such as referring to pain as an architect of success. At the same time, they also illustrate how common and conventionalized the metaphor has become and reveal how the metaphorical use of the term architect clashes with the realities, requirements, and challenges of architecture as a profession and cultural technique. It has been pointed out repeatedly and continually, both in and beyond scholarly research, that the role and responsibilities of architects are complex, diverse, contested, and subject to change.³¹ Discrepancies also arise between the popular image of architects as highly creative, solitary geniuses, not least embodied by many of the on-screen architects, and the everyday practices and ways in which the architectural profession works. Architectural theorist Mark Cousins even detected “an almost unbridgeable gulf between the popular conception of what happens and what actually happens” when it comes to architectural design.³² He also characterized architecture as a “weak” discipline, in the sense that it is not a self-validating discipline, has unclear and shifting boundaries, changing contents, and is

31 For two examples addressing architects’ roles in relation to their responsibility to respond to global developments and specific events see: Daniel Barber, “After Comfort,” in *LOG: Observations on Architecture and the Contemporary City*, no. 47 (2019); Oliver Wainwright, “‘Professional Buck-Passers’: Why the Excoriating Grenfell Report Was Right to Damn Architects,” *The Guardian*, September 5, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/sep/05/professional-buck-passer-excoriating-grenfell-report-architects>, accessed April 20, 2025.

32 Mark Cousins, “Building an Architect,” in *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User*, ed. Jonathan Hill (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 16.

shaped by a variety of external forces.³³ Architecture is also highly collaborative. Architects rarely work all by themselves and they always need to consider and mediate between different interests and requirements, including the existing architectural context, clients' views, laws, etc. Furthermore, the process of constructing a building involves a multitude of parties while, in addition, scholarship highlights the significance of different media as additional, though not less important, architectural production sites, including books, magazines, photographs, drawings, and digital platforms.³⁴

Contemporary architectural scholarship is increasingly moving away from a more traditional and narrow understanding of architecture and its history, and who is and is not recognized as a producer of architecture. Instead, architectural topics are approached from a wide range of perspectives, contexts, and concerns—not only focusing on buildings and their designers, but also engaging with issues such as territories, conflicts, colonialism, energy consumption, media, archives, infrastructures, and more-than-human actors and entanglements, to name just a few. Likewise, a growing number of architects and architectural firms reflect on and expand their fields of activity, by exploring new ways of making architecture and by asking what practicing architecture today means. The development of new materials and technologies and the growing influence of AI challenge and change the profession and the professional realities of architects rapidly and fundamentally. The ever-worsening environmental crisis, as well as political and social shifts on local and global scales, create new demands and challenges, and also affect the debate about how, where, as well as by and for whom architecture is produced. Considering the power and potential that metaphors and metaphorical thought have for opening up new ways of thinking and looking at the world, they might provide a powerful tool to find responses to these questions and challenges.³⁵ However, in the case of common conventionalized architectural metaphors, this potential could be countered by the narrow understanding of architecture they rely on, exemplified by the metaphor of the architect discussed above.

33 Jonathan Hill, "Introduction," in *Occupying Architecture*, 5.

34 See for example: Beatriz Colomina and Joan Ockman, eds., *Architectureproduction* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988).

35 Incidentally, while numerous studies have examined the potential of metaphors in relation to environmental issues, relatively few have focused specifically on the

The philosopher and media theorist Marshall McLuhan writes that metaphors can be both “helpful” and “crippling,” while having the potential to direct “the thoughts of whole periods of history.”³⁶ The presence and centrality of built environments across cultures, times, and places makes architecture extremely valuable, important and helpful as a metaphorical reference to frame, explain or concretize ideas, thoughts and processes. The ubiquity of architectural metaphors is therefore hardly surprising. Yet, as I have discussed, these metaphors remain grounded in and continue to reconfirm and actualize an image of architecture that is tied to qualities such as structure, materiality, and solidity—and respectively, of architects as analytical, problem-solving creators of complex plans. As architectural metaphors characterize their targets in terms of stability, order, and structure, they can—as Karatani, Hollier, and others have pointed out—inhibit more creative, fluid, and dynamic ways of thinking by creating and nurturing a sense of and longing for stability and finality. By referencing and thereby foregrounding specific qualities, they consolidate a conventionalized image of architecture and architects and may thereby contribute to an underlying reluctance—within professional institutions, among architectural practitioners but also in the wider public—to critically reassess this image and what it entails. In its highly conventionalized form, the metaphorical use of architectural concepts and images refers to an outdated understanding of architecture in the contemporary moment—an understanding that has arguably always been selective and idealized to begin with. This continues to tie architecture in the present to precisely this delineated frame of reference, while the world around us continues to change and require new ways of doing and thinking architecture. Approaches that shift the focus from solidity, finality, and perpetuity towards aspects such as fluidity, circularity, and diversity might play an important part in this respect. Although such practices and scholarship are not non-existent, certain long-established ways of thinking through and

field of architecture to date: Brook Muller, “Metaphor, Architectural Design, and Environmental Response,” in *Enquiry: The ARCC Journal for Architectural Research* 4, no 1 (2007); Stephen J Flusberg and Paul H Thibodeau, “Why Is Mother Earth on Life Support? Metaphors in Environmental Discourse,” *Topics in Cognitive Science* 15, no. 3 (2023); Anaïs Augé, *Metaphor and Argumentation in Climate Crisis Discourse* (New York; London: Routledge, 2023).

36 Marshall McLuhan, *Letters of Marshall McLuhan* (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 136.

about architecture prevail and continue to dominate discourse. Even though architecture is shaped by a variety of forces, both material and immaterial, it is still generally “expected to be solid, stable and reassuring—physically, socially and psychologically,” as Jonathan Hill argues; which are precisely the traditional qualities referenced by the most common architectural metaphors.³⁷ As explicated earlier, these kind of metaphors have a long history, and they play an important role in organizing and structuring abstract thought by offering a linguistic framework through which complex and abstract ideas can be conceptualized and communicated. Consequently, it may well be this very discrepancy between our conventionalized architectural metaphors on the one hand, and the conditions of our contemporary situation on the other that should continue to be both catalyst for ongoing critical engagement, as well as inspiration and potential framework for alternative contemporary solutions and ways of thinking. We can, and arguably should, attempt to deploy conventionalized architectural metaphors more critically and reflectively as a way to reconsider and potentially challenge and expand established notions of architecture, architectural practice, and space. Invoking Meryl Altman’s claim that we need to pay “relentless attention to metaphor’s historical and non-universal dimension—to the power to exclude that lies implicit in the power to name,” what is actually vocalized with architectural metaphors, what is left unspoken, what is the meaning of the space in between, and why are both sides of the coin important?³⁸ Architecture is implicated in the negotiation of social, political, and ecological challenges through both its material and its metaphorical presence in society. If, indeed, metaphor has the inherent potential to direct “the thoughts of whole periods of history,” as McLuhan suggests, then the process of challenging and reshaping the catalogue of conventionalized architectural metaphors could play an integral part in transforming our contemporary moment through metaphorical reference.³⁹

37 Jonathan Hill, *Immaterial Architecture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 2.

38 Altman, “How Not to Do Things with Metaphors We Live By,” 504.

39 McLuhan, *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, 136.

Authors

Sarah Borree is an architectural historian and cultural studies scholar. Her research is situated at the intersection of architectural and cultural history as well as visual studies, with a particular interest in the relationship between architecture and modern mass media, socio-professional cultures, and knowledge practices from a historical and cultural perspective.

Matteo Cassani Simonetti is Associate Professor in History of Architecture at Dipartimento di Architettura of Università di Bologna. He is Coordinator of PhD Programme in Architecture and Design Cultures and Deputy Editor in Chief of *Histories of Postwar Architecture Journal*. Among his publications: *La Storia di Leonardo Benevolo nella cultura architettonica italiana (1945-1960)* (2025); *Biagio Rossetti secondo Bruno Zevi*, ed. M. Cassani Simonetti, F. Ceccarelli, and A. Zevi (2021).

Markus Dauss is Professor of Architectural History and Theory at the University of Bonn. He previously held visiting and substitute professorships in Heidelberg, Augsburg, Berlin, and Frankfurt. He earned his PhD from the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris and the Technical University of Dresden with a dissertation on public buildings in Paris and Berlin. His habilitation at Goethe University Frankfurt examined the metaphor of architecture as writing. His research interests include comparative historicism, the history of monuments, the history of infrastructure and mobility, 19th-century painting, and—more recently—the aesthetics, critique, and mediality of ruins.

Dietrich Erben is a Professor of Theory and History of Architecture, Art and Design at Technische Universität München. His research focuses on the history of art and architecture since the early modern period, with special consideration of political iconography, architectural theory and the history of international art relations.

Davor Ereš is architect, researcher, and an author of the Venice Biennale 2025 Serbian Pavilion exhibition, “Unraveling: New Spaces.” He holds a Ph.D. in Architecture from the University of Belgrade and is a Research Associate at the Institute of Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade. His

work focuses on modalities of learning through architecture, the post-production of architecture, and questions of contemporaneity. He is a visiting teacher at the Confluence Institute in Paris and has developed his methodology through leading workshops, notably in Helsinki, Vailletta, Tehran, Lyon, and Venice.

Ole W. Fischer is Professor for History and Theory of Architecture and Design at the State Academy of Art and Design Stuttgart. Prior appointments include University of Utah School of Architecture, MIT, Harvard GSD and Rhode Island School of Design. Trained as an architect, he received a doctorate from ETH Zurich with a thesis on Henry van de Velde, Friedrich Nietzsche and philosophically informed design.

Frederike Lausch Frederike Lausch is Associate Professor of History and Culture of Architecture at ENSA Grenoble-UGA, Research Unit AE&CC, and founding member of the Center for Critical Studies in Architecture (CCSA). Her research focuses on architecture as discourse and discipline by investigating media strategies of architects, their political positionings and professional conflicts over expertise and authority in international settings. Currently, she is researching architecture in development contexts.

Daniela Ortiz dos Santos is Assistant Professor of Architectural History at the Goethe University Frankfurt and scientific coordinator of the Center for Critical Studies in Architecture. She holds a degree in architecture from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and a PhD from ETH Zurich. Her research, teaching, and curatorial activities work on the intersection between transatlantic architectural history and historiography.

Salvatore Pisani is an Assistant Professor in art history at the University of Mainz. His studies are characterized by a pluralism of topics and approaches, which allows to shed light on classical problem areas from a different perspective. 2020 to 2025 he was in charge of the DFG-funded research project „Mobilier urbain. Objektkultur und öffentlicher Raum im Paris des 19. Jahrhunderts“. His publications include the editorship of the handbook „Neapel. Sechs Jahrhunderte Kulturgeschichte“, Berlin 2009, and „Architekten-schmiede Paris. Die Karriere des Jakob Ignaz Hittorff“, Berlin-Boston 2022.

Achim Reese studied architecture at RWTH Aachen and the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. After working as an editorial assistant for the magazine ARCH+, he was a fellow at the Kunsthistorisches Institut – Max-Planck-Institut in Florence from 2016 to 2019. In 2022, he joined the Chair of Theory and History of Architecture, Art and Design at the Technical University of Munich.

Carsten Ruhl is Professor of Architectural History at Goethe University Frankfurt, a founding member of the Center for Critical Studies in Architecture (CCSA) and one of two Directors of the DFG research cluster Organizing Architectures. Recent books include: *Kracauer's Architecture. The Ornamental Nature of the New Capitalist Order, Weimar 2022*, and *Bauhaus Clouds. Challenges to the Nebula of Architectural Histories and Archives, Weimar 2025* (with Daniela Ortiz dos Santos and Oliver Elser).

Szymon Ruszczewski, architect and researcher, graduated from the University of Florence and received a Ph.D. from the University of Sheffield. His work concentrates on modern architecture history and heritage, and its conservation, with publications on Alvar Aalto, Team 10, and Jerzy Sołtan. He has taught design studios and humanities courses at the universities of Florence, Pisa, and Sheffield and at the Polytechnic of Milan, and he works as a registered architect in Florence.

Hande Tunç received her B.Arch from Istanbul Technical University and her MSc in Architectural History from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, where she is currently a PhD candidate in Building Design Theory and Methodology. Her research focuses on architectural utopias, urban history, and socio-spatial transformations, particularly regarding the ideological dimensions of architectural production in twentieth-century Turkey.

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