

**EAHN 7th International Meeting  
Preliminary proceedings**

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# THE PERFORMATIVE ACTS OF BECOMING AN ARCHITECT

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## Abstract

As a theory, ‘performativity’, developed by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), questions the natural character with which gender is considered. According to the author, gender is not something predetermined or even circumscribed to binary positions, but ‘performatively’ constructed, i.e., through the reiteration of significant acts that produce what they declare. Butler also claims that although gender belongs intimately to the individual, its constitution has a public dimension, either to be marked with characteristics recognizable by others, or to stabilize a notion of the I of oneself.

This essay transfers the theory of ‘performativity’ to the architectural universe, making the analogy between gender and the different types of architects as professional role-models, considering the specialized periodical as a privileged place for their constitution. Using the periodical *Jornal Arquitectos* (1981-2020) as a case study – a important publication in the Portuguese specialized editorial panorama – I argue that ‘performativity’ can be a useful methodology to clarify the publication’s legitimization mechanisms, to demonstrate how it is used by published authors as a (per)formative tool, and to explain the ‘naturalness’ of certain types of architects.

## Keywords

Architect, Gender, Ideal-Model, *Jornal Arquitectos*, Performativity

This paper explores the application of Judith Butler's theory of performativity to the architectural universe through a specialized Portuguese magazine, *Jornal Arquitectos* (1981-2020). The magazine is not only considered an important agent in social relations, but also an influencing agent in the construction of the architect as a subject. This is one of the advantages of performativity as a methodological tool, as it simultaneously observes the way in which the collective organizes the context of choices available to the individual, just as the individual structures the collective form. This is particularly useful in a discipline where there is, as will be argued, in most cases, an overlap between the individual and the professional, between the subject and the architect.

It is also important to underline the virtue that *Jornal Arquitectos* (J-A) has as an instrument for analysing the figure of the published architect and identifying what could be classified as an 'ideal-model'. The fact that it is an official publication of the professional association that regulates and represents Portuguese architects means that it is distributed free of charge to all members. This is relevant as it guaranteed its longevity, quantity and continuity, surviving the highs and lows of paper publications, but it also represents a direct communication channel with practising architects (those for whom registration in the association is necessary for professional practice). The comprehensive survey of 1353 projects and 4081 texts, spread over 202 editions, allows the consolidation of the research process and anchoring the work to a classic methodology: the inventory; a catalogue that offers objective and subjective information that allow an analysis according to the defined concepts to dissect the ideas that are now defended.

### **The 'Ideal-Model' According to J-A**

The J-A is a unique case in Portuguese paper architecture magazines. Among other reasons, there is the regular renewal of its editorial line or the lack of commercial pressure usual in corporate periodicals, setting it apart from other specialized publications, and arguably allowing for the promotion of a more 'independent' and ideological position. Its particularity also stems from the period of its existence. If between the 1960s and 1980s, as defended by Jorge Figueira<sup>1</sup>, architecture made by Portuguese architects emancipated itself from the more 'central' references, the J-A was one of the places where this maturity was stabilized through the publication of its protagonists such as Álvaro Siza or Eduardo Souto de Moura.

And here, the issue of name is central. In the analysis of the published projects in J-A, it appears that authorship under one's own name, with one or more authors, prevails almost entirely (86%), with more than half of this value corresponding to individual authors (54%). While projects under a collective name, meaning, those whose designation does not directly refer to the individuals' first or surnames, presents a residual value (14%). Therefore, one can argue that the simultaneous use of the proper name and the professional name suggests a coincidence between the subject and the architect. Implying that there is a subjectivation of the individual through the act of making architecture, which validates this paper's hypothesis of the architect as a performative construction and the application of Judith Butler's theory to the field of architecture.

Analysing the set of published designs, it is evident that the attention devoted to Portugal (80%), with the foreseeable highlights in the districts of Lisbon (39%) and Porto (18%), which comprise more than half of the published pages, whatever the editorial line. Nor can it be said that it is a surprise that the most published program is that of public buildings – such as libraries or cultural centres – with almost half of the designs (45%), insinuating a strong tendency towards programs for collective use, enormous urban impact and great social relevance. This also explains the dominance of the public sector (76%), despite the progressive increase of private investment in recent decades. From the analysis of the published texts as a whole, there is a clear prevalence of the exercise of criticism (41%) and the essay (21%), addressing mainly issues related to the discipline of architecture (30%), despite some variations between the different series.

One of the conclusions that this set of data offers, especially within the scope of design, is that when compared to the profession's surveys<sup>2</sup>, there is a detachment between what is published and the professional practice of most architects. What is printed seems to be just *one* dimension of professional practice, one that the different editors considered to be most relevant, and which is closer to a constructed 'ideal-model' than to a common reality. A model that, through its reiteration and hegemony, acquires a 'natural' form defined by specific significant acts (a significance that is acquired through repetition): a single authorship practice under one's own name, developing projects in an urban environment, mainly public buildings, and responsible for disciplinary critical texts.



## The 'Natural' Imperative Rather than Gender Specificity

Despite once again making the error of the gender binary classification warned by Judith Butler, this division of published authors is relevant to clarify possible misunderstandings.

Not surprisingly, J-A is dominated by projects designed by male authors (83%). Even if the tendency of members registered in the professional association points to a balance between genders, the reality is that this is still not reflected (yet) in the published works. In the analysis of the textual production, curiously, the same values can be verified in the design section (83% belong to the male gender), suggesting that the greater or lesser presence of a certain gender in the pages of the J-A has nothing to do with the type of production. The reversal of this trend only took place when the magazine was for the first time edited by two female architects (Paula Melâneo and Inês Moreira), not because they favoured articles written by women, but because they assumed the editor position and thus began to sign the editorials that used to be written by man. Additionally, the gender difference also does not help to explain the prevalence of the trends that have been characterized, with roughly the same expression for each category analysed (Fig. 1).

It cannot be said that from the analysis of the elements and their differentiation by gender, a distinct model of an architect emerges. It seems that, more important than the male or female specificity, is the hegemonic model that, a kind of disciplinary imperative conditions the architect's model regardless of the gender to which they belong. However, the reading carried out here considers, in a unified way, a socio-culturally diverse universe of architects. Does the individual performance of the architects present significant deviations from the 'ideal-model'? And does his/her construction as an architect present the same significant acts?

In a first reading of the group of the most published authors (Fig. 2 and 3), there is a certain mismatch in relation to some of the values indicated in the previous analyses. The reduced presence of female architects is confirmed, but the near absence of authors under a collective name (only one) does not reflect the general trend of the collected data (Fig. 4). The prevalence of disciplinary topics and critical texts is maintained, as well as the confirmation (although without the same expressiveness) of the public building as the most explored program. The possible explanations for the divergence are diverse and hardly applicable to the

group of authors presented here, either because of the particular characteristics of each one, or because of the context in which they were published. It could, for example, be justified that the existence of different editorial lines prevents the perpetuation of a given author. However, the persistence of Álvaro Siza in all series contradicts this explanation. It could also be argued that each author would have a personal path, according to his or her particular interests and abilities, but the fact that all of the architects with projects design public buildings, or all the writing architects reflect on the discipline, insinuates something more than a simple coincidence.

That the conformity between individual performance and the ‘ideal-model’ is not perfect does not mean that there are no common traits between them. What they share, although limited, seems to remain relatively stable throughout the decades. Even considering authors whose production tends to be dominated by any of the dimensions – design or text – when they experience the other, they tend to adjust, with greater or lesser intensity, to their dominant referential. Still, whatever the reasons for the mismatch, it is possible to conclude that the presence of a hegemonic model does not act in the same way in all those that have been published. It could be said that its existence does not have the *capacity* to regulate the authors’ conduct, allowing each a certain (illusory) degree of freedom, but it has the *power* to structure their eventual field of action.

Regardless of the position of greater proximity or distance between the most published authors and the ‘ideal-model’, this articulation seems to show that the performative constitution, even if it is not the same in all, is not done without the reiteration of specific acts. When analysing individual production, there are certain mandatory acts that shape the disciplinary scenario: public buildings in design practices and the disciplinary critical texts. Consequently, there seems to be a mutual complicity between the performance of the most published authors, the configuration of disciplinary boundaries, the hegemonic model and its ideal, which contribute to a certain architectural model being presented as ‘natural’ and consequently becoming a reference for an entire professional class.

Obviously, this characterization of the ‘ideal-type’ or the hegemonic or ‘natural’ model – strictly speaking they are one and the same figure – is far from being an exclusive product of J-A. One could easily find similar configurations in other media or places of disciplinary legitimation, from the erudite to the popular (if

the distinction still makes sense), where the constructed figure that approaches the individuality of the genius-creator has a long and identifiable tradition. Hilde Heynen notes, for example, how the Pritzker Prize “builds upon a conception of the master architect that is informed by the idea of genius” founded on 19th century Romanticism that admired the individual’s originality and creativity.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Heynen had already argued that, even if architectural production results from the combined efforts of a multiplicity of actors and agents ranging from design to use, the discipline still honours individual authorship, whose “mystique is reinforced again and again in the mediation and communication of architecture to a general public – and likewise to its own students and practitioners.”<sup>4</sup> And perhaps there is no better example than Howard Roark, protagonist of Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead* (1943). In the book, as in King Vidor’s film (1949), the hero, resembling Frank Lloyd Wright, appears as a paradigmatic myth of creative genius.<sup>5</sup> After having worked for a ‘master architect’ and created his own practice under his name, he dramatically fights against adversity to affirm his original vision, sacrificing himself for his authentic artistic integrity, rejecting any kind of shared creativity, transforming himself into a model of ‘success’. Despite the *cliché*, it is these recurrent manifestations in different media and diverse degrees of disciplinary relevance that, mutually legitimizing each other, contribute to a constant visibility of the model and thus constructing its norm.

### **Judith Butler’s Performativity**

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler questions the natural character with which gender is considered. In her book, Butler argues that gender is constructed through a sustained set of actions or acts, as something one becomes. A kind of transformation or activity that should not be taken as something prearranged or static, but rather as an incessant and repeated action – gender as a performative construction – whose determination is achieved through a set of pre-existing meanings founded on the social nexus. Performativity, as a theory, is not established, therefore, as an isolated act, but in the reiteration of certain norms that hide the conventions that allow the recognition of a certain gender. This perspective also points out that even if genders belong to individual bodies, their constitution has a public dimension. This dimension is fundamental, whether to mark bodies with characteristics recognizable by others, or to stabilize a notion of the individual’s own ‘self’.

Another equally decisive feature of the performative exercise is its temporal dimension. The demand for its reiteration not only implies the consolidation of norms, but also that this process is prolonged over time through a “stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, has to be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, performativity consists in a re-enactment of specific acts, in which the theatrical illusion acquires constitutive contours for the “mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, [who] come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief”.<sup>7</sup> In this way, performativity seems to work to produce what it declares. When performing certain acts, gestures, actions and movements that, in order to be effective must be performed repeatedly and thus ratified by a set of conventions – performativity as a discursive practice –, these end up constituting the ‘self’. In this perspective, it cannot be said that there is a ‘self’ prior to the execution of the acts, but that these acts hold on to the individual’s body in such a way that they promote its constitution. But how does the integration of these acts take place in individuals? According to Butler, this integration is done through an identification (in the psychoanalytic sense – as in to assume an image) on the part of the individual who, when looking for an idealized coherence, carries out its “enacted fantasy or incorporation”.<sup>8</sup>

It can then be said that the production of gender (and of the ‘self’) is a discursive effect, meaning, that the discourses produced in a given culture and to which individuals are subject to, have a central importance in the development of their ‘self’, since they create the conditions for the individual to act in accordance with these norms. In this way, gender is produced by the incorporation of those significant acts that are external to it, coming from the culture to which it belongs or wants to belong. This performative gender presumes the repetition of certain acts that eventually form the illusion of an inner ‘self’ with the matching desires to these acts of the outer body. Hence, it is not possible to affirm the existence of a ‘self’ that influences the decisions or acts of the individual, but rather the decisions or acts of the individual that produce the illusion of a coherent ‘self’.

But this idea of gender as a performative construction may give rise to some misunderstandings. Eventually, it could mean that any individual had at his/her disposal several genders from which he/she would choose for any given circum-

tance, switching it for another in the following one. Now, it is precisely this interpretation of performativity free from constraints that Butler intends to clarify in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993). In this book, she argues that performativity will only make sense if it is accomplished through the repetition of regularized norms. From this perspective, performativity does not result from any isolated act, but from the practice of rituals that obey to very specific norms operated through power relations (even if power inevitably exerts its influence on the actions of individuals, its result is not fully decided from the outset). Thus, when Butler claims that the materiality of sex is constructed through ritualized repetitions of norms, or that the materiality of the body is made through performativity, what she is stating is that this materiality is constructed<sup>9</sup> as effects of discourse and power. The same power that, by operating performatively through regulatory norms, by stabilizing the limits and movements of the body, materializes it.

### **Becoming an Architect**

The word 'architect' shows an unproblematic unity despite the possibility of heterogeneous practices that it brings together; one cannot say that architecture as a discipline results in only a single model of the architect. However, even in its diversity, the substantive designation remains intact, implying that there are associations of coherence and continuity between discipline, profession, practice and desire, which somehow contribute to its intelligibility, in the same way that Butler considers intelligible genders those that "in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire".<sup>10</sup> If this observation is true, then it means that the one who calls him/herself an architect, aside from his/hers personal professional exercise, is the effect of regulatory practices, of a normative ideal and of intelligible socially instituted and maintained norms that allow the architect to be recognized as such.

However, the 'architect' must not only be conceived as the cultural inscription of meanings of a prearranged discipline (architecture), but also as the very apparatus of production in which the discipline itself is founded. Still, if the 'architect' is not a set of free characteristics, since its designation is produced by the practices of coherence that the discipline requires, then it means that its constitution is done in a performative way, meaning, through acts, gestures and actions that

produce what they declare (even if their constitution is the effect of fantasies, illusions or fabricated inventions, maintained through discursive means). Thus, if one wants to contest the deterministic nature of the architect's model, one is, simultaneously, contesting the limits of the discipline and questioning its hegemonic model (the model through which the architect is more intelligible). But when it is said that the architect is a cultural interpretation of architecture or that the architect is a cultural construction, what is the form or mechanism of this construction? If the architect is constructed, can it be constructed in a different way, or does the character of this construction imply some form of social determinism that excludes the possibility of being something other than the one foreseen? Does 'construction' imply that certain norms produce a certain model of architect and that they may differ depending on the different contexts in which they operate? Where and how is the architect constructed?

Whether the designation of the 'architect' is pre-set or free is the function of a discourse that aims to establish certain boundaries, or protect certain disciplinary principles, as assumptions for any type of its analysis. The boundaries of this discursive examination assume, and at the same time remove, the possibility of viable or imagined configurations of the architect in a culture. This means that the limits of this analysis reveal the boundaries, always established in terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse, of a model of architect conditioned by the discourse. It is necessary, however, to consider that the sedimentation of these discursive norms, or in other words, certain cultural illusions that dominate and regulate what is called an architect, produce a particular effect of what could be interpreted as a 'natural architect' given the hegemony of the model. This sedimentation over time, results in the production of a set of characteristics in the architect's body, since, by transforming, through a mental operation, abstract concepts that circulate in the cultural level into concrete personal realities, it ends up incorporating them as 'natural' manifestations of his/her own body. And here, the architect's body must be understood not only as a physical body (as the "inscribed surface of events" in Foucault's words), but also as the set of realized elements that compose the matter of its existence, meaning, his or her *oeuvre* (from words to buildings). In this way, the performative act of 'becoming' an architect finds privileged conditions for its performance (although in a non-exclusive way) in magazines. Not only because they allow the elaboration of the architect's models intelligibility and their

hegemonic referent with which they identify, but also the public visibility of their constitutive significant acts.

Nonetheless, as it is a regulatory fiction, a fantasy, in the absence of a pre-existing or determined ‘consistent architect’, but only constituted by the reiteration of significant acts, if the repetitive obligation of these specific acts cease to exist and, alternatively, replace their reiteration by others, then the conditions are created to construct another model of architect beyond that which is expected. In other words, if an architect’s construction is determined by the reiteration of certain norms, but if he/she does not perform according to these but by others, then his/her constitution will necessarily be different. However, this ‘choice’ by which norms to obey is not arbitrary. In fact, this choice will only be viable if these other norms belong to the same cultural intelligibility, even if they are alternative, marginal or little-experienced domains but, even so, viable and existing, since the subversion is only possible within signifying practices in a reiterated way. It is evident that this is not an easy path. Deviations from the norms often lead to failures, various incoherent configurations that, in their plurality, go beyond and move away from the norm from which they started. Furthermore, the very configuration of a ‘consistent architect’ occurs through specific discursive itineraries, such as having a structured theoretical background, being recognized by peers, being included in the broad disciplinary discourse; in short, it has to mean a diversity of guarantees in response to a multiplicity of simultaneous and distinct requirements. This indicates that the articulation of this discursive configuration stems from a very complex reformulation, never exclusively determined individually by the architect him/herself, but always dependent to multiple factors and various actors and agents.

## **Conclusion**

What the analysis carried out here leads one to believe is that the subjectivation of an architect, and regardless of gender specificity, involves the construction of a body-of-work according to significant acts that give it the intelligibility suggested by the ‘ideal-model’. It also indicates that professional parity does not mean greater visibility of women architects’ production. Architecture conceived and designed by them does not necessarily represent a change in disciplinary paradigm or new models of being an architect. And the presence of women in the direction

of J-A does not change the ‘ideal-model’, nor does the increase in the number of published women guarantee an alternative one.

This does not mean to devalue the indifference to which women architects have been subjected to, both in their work and as subject. Quite the opposite. If their presence is to be fully acknowledged and alternative models of being an architect considered, they do not have, and shouldn’t be submitted to an imperative defined by the hegemonic male model. It is only through a full understanding of how this model works that it will be possible to dismantle it. If one really wants to change the balance of forces between the genders, then perhaps should start by questioning the architect’s model that has been considered as ‘natural’. And this is possibly Butler’s most powerful lesson. What performativity theory offers us, is not only a release from gender restrictions and binary thought, but also the tools for our emancipation as subjects.

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## Endnotes

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5. Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (London: Yale University Press, 1983), 1-18.
6. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.
7. *Idem*, 141.
8. *Idem*, 136.
9. “A construction is, after all, not the same as an artifice. On the contrary, constructivism needs to take



account of the domain of constrains without which a certain living and desiring cannot make is way.” Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 59.

10. Judith Butler, *op cit*, 1990, 17.

# NOT A “COAL MINE SHAFT”: WASHINGTON D.C.’S METRORAIL STATIONS AND THEIR POSTWAR CLASSICAL CHARACTER

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the design of the Metrorail stations in Washington, D.C. (1966–1972) and its relationship with the classical origins of federal architecture in the country. Despite its resemblance to the great vaulted halls of Western history, the D.C. Metro design was rejected several times by local agencies and consultants due to the lack of a “more formal” approach, not appropriate to federal architecture—a design that was initially referred to as “a coal mine shaft.”

Through archival work, literature review, and design analysis, this paper argues that the case of the D.C. Metro reflects the search for a modern characterization of national identity. Born out of an appreciation for the classical tradition, the conservative power-oriented nature of government buildings expanded its language to progressive concepts, such as diversity and change. Bringing such characters of federal architecture to light is key to understanding that a civilization’s origins and evolution can be framed, reshaped, and transfigured. The history of the D.C. Metro design is therefore examined in this work according to the character of primitive types, evolutionary language, and sociality.

## **Keywords**

D.C. Metro, Harry Weese Associates, Federal Architecture, Modern Monumentality.

## Introduction

*Those who rejected the academic discipline did so because they felt it to be hostile to their conception of architecture, which they held to be functional, scientific and divorced from stylistic considerations. Yet, (...) the very embodiment of the academy—was as functional, scientific and un-stylistic as they. Conversely, they in their turn, while repudiating the ‘false standards of the academies,’ accepted many academic ideas without knowing where they had come from.<sup>1</sup>*

More than a half-century later, Reyner Banham’s critique on the misuse of the heritage of the academic tradition still has room for debate in contemporary theory. In this article, American civic architecture is highlighted as one of these points of controversy. Having its roots in the Classicism of the Jeffersonian Era, federal architecture followed the heritage of Beaux-Arts Neoclassicism while maintaining American nationhood, which historically had been the “official” style for federal architecture in the country. Paradoxically, the absorption of Neoclassicism by government agencies also represented a theoretical challenge against the exclusivity of Classicism itself, its orthodoxy, and supposedly primitive ossification. By embracing flexibility and adaptability—let’s say, a “modern” approach to antiquity, architecture became suitable for social progress and its overall evolutionary context.

Rhetoric, compromise, and inconsistency were typical of the battle that raged between the so-called “Modernists” and the “Traditionalists” during the first half of the twentieth century. Commissions for civic buildings were traditionally held by governmental agencies such as the Office of the Supervising Architect (extinguished in 1939) and the Association of Federal Architects (AFA). Both were in line with the classical tradition. The AFA was responsible for promoting classicist architecture primarily through the so-called *The Federal Architect* magazine, opposing the defenders of Modernism and private architects who were demanding new modes of representing public buildings.

Boosted by the general ideological climate of the West, which was hostile to the Stripped Classicism developed by totalitarian regimes in the Interwar period, the defenders of Modernism in the U.S. and critics alike eventually succeeded in their campaign by linking the historicist “New Tradition”<sup>2</sup> style to a pejorative instru-

ment of national policy. The American Institute of Architects (AIA), in special, played a central role in advocating the decentralization of public commissions from governmental agencies. Private architectural firms' control of public commissions (particularly those related to Modern Architecture) was solidified only after World War II (WWII), particularly in 1949, when the General Services Administration (GSA) was formed. Since its inception, much of its agenda discouraged historicist styles and shifted toward mid-century Modernism, officialized later through the 1962 Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, one of the former sentinels of the classic tradition in the country, the permanent Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), founded in 1910, still remained as an advisor upon the selection and placement of statues, fountains, and monuments erected under federal authority.

Throughout these two hundred years of public architecture in the country, one typology, in particular, was molded under such context and transformations: the terminal for mass transportation. In the origins of railway stations and terminals alike, the style for public architecture was not based on the imitation of Greek-Roman antiquity, but it was mostly following Picturesque Eclecticism. Such style, primarily a creation of the English-speaking world, could mold all forms and shapes of the past to its ends.<sup>4</sup> But a major theoretical conflict was born when the federal government created the National Capital Transportation Agency (WMATA) in 1960, responsible for developing a rapid rail system in Washington, D.C. Major efforts emerged in a total reevaluation of design principles and language. Several architects were considered for the job, and a number of precedents were brought to the table; while the CFA interfered in matters of design and aesthetics, seeking to preserve the dignity of the nation's capital. In this article, I am looking closely at this case, the Metrorail stations (1966–1972) in Washington, D.C. (also known as D.C. Subway, or D.C. Metro), designed under the pressure of counteracting a set of different interests (Fig. 1).

### **A Modern Subway for the City Beautiful Aesthetic**

The D.C. Metro design is attributed to the American architect Harry Weese (1915–1998) and his firm, although many agencies, references, and individuals also participated in this process.<sup>5</sup> The engineering firm De Leuw, Cather, and Company was hired even before Weese's firm and pushed for overall economic solutions

and topographic adjustments throughout the project. The American architect Stanley (Stan) Alley (1921–2015) participated in different stages and decisions of this design, a relatively unknown fact revealed in this article through archival work on Weese’s collection at Chicago History Museum.<sup>6</sup>

Among those involved in the D.C. Metro design decisions, it is essential to highlight the concern of the CFA with the project. Originally Beaux-Arts minded and hostile to Modernism, the CFA became a more flexible organization after the appointment of a new chairman in 1963, the American journalist and abstract expressionist painter William E. Walton (1921–2015). Walton was open to contemporary architecture, although the CFA never abandoned its purpose of preserving the classic monumentality of the country.

Such change at the CFA administration was exceptionally significant, reflecting an ongoing reevaluation of federal architecture at that time which seemed to be under disapproval. A 1959 issue of the *Architectural Forum* exemplifies the general need for a “contemporary government character through creative design.” The magazine argued that such character should reflect “the creation of a more agreeable and attractive society, which is to say, the creation of a new civilization.” Accordingly, the time had come to re-examine what is meant by “civic character” and what the U.S. can hope to accomplish through better planning and architecture. There was a general “shoddy, unkempt look” about much of America, and a “lack of dignity and character” in public places, avenues, and buildings, deteriorating public architecture ever since the Jeffersonian era.<sup>7</sup>

In the beginnings of the D.C. Metro design, one of Weese’s main concepts was to use exposed rock as part of the aesthetic honesty of the project (perhaps due to his close affiliation with Brutalist tactility at that time). He called this type of station “rock tunnel.” Weese also explained this concept in a draft letter, editing it while conceiving his architectural principles for the project:

*The sparing use of rich and permanent materials such as bronze and granite in places that tell will add a quality relatively rare in the state of art. We aim to avoid any unnatural material, i.e., terrazzo, or precast concrete, or paint. By staying with natural materials (if you include pour-in-place concrete as one and I do) we emphasize the atmosphere of the outdoors. By treating arrival and departure and transition spaces as distinct different environments, but inter-connected, we hope to improve the rider and make him more aware of his surroundings.*

*Splayed walls [The vault] rather than a straight sided box accent the underground effect and go with the vaulted [is the] aesthetic of the deep rock station [underground].*<sup>8</sup>

The CFA rejected the rough character of this proposal, calling it “a refined coal mine shaft.”<sup>9</sup> In a 1967 letter, Walton mentioned a “certain reservation on the use of natural stone exposed by tunneling,” although he was sympathetic to the proposition.<sup>10</sup> As Weese wrote in one of his draft letters to the CFA, “the single-ended taper with the rock walls and vaulted ceiling was considered by some members to be Neanderthal and lacking in creature comforts. (...) There was an expressed desire, shared by the architects and the agency, for simplicity, uniformity, and monumentality.”<sup>11</sup>

On that occasion, the American architect Gordon Bunshaft (1909–1990) served as a consultant to the project. He echoed the concerns of the CFA, also rejecting the “grotto” aspect of the stations and calling for a formality consistent with federal Washington’s traditions. Bunshaft arguably inherited the classic spirit from Mies van der Rohe and his students, as part of a postwar generation that followed a type of “Post-Miesian Manner.”<sup>12</sup>

During the early conceptions of the D.C. Metro design, the team headed by Weese traveled the world looking for stations in cities such as Hamburg, London, Milan, Montreal, Rome, Paris, Stockholm, and Toronto. In Berlin, passengers would walk or ride escalators directly from the surface to the platform, with no intervening mezzanines. In Milan, the entire system would have a unified graphic design. Subways in London were characterized by their sans-serif typography. The ones in New York were famous for their mosaics. Weese also mentioned the need to observe the context of the Cold War, arguing that Russia had “some very good metro stations going” (a possible allusion to the Arbatsko-Pokrovskaya Line, a lavish monumental and classicist Soviet subway system conceived between 1957 and 1959).<sup>13</sup> Although the now superpower “land of the free” needed to counteract the classicist architecture of the Soviets by fostering a new postwar language of monumentality, the identity of federal architecture also implied recognition of its classical heritage since the Jeffersonian era.

Weese’s team eventually abandoned the use of exposed rock in the D.C. Metro design, but not its vaulted forms or its aesthetics. They reinterpreted the “rock tunnel” concept through coffered, reinforced concrete vaults. These forms see-

med to fit the task for the job, echoing the great coffered vaults of the ancient Roman Pantheon in one hand; and relating to the technological evolution of arcuated railway stations on the other (Fig. 2). Still today, the coffered vaults are an exceptional characteristic of the D.C. Metro.

Nonetheless, such solution did not remain unchallenged. By the end of October, 1966, a group of engineers had prepared cross-section drawings of twelve alternative schemes, including a box-sectioned proposal nine percent cheaper than Weese's vaults. Rectangular cross-section stations could be more easily adapted to the crowded underground of downtown, saving the cost of underpinning neighboring buildings that would overlap the edges of a vault. W. Kent Cooper (1926–2018), an architect in Washington who also served as a consultant, pushed for a "system-wide approach." A model developed by the National Capital Transportation Agency (NCTA) for Washington subways was similar to the successful examples of Toronto's post-and-lintel stations. However, the box-sectioned proposal, nine percent cheaper, was soon excluded under the argument that cities, such as San Francisco, lack the monumental architectural identity of Washington.

After much discussion, the D.C. Metro design followed three main principles: (i) the requirement for mezzanine within the station room, increasing surveillance over the public areas; (ii) the absence of columns or other hiding spaces; and (iii) the "floating" feature of mezzanines and platforms so the walls cannot be reached to get dirty or to be marked.<sup>14</sup> The D.C. Metro design also was based on three main building formats: (i) "rock tunnel," (ii) cut-and-cover, and (iii) aerial or on-grade (Fig. 3). All of them pursued a sense of spaciousness through the use of arcuated structures.<sup>15</sup> The Italian designer Massimo Vignelli (1931–2014) developed the graphic information system for the Metro, although they were also rejected initially by the CFA due to their size and prominence. The commission encouraged "signs and fixtures as simple and dignified as possible."<sup>16</sup> In one of the letters written by Stanley Alley, he mentioned that the Norwegian born, structural engineer Fred Severud (1899–1990), who is virtually unknown in the historiographies of the D.C. Metro, participated in the design of coffered vaults, providing drawings that later were sent to the CFA.<sup>17</sup> Alley also gave a final description of the D.C. Metro design:

*This is a pre-cast, composite system with ribs and coffered structure. The concrete is quality-control, prefabricated, off-white, with natural color slightly sand blasted and sealed with acrylic. The lightning is totally indirect from track center and under platform. The station signing is combined with air conditioning not less than 32' on centers. All metal is oiled bronzed finished, platforms are dark pavers, the platform edges of granite. We believe that the design is responsive to the idea of a "system" stressing consistency as opposed to variety and producing a spacious monumentality appropriate to the Capital.<sup>18</sup>*

### **Variety within Universality: The Theory that Lies Underneath**

In his *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, Banham based much of his initial arguments on the French Beaux-Art theoretician Julien Guadet (1834–1908). Accordingly, both the elements of composition and architecture make up a design philosophy familiar to “Academics” and Moderns” alike. But another of Guadet’s theories that is somewhat overshadowed in the relationship between the “Traditionalists” and the “Pioneers” is the theory of character, particularly the opposition between individual character and universal character.

The theory of character, often related to the notion of “expression,”<sup>19</sup> derives, in the academic tradition, from the Greek interpretation of the term, meaning “a mark or figure traced on stone, metal, paper, or any other material with a chisel, burin, brush, or any other instrument.”<sup>20</sup> Character also derived from the term “appropriateness,” the concept of “the easy performance of a function or purpose,”<sup>21</sup> itself a derivation of the Vitruvian notion of “propriety:” “that perfection of style which comes when a work is authoritatively constructed on approved principles,” arising from prescription (i.e., purpose), usage (i.e., adjective characterization), or nature (i.e., rational response to the site and landscape).<sup>22</sup> It was only after the eighteenth century that the idea of character came to be understood more abstractly, departing from early notions of the term that involved the concept of decorum.<sup>23</sup> Widely explored by the **École des Beaux-Arts** and the French academicism, character in architecture can be currently accepted as a “quality dependent on the close relationship of the general aspect of a building and its purpose, something to do with a building’s homogeneous expression, its consistency throughout.”<sup>24</sup>



In the design of the D.C. Metro, the notions of individual and universal character were in conflict. On the one hand, representational qualities such as diversity and variety are necessary components in a context of progress and evolutionary change. As Guadet argued, variety (or inclusiveness) is an element of beauty.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, rational principles such as mass production, economy, and efficiency promote repetition, leaning toward the universal character. But they also fit in a context of progress. Weese was among those who pushed for variety, arguing that each Metro station should have an individual character within a similar language. Different sites also required different solutions. Supported by consultant-engineers, variation in terms of building solutions was a rational response to the project, which eventually led to the three schemes “rock tunnel,” cut-and-cover, and aerial station previously mentioned. But Bunshaft, the American art critic Aline Saarinen (1914–1972), and the Japanese-American Hideo Sasaki (1919–2000), who also were consultants of the D.C. Metro design, fostered universality. They argued that continuity is a characteristic of a prototype.<sup>26</sup> The CFA members echoed their concerns and also argued that all stations should look alike, promoting a lineal continuous experience. In a note, Weese explained that this was not a case of a simple opposition between individual vs. universal character, but variety within universality. As Weese argued, the stations must include character:

*(...) where variety is possible within the necessary continuity of the system. The shape of each vault will be different, too. This will come about from different engineering and functional conditions at each system. So this, too, provides a given variety. No concept will provide identical stations.*<sup>27</sup>

## A Grotesque Conclusion

Based on Weese’s wish for a “rock tunnel,” the D.C. Metro design indeed resembles a *grotto*, the primitive natural template that was arguably imitated by art; and eventually came to belong to society in the form of vaulted architecture. The *grotto* was among the three primitive architectural “types” established by the French theorist Quatremère de Quincy (1755–1849): the tent (expressing the mode of living of hunters and fishermen), the subterranean cave (or souterrain, expressing the dwelling of shepherds), and the hut (born out of carpentry, and being more

suitable for a population of farmers).<sup>28</sup> But why did the *grotto*, an intrauterine space sheltered by monolithic or masonry-like cultures, replace the tectonics of both the steel frame and the timber construction that are so usual in American culture?

The primitive hut has been used in ritual and in building as both a token from the past and a guide to the future. It is a reflection of man's desire for renewal as well as a recollection of lost perfection that has been humankind's original condition. But the grotto seems to be more related to the authority of the Egyptian pyramid, which Quatremère harshly criticized due to its uniformity, perpetual monotony, intellectual immobility, and social stagnation. "An essentially conservative social type condemned every form of social language to a permanently savage and primitive state."<sup>29</sup> From the outside, it is impossible to imagine that the underground D.C. Metro stations have vaulted interiors as is to imagine the internal chambers of the Egyptian pyramids. They are the antithesis of the glass cage. As with most engineers' architecture, the box conception is neat and clean; but it is challenged when it comes to transcending these qualities, which are so appropriate for a laboratory or an office building. Similarly, the reinforced concrete vaults of the D.C. Metro are the antithesis of the glass cage in this aspect.

The validity of the *grotto* relies on its power-oriented genesis, dating back to when it served as a template for civic architecture in ancient Western culture. In one of his lesser-known works, entitled *Architecture and the Phenomena of Transition: The Three Space Conceptions in Architecture* (1971), the architectural historian Sigfried Giedion (1888–1968) argued that the rise of large indoor spaces fostered a new type of social life: more concerned with civic representation and access of the public to the interior of monumental buildings. Throughout time, this civic *grotto* was perpetuated as part of "those elements that remained constant despite the advent of mechanization and the tragic nineteenth century rift between thinking and feeling."<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps this is also the case of the D.C. Metro. No primitive paintings cover its surfaces. Stations follow prototypes. Advanced wide-span structures have the grandeur of the ancient monuments of Rome. The modern civic *grotto* can be seen as a result of a process that Quatremère called "positive" imitation: the use of stolen elements from other civilizations that were submitted to rational criticism, reducing them to abstract principles.<sup>31</sup> But if that is true, the D.C. Metro is not, after all, a "coal mine shaft"?

Through archival work, literature review, and design analysis, this paper argued that the case of the D.C. Metro reflects the search for a modern characterization of national identity. Archival work reveals Weese's fascination for a "rock tunnel" solution, which here in this article is also referred to "grotto." Archival work also unveiled the participation of the structural engineer Fred Severud, who is virtually unknown in the historiographies of the D.C. Metro, as well as the central role of the architect Stanley Allen throughout the design process. Literature review recovered the French eighteenth-century theory of "character," which here is unprecedentedly linked to the uniqueness of the D.C. Metro design. Finally, design analyses of the project revealed that rational solutions were encouraged, but pure utilitarian and economic approaches were rejected. An uncommon vaulted solution prevailed over the structural frame, challenging the hegemony of the glass cage as a general template for all types of programs.

## Endnotes

1. Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (New York; Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1967), 14–15.
2. Term coined by Henry-Russell Hitchcock in 1929, who highlighted the rise of a "consciously modernized historicist style," the so-called "New Tradition," outside the main line of the Modern Movement. The New Tradition provided a generic style for the establishment. See: Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration* (New York: Payson & Clark Ltd., 1929).
3. Early in 1938, a group composed mostly of modern architects, yet including Beaux-Arts architects such as the French-American architect Paul Philippe Cret (1876–1945), formed a National Commission Committee (an outgrowth of the modernist League for Architectural Progress).
4. Carroll L. V. Meeks, *The Railroad Station: An Architectural History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2013).
5. For a detailed history of the D.C. Metro, see: Zachary M. Schrag, *A History of the Washington Metro* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2014).
6. In a letter to John Calbreath Burdis, Director of Planning in Nassau County, Weese said that the former should contact Stanley Allen, "our man in the transit scene," who was working in the Harry Weese Associates Washington office at that time. Letter to John Calbreath Burdis from Harry Weese, Feb. 14, 1968. Source: Abakanowicz Research Center, Chicago History Museum, Harry Weese Associates Architectural Drawings and Records, 1952–78, #612, folder "Miscellaneous, Papers, and Correspondence."
7. *Architectural Forum* (Jan 1959), 67–68.
8. Draft letter from Harry Weese, unspecified destination, undated. Source: Abakanowicz Research Center, Chicago History Museum, Harry Weese Associates Architectural Drawings and Records, 1952–78, #612, folder "Drafts and Design Rationale, 1967–1968."

9. CFA, minutes, 19 April 1967, 179–181, apud Zachary M. Schrag, *A History of the Washington Metro*, 85.
10. Letter to Walter J. McCarter, National Capital Transportation Agency, from William Walton, April 27, 1967. Editions (e.g., strikethrough and additional words) are a transcription of the notes made by Walton.
11. Draft letter to the CFA from Harry Weese, undated. Source: Abakanowicz Research Center, Chicago History Museum, Harry Weese Associates Architectural Drawings and Records, 1952–78, #612, folder “Drafts and Design Rationale, 1967–1968.”
12. Colin Rowe, “Neoclassicism and Modern Architecture,” *Oppositions* 1 (September 1973), 1–26.
13. “Oral History of Harry Mohr Weese,” interviewed by Betty J. Blum, compiled under the auspices of the Chicago Architects Oral History Project, Department of Architecture, the Art Institute of Chicago, 172.
14. According to the notes of a slide presentation by Sprague Thresher, Metro’s Director of Architecture, undated. Source: Abakanowicz Research Center, Chicago History Museum, Harry Weese Associates Architectural Drawings and Records, 1952–78, #612, folder “Miscellaneous, Papers, and Correspondence.”
15. In one of Weese’s drawings for D.C. Metro, he wrote the word “spacious” curved into the air under a vault.
16. Wolf Von Eckardt, “Arts Boards Reject Subway Design,” *Washington Post* (Jan 18, 1968).
17. Letter to Charles Atherton, Secretary at the Commission of Fine Arts, from Stanley Allan, Oct. 13, 1967. Source: Abakanowicz Research Center, Chicago History Museum, Harry Weese Associates Architectural Drawings and Records, 1952–78, #612, folder “Drafts and Design Rationale, 1967–1968.”
18. *Idem*.
19. Harry F. Mallgrave, *Architectural Theory: Volume I, An Anthology from Vitruvius to 1870* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006).
20. Quatremère de Quincy, “Le Dictionnaire Historique d’Architecture” (1832), apud Harry F. Mallgrave, *Architectural Theory: An Anthology from Vitruvius to 1871*, 103.
21. *Idem*, 218.
22. Vitruvius Pollio, Marcus, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, translated by Morris Hicky Morgan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 15–16.
23. Harry F. Mallgrave, *Architectural Theory: An Anthology from Vitruvius to 1871*, 190–220. For Mallgrave, character is a quality that depends on some kind of intelligibility, which in turn depends on the existence of some kind of symbols that arouse recognizable association. In addition, the notion of character includes an emotional reaction, related to the way which buildings arouse, the direct psychological effect (pleasure or displeasure) of certain types of lines and volumes that have definite shape and quality.
24. Talbot Hamlin, *Forms and Functions of Twentieth Century Architecture: The Elements of Building*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 217.
25. Julian Guadet, *Elements and Theory of Architecture*, vol. 1, book 2, p. 131. The conservative academicians, called “Ancients,” were strictly rigid in regard to universal values, believing that these ideals are eternal, regardless on the context of progress or evolutionary change. The expression of the quality of the material was less important to the academic designer than the “correct” design. But the opposition to those conservative hardliners were called “Moderns,” and they rejected the view that principles of beauty are universal. Rather, these principles are relative, often created by individual geniuses or related to the particularities of

nature (e.g., materials, techniques, structures, and the natural purpose of a building in accordance to its time and place).

26. Apud Zachary M. Schrag, *A History of the Washington Metro*, 87, 91.
27. Note available in the folder folder “Miscellaneous, Papers, and Correspondence: Airlie” at the Chicago History Museum archives.
28. Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, “On Egyptian Architecture” (1803), in Harry F. Mallgrave, *Architectural Theory: An Anthology from Vitruvius to 1870*, 338.
29. Sylvia Lavin, *Quatremère de Quincy and the Invention of a Modern Language of Architecture*, 129.
30. Sigfried Giedion, *Architecture and The Phenomena of Transition: The Three Space Conceptions in Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), I.
31. Sylvia Lavin, *Quatremère de Quincy and the Invention of a Modern Language of Architecture*, 102.

## Figures

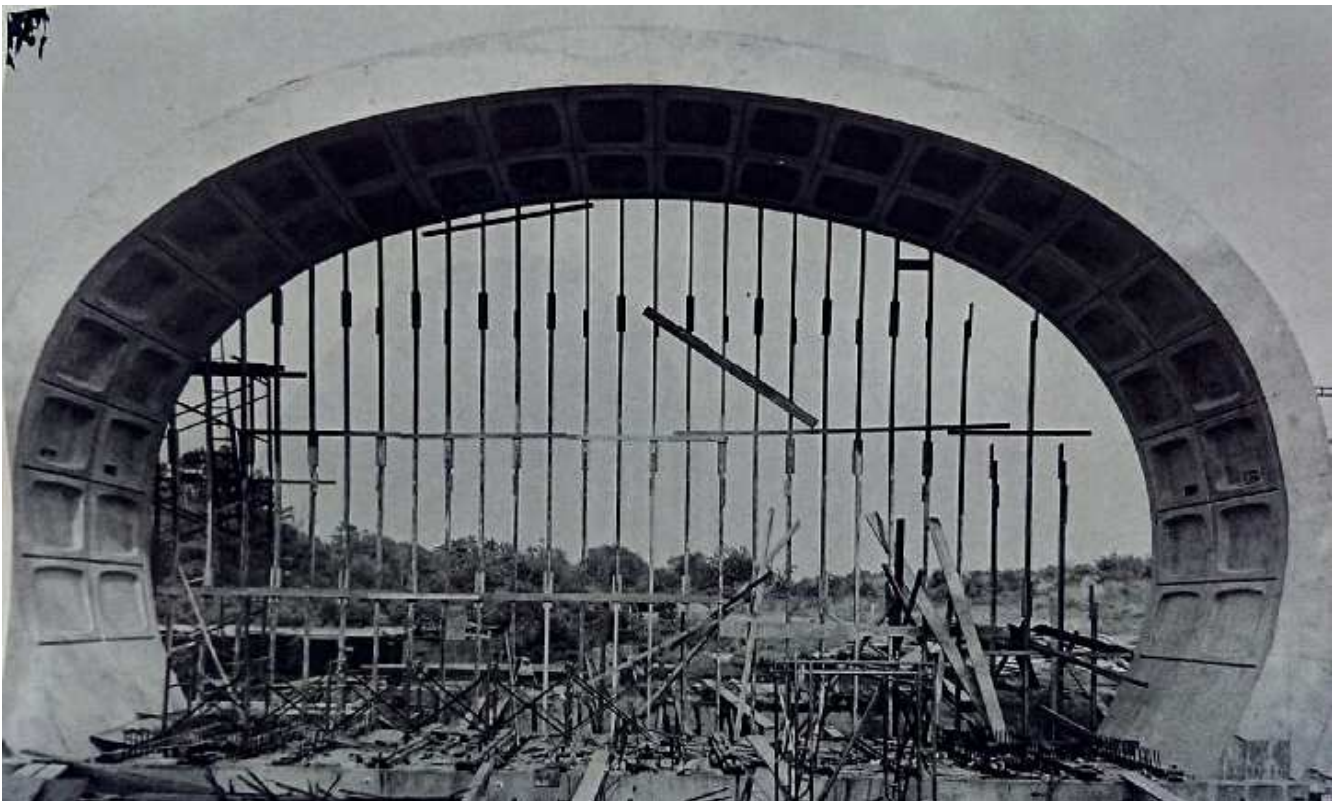


Fig 1. Mock-up of the Washington Metro, c. 1968. Source: Abakanowicz Research Center, Chicago History Museum, Harry Weese Associates Architectural Drawings and Records, 1952–78, #612, folder “Sketches and Drawings, 28 Oct 1967–12 Feb 1971.”

149. Sections of train-sheds.

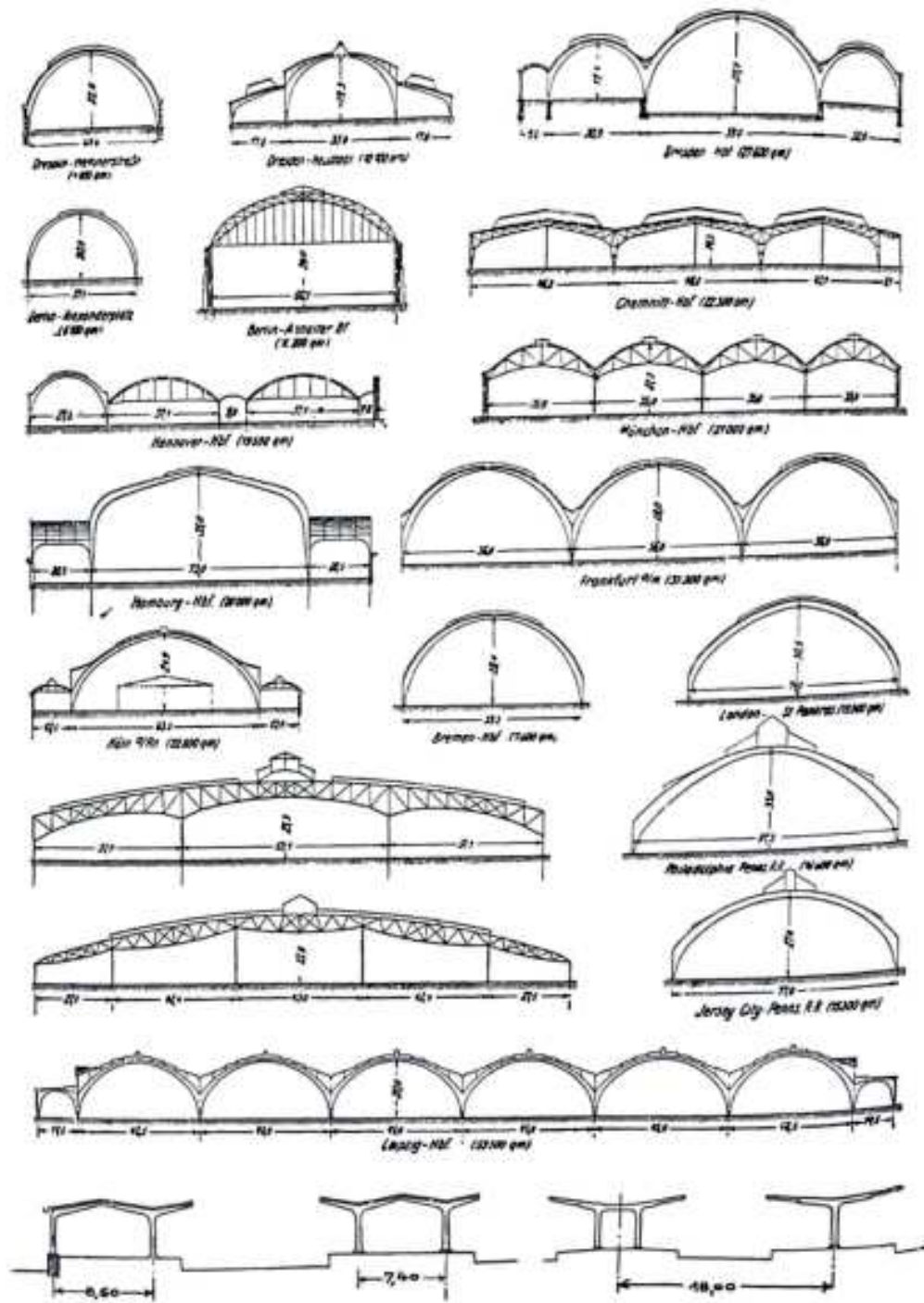


Fig 2. Sections of 19th and 20th arcuated train. Source: Carrol L. V, Meeks, The Railroad Station: An Architectural History (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2013), unnumbered.

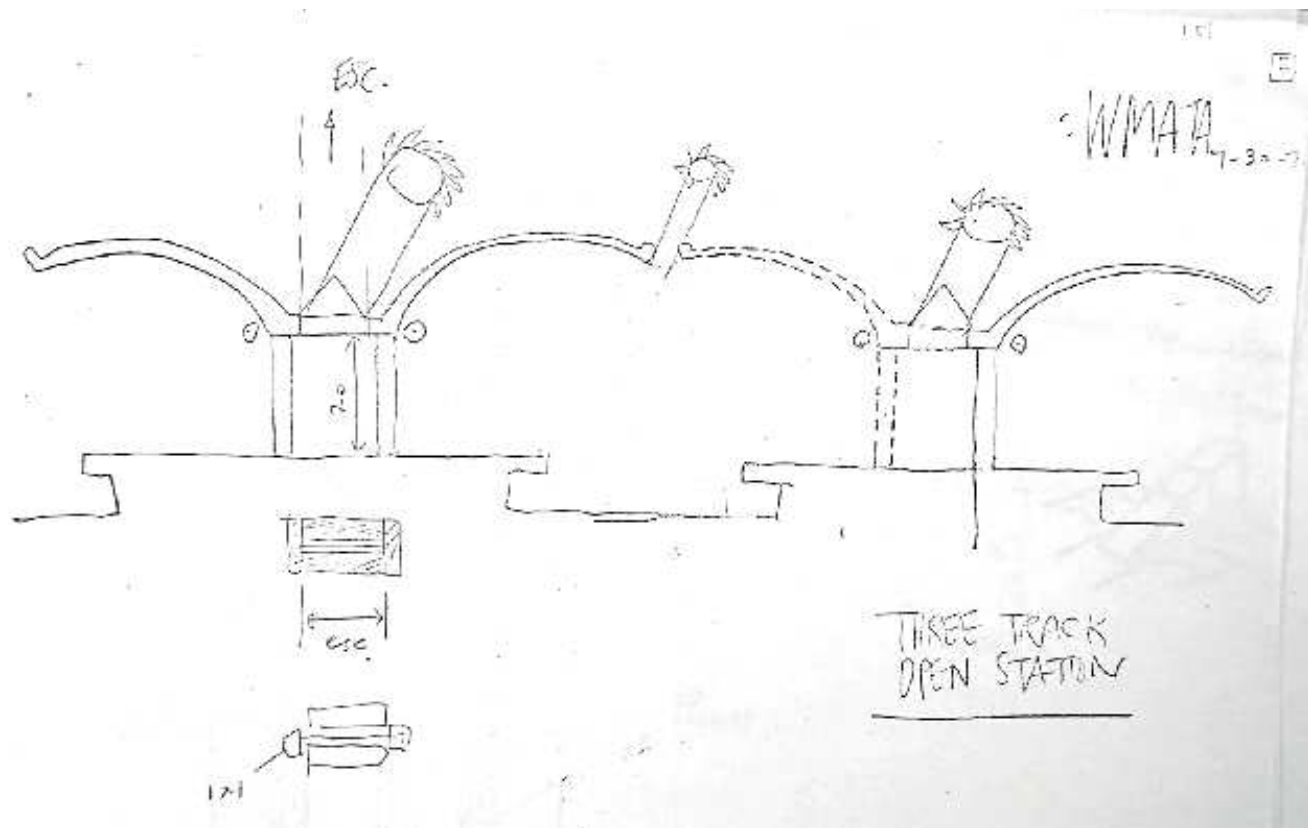


Fig 3. Sketch of the Aerial stations, by Harry Wesse, undated. Source: Abakanowicz Research Center, Chicago History Museum, Harry Weese Associates Architectural Drawings and Records, 1952–78, #612, folder "Sketches and Drawings, 28 Oct 1967–12 Feb 1971."

# GOVERNING ON THE MOVE: AMERICAN-SPONSORED EXHIBITIONS IN EUROPE AT MID-20TH CENTURY

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## Abstract

In 1950, the exhibition *Europe Builds* traveled “Western Europe,” conveying the benefits of European cooperation to the nascent Western European public. The Visual Information Unit (VIU) of the European Cooperation Administration, the U.S. Government agency administering the Marshall Plan (MP), produced the exhibition. It consisted of a “caravan” of expandable trailers and a grand circus tent containing panels of photographs and infographics of European integration. Between 1950-51, the exhibition visited seven countries and a million and a half visitors visited it. Further, the VIU installed the exhibitions on trains, barges, and trucks, not only evincing an aesthetics of mobility, lightness, and speed, but performing it. After introducing the VIU, this paper examines *Europe Builds*, eventually showing how three aesthetics developed by this “architectural arm” of the MP performed the MP architecturally. Mobility, expressed by the caravan’s ability to travel from Sweden to Italy, implied a US-style continent-wide space without borders. Lightness, expressed by innovative structural systems, implied the “politics of productivity” and the “harmoniousness” of US labor relations applied to Europe. Speed, expressed by the oft-noted “psychological effect” of the exhibitions’ speedy erection onsite, dazzled visitors and introduced them to new patterns of entertainment and consumption. The VIU recycled the concept behind *Europe Builds*, as well as its aesthetics in the coming years and adapted it for rail, waterway and discrete mobile units traveling by road.

## Keywords

Architecture, Marshall Plan, Propaganda, Governmentality, Infrastructure



## Introduction

A principal aim of the European Recovery Program (ERP), commonly known as the Marshall Plan (MP), was to reshape what was only then becoming known as the political entity of “Western Europe” in the image of the US after the calamity of World War II (WWII).<sup>1</sup> There were three ways in which the MP was to accomplish this. First, a “United States of Europe” would allow European countries to benefit from the same economies of scale the US enjoyed through continent-wide economic integration.<sup>2</sup> Second, it aimed at combating the hostile labor politics of Western Europe through the “politics of productivity.” Instead of hostile Communist-dominated labor politics, US administrators promoted so-called Free Trade Unions for Western Europe and effectively banned Communist-associated unions. The new Western European labor pool was to be homogenous, aspirational, and ready to “grow” itself out of post-war misery through the logic of growing the pie through increased productivity, as opposed to re-dividing the existing pieces.<sup>3</sup> Third, and less clearly stated, the MP intended to accomplish this through psychological interpellation. By dazzling Western Europeans through their instantaneous introduction to material and technological goods of all kinds, their subjective make-ups might grow accustomed to the material basis accounting for the existence of these goods (Fig. 1).<sup>4</sup>

*Europe Builds*, a mobile exhibition produced by the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA)’s Visual Information Unit that circulated around of Western Europe in 1950, represented all three aspirations in its infographics. But more than representing them, the exhibition performed them through its architecture. This paper introduces the VIU and examines *Europe Builds*, eventually showing how three aesthetics developed by this “architectural arm” of the MP performed it architecturally. Mobility, expressed by the caravan’s ability to travel from Sweden to Italy, implied a US-style continent-wide space without borders. Lightness, expressed by innovative structural systems, implied the “politics of productivity” and the “harmoniousness” of US labor relations applied to Europe. Speed, expressed by the oft-noted “psychological effect” of the exhibitions’ speedy erection onsite, dazzled visitors and introduced them to new patterns of entertainment and consumption.<sup>5</sup>

## The Economic Cooperation Administration's Visual Information Unit

In the initial stages of the MP, from 1948-50, the ECA counted on the country missions to inform local populations what the Marshall Aid was accomplishing for their country. It was not until 1950 that a Europe-wide strategy came into existence through the creation of a Special Media Section at the Office of the Special Representative in Europe (OSR) in Paris. The section, in turn, consisted of three units, a Film Unit, a Radio Unit, and the principal actor of this paper, the VIU (Fig. 2).<sup>6</sup> Its first assignment was the production of an exhibition strategy that could address Western Europe as a whole. The outcome was the exhibition *Europe Builds* and the series of “mobile exhibitions” that followed – all directed by Yale-educated American architect Peter Harnden. Harnden had served as an information officer during WWII and subsequently became head of the US Office of Military Government (OMGUS) Presentations Branch, for which he produced a series of well-known exhibitions in Germany. In the fall of 1949, Harnden had relocated to Paris to become head of the VIU, now joined by Italian architect Lanfranco Bombelli, Harnden's creative partner for the rest of his life.<sup>7</sup> In addition to Harnden and Bombelli, the team credited for *Europe Builds* was a mix of artists, architects, and graphic designers: British architect Clive Entwistle, French graphic designers Pierre Boucher and Adolphe Le Houerf, Swiss photographer Scheidegger and French architects Jean Prouvé and André Sive<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 3).

### Europe Builds: Exhibition architecture

*Europe Builds* consisted of a “caravan” of three expandable trailers, each of which installers could triple in floorspace through manual expansion, and a grand circus marquee. Designed to publicize the OEEC, the precursor to the present-day OECD, the exhibition emphasized the need for intra-European cooperation and increased productivity. The caravan visited seven select MP recipient countries and a million and a half people visit between April 1950 and March 1951.

*Europe Builds* was erected in prominent urban sites such as Italian piazzas in “hearts” of cities, to use a parlance in vogue at the time.<sup>9</sup> For a local visitor to *Europe Builds*, this may have been a practical choice necessitated by the “lack of available exhibition halls in postwar Europe,” but it was also a theatrical one, allowing the whimsy and ephemerality of the marquee to play counterpoint to civic mo-

numents derived from Europe's Mediterranean, and by extension, Greco-Roman, past. Other times, the planners installed the exhibition on traditional fairgrounds on outskirts of cities such as Bremen, "where fairs and circuses had long brought celebration and color to small towns," thus evoking a more Northern, Germanic, medieval heritage, however unscientifically.<sup>10</sup>

The message was both one of space and of time. Locally, the caravan could integrate itself into the environment and make itself understandable through its exchangeable text and universal graphic design language, to be explored further below, whereas in a global sense it could bridge the distance between localities, between the Mediterranean "heart of the city," and the bumbling medieval fair of North Europe, with its attendant productivity and commerce, to which it had traveled "towed by five heavy tractors [...] over highways used since the Middle Ages by bands of craftsmen and merchants, troubadours, jugglers and storytellers, buyers and plain citizens."<sup>11</sup> Both on the local and the global scale, the mobility of the exhibition symbolized a united Europe, fusing the great symbolic poles of its Mediterranean and Germanic heritage into something that transcended both, not unlike the folk-image of the American "melting pot" myth.

The circus marquee was the principal space of the exhibition, affording the exhibition designers a modernist free plan with a populist twist. Along the inside diameter of the marquee, a series of triangular aluminum brackets supported aluminum-framed display panels. The cable-stayed king pole was reproduced on the inside as a series of smaller poles, arranged on a free-plan supporting further panels. Together, the uniform outer walls and the free-plan inner walls formed a spatial sequence, combining to tell a didactic story of European integration. Two expandable trucks flanked the Marquee, storing the exhibition panels, but which after unloading provided further exhibition space (Fig. 3).<sup>12</sup>

If the MP left one definable legacy for architecture in Western Europe, then it is prefabrication. Modern architecture's fascination with prefabrication stretches back to the interwar period and beyond, and intensified during WWII. It was therefore no surprise that prefabrication was also supposed to be a contributor to post-war reconstruction.<sup>13</sup> In Marshall Plan Propaganda however, prefabrication in the building industry became a metaphor for frictionless collaboration under American models of scientific management.<sup>14</sup> The pre-engineering of parts by experts reduced the power of labor to rapid assembly of prefabricated elements,

its skills rendered superfluous and easily replaceable. This, in turn, was one of the aims of the MP itself—to combat hostile European labor politics and their communist-infiltrated labor unions with the American vision of growth through productivity.

*Europe Builds* performed this through its own practices: Through its prefabricated, kit of parts approach. An article in the official outlet of OMGUS claims that

*due to the fine co-operation extended by the Bremen Panel for Economic Research to the [...] Exhibit during its stay in Bremen, a dozen German workers had been hired and were on hand to combine their efforts with those of the Caravan technicians. They had laid out the canvas of the big gaily-topped 103-foot diameter tent as well as the parts of its unique light-metal construction, and had unloaded display panels, loudspeakers, floodlights, cinematographs and heavy cable drums.<sup>15</sup>*

The idea of a team of “dead tired French crew members and locally hired German workers” erecting an impressive structure in unison, designed by a multinational group of experts evoked a frictionless modernity that sidestepped old-world labor disputes through a new-found American-guided lightness. “Two dozen men, speaking different languages and belonging to two nations which historians have recorded as ancient enemies, had done the job.”<sup>16</sup> This lightness repeated in the aluminum structural members of the king pole and the king poles in miniature that supported the exhibition inside.

## **Exhibition content and techniques**

Despite the name, the content of *Europe Builds* did not have anything to do with literal *building*. Rather, it was about the building of Europe as a political entity through the two-step process of American Aid and European organization via the OEEC. Graphic illustrations (graphs, maps and photocollages), mounted on steel-framed panels, illustrated the benefits of membership in the OEEC. The most common graphics represented growth of productivity in agriculture and industry with common visualization techniques such as bar graphs and growth curves. Others depicted costs of trade barriers. One image depicted a familiar organicist metaphor of the era, a muscular figure over a black map of Western Europe, with each body part severed from the others by a trade barrier. Yet another theme was the so-called “dollar gap,” addressed by an electronic display claiming

that “since 8 in the morning Europe has used (and here there is a moving digit indicator, indicating the number is going up) dollars more than it has made. The rest is supplied by the Marshall Plan” (Fig. 4).<sup>17</sup>

The VIU juxtaposed these variably novel images with innovative display techniques: large-format photography, modernist graphic design, and gimmicky technological contraptions. It is hard to appreciate now how novel these new exhibition techniques were to bourgeois European tastes at the time.<sup>18</sup> A contemporary news article reviewing this “ingenuity in use of the mobile exhibition” noted that the “exhibition, conceived on a basis of mobility” was “not a new idea” but that the VIU had “shown such technical ingenuity and imagination in display that... they are of interest to all concerned with the technique of conveying ideas through the medium of the eye.” It noted further that the “bold use of contemporary display techniques: enlarged photographs, pictorial statistics, moving models and three-dimensional illustrations of all kinds, specially designed, because of the language problem, to be intelligible without recourse to words.”<sup>19</sup> Beyond these artistic means, contemporary reviewers of the exhibition mention what one reviewer calls the “psychological value of the overnight transformation of a convoy of vehicles into a spectacular exhibition, after the manner of the old-fashioned traveling circus.” This psychological value of the exhibitions dazzled Western Europeans through what could be a positive blitz of psychological warfare, disarming them by surprise and in the process interpellating them with new values.

### Europe Builds and the “Four Mobile Exhibitions”

The VIU expanded blueprint for *Europe Builds*' instrument of capture to a series of exhibitions the *Architectural Review*, in one such remediation, would sensationally refer to as “Four Mobile Exhibitions” (Fig. 5).<sup>20</sup> *Europe Builds* thus became a concept re-deployable in various formats and locations for different subjects, whether on roads, tracks or canals.<sup>21</sup>

First, the VIU expanded the caravan concept into the even more popular *Caravan of Peace*, which traveled as far as Greece and Turkey on behalf of NATO in 1952. Even before it launched the *Caravan of Peace* however, the *Train of Europe* began its tour in Munich in April 1951 and toured Europe until mid-1953. The media covered it even more enthusiastically than *Europe Builds* and more than five million visitors visited. The OEEC also commissioned the *Train*, which built on

similar themes, even if documentation of its exhibition materials is more dispersed. The *Train* consisted of seven cars which originally composed a military hospital train taken over from Germany after the war. The train housed the exhibition in four cars, of which one was a changing exhibit adapted to each country visited. One car served as a cinema showing MP films, one housed generating equipment, and one provided quarters for the French crew.<sup>22</sup> In keeping with the repurposing of the technique of the caravan for the 1952 NATO exhibition, the *Train* was later repurposed for a NATO exhibition.

Another mobile exhibition, *Alle Hens aan Deck* (All Hands on Deck), toured Dutch canals on barges on behalf of the Dutch Productivity Council on a two-barge arrangement, where one of the barges contained a 220-seat cinema below-deck.<sup>23</sup> A last type of mobile exhibition was installed in single expanding trailers and featured various commissioned exhibitions, such as one at the opening of the 1951 Paris motor show, and another on food merchandising for the Productivity and Technical Aid Division of the OSR.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

Regardless of the differences between the exhibitions' content, the "Four Mobile Exhibitions" were variations on the same theme, and they depended on the same aesthetics for their communicative power: Mobility, lightness, and speed. The medium was the message—the fact that the exhibitions performed these aesthetics architecturally coincided happily with the message that the US was trying to send to the Europeans. One should judge the success of the exhibitions on those terms—the fact that as an extended propaganda apparatus, they performed the message they were meant to convey. As continent-wide spanning instruments, operating on a variety of scales, from the individual, to the urban, to the national, to the Pan-European, they formed a capillary form of governance, sponsored and thoroughly controlled by the US, where power was projected within the system, but where there was no clear center.<sup>25</sup> It was the repetition and re-circulation of related images that more than anything else produced something that might be likened to an architecture of the Marshall Plan.

To conclude, allow us to revisit the principal actors of this story, the members of the VIU. One of the striking things about VIU is the paradox of its members' proximity to the echelons of high modernism combined with their willingness to

peddle what everyone knew to be American propaganda. These were avant-garde designers, fluently conversive in the idiom of an internationalized and ideologically softened interwar modernism, as well as by the transatlantic wartime displacement of European intellectuals. They were equally comfortable with the innovative developments in art, architecture, photography, and what Bauer saw as the culmination of all of these, exhibition design, with Max Bill protégé and CIAM “junior member” Bombelli as the prototypical example. They were Europeans!<sup>26</sup> At the same time, they dedicated important periods of their careers to partake in what the senators who reviewed the program a few years later were not afraid to refer to as “psychological warfare.”<sup>27</sup>

The explanation for this somewhere mid-between idealism and opportunism. On the one hand, the members’ participation in the MP information campaign gave them an opportunity to channel their energies into an aesthetic for a new world (or, at least, a new Western Europe). This new world transcended the least interesting facet of the exhibitions: their literal contents, with their banal messages delivered in bar graphs and growth curves. As we have seen, even the accomplished artists of the VIU struggled to make these messages interesting. As a traveling architectural ensemble, however, these techniques and the messages they carried became capable of mobilizing vast territories. They became parts of a whole that transcended the banality of individual messages. This whole was the thrill of Europe coming together through its infrastructure, productivity and commerce, and the exhibitions captured that thrill, not through their individual messages, but through their architectural performance.

On the other, participation in the campaign gave the VIU an opportunity to experiment on a continent-wide scale with a new design language, paid for by American taxpayers and minimal prospects of collateral damage. These were temporary exhibitions. It was not hard to envision a jump from a mobile exhibition, exuding a set of architectural values, into something more permanent, even if this never really materialized as a “Pan-European architecture” proper.

If it is true that the ECA’s VIU was the “architectural arm” of the MP, as I have claimed, then this does not mean that its work had direct implications for the architectural profession. The mobile exhibitions were not meant to teach European architects how to build, just like MP films were not meant to teach European filmmakers how to produce films. Rather, just like the films, the exhibitions and

their architecture were meant to teach the European public *how to live*. The exhibitions' aspirations to comprehensiveness thus point to other ways in which the MP produced Western Europe through the built environment. *Europe Builds*, just like the rest of the corpus produced by the VIU, is the closest we get to a trans-national, Pan-European, MP architecture, and as such, they are forms of trans-national governance through the built environment.

## Endnotes

1. The Marshall Plan literature is vast, but a good introduction are the competing works of Michael Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Alan Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe: 1945-1951* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
2. For a critical introduction to Marshall Planners' thoughts about European economic integration see Milward, *The Reconstruction*, 44-47 and 359.
3. Charles S. Maier, "The Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Economic Policy after World War II," *International Organization* 31, no. 4 (1977): 614-5.
4. On this "fast way to peace," please see the eponymous introduction to Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2005), 7-14.
5. On *Europe Builds*, see "Four Mobile Exhibitions," *Architectural Review* 113, (April 1953): 216-225, Ernst Scheidegger, "Mobile Ausstellungen." *Werk* 40, (April 1953): 109-124, "OEEC Truck Caravan, Information Bulletin (October, 1950): 34. For the secondary literature, see Ascanio Cecco, "Mobilité et reproductibilité technique au service de la propagande. Les expositions mobiles du plan Marshall," *Transbordeur: Photographie histoire société*, no 2 (2018): 102-113. For a wider history of the VIU, see Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan. *Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and their Role in the Cultural Cold War* (Baden: Lars Müller, 2008), 8-35.
6. For a disentanglement of the various information agencies of the US Military and the US State Department after WWII, see Angelique Durand, "American Audiovisual Propaganda in France, 1948-1955," in *France and Its Spaces of War: Experience, Memory, Image*, eds Patricia M. E. Lorcin and Daniel Brewer (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 263-276. An all-encompassing scholarly treatment of the Marshall Plan information campaign does not yet exist. For an in-house overview, see *Overseas Information Program*. For a brilliant work on the film campaign that also details the underpinnings of the later years of the information campaign, see Maria Fritsche, *The American Marshall Plan Film Campaign and the Europeans: A Captivated Audience?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).
7. For Harnden's career and the exhibitions' place within it, see Julio Garnica, "Between the Cold War and the Mediterranean tradition." *FAMagazine. Ricerche e progetti sull'architettura e la città*, no. 47 (April 1, 2019): 12-30 and Antonio Pizza, "Two Foreigners in the Spain of the Sixties: The Journey of Harnden and Bombelli from Paris to Cadaqués," in *El Cadaqués de Peter Harnden y Lanfranco Bombelli*, ed. Manuel Martín and Anna Noguera, trans. Carlos Bermúdez, et. al, (Girona: Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya, Demarcació de Girona, 2002), 141-7. For his role bridging architecture and the US information apparatus, see Masey, "Cold War Confrontations" and Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, esp. chapter 1, "Household



Affluence and Its Discontents” (1-30) and chapter 3, “Better Living Through Modernism,” (59-86).

8. Beyond the design team members credited for Europe Builds, participants in other exhibitions included British Abraham Beer, who would go on to become a specialist in truck mounted exhibitions for UNESCO, British architects Robert Browning and Peter Yates and Greek architect Athanase Hadjopoulos. The VIU also had a team of designers and illustrators lead by American artist Bernard Priem, including French Robert Pontabry, Swiss Rolf Strub and British Walter Goetz. Scheidegger, “Mobile Ausstellungen.”

9. The “Heart of the City” was the title of the 8th CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne), held in 1951. Sigfried Giedion, “CIAM 8: The Heart of the City: A Summing Up.” *Ekistics* 52, no. 314/315 (1985): 475–77.

10. Jack Masey, *Cold War Confrontations*, 32.

11. “OEEC Truck Caravan, Information Bulletin (October 1950): 34.

12. The best description of the exhibition is in Scheidegger, “Mobile Ausstellungen.” I derive my descriptions from this article, combined with observations of archival photographs in the Harnden and Bombelli archive at the Arxiu Històric del Col·legi d’Arquitectes de Catalunya in Barcelona, assisted by the abovementioned secondary sources.

13. This history is too extensive for the purposes of this paper.

14. Greg Castillo *Cold War on the Home Front* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP), 2009, 26.

15. “OEEC Truck Caravan, Information Bulletin (October 1950), 34.

16. *Ibid.*

17. A year after Europe Builds closed, the caravan concept was repurposed for an enlarged exhibition designed for NATO entitled *Caravan for Peace*, which opened in Naples in February 1952.

18. For the “conflicts between the United States and Europe turned around contrasting lifestyles, material interests, and political ambitions,” see De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, especially her fourth feature of the Market Empire’s rule, the power derived from the democracy of consumption, 14 and 8, respectively.

19. “Publicity for Western Europe: Ingenuity in Use of the Mobile Exhibition,” *The Times*, December 30, 1952.

20. At least five contemporaneous publications cover the “Four Mobile Exhibitions” as a discrete ensemble. The earliest coverage is “Publicity for Western Europe,” followed by the abovementioned eponymous article in the *Architectural Review* and in Scheidegger, “Mobile Ausstellungen.” A pamphlet published by the OSR Information Division provides an “insider’s view,” *Overseas Information Program: Economic Cooperation Administration 2nd Year*, Paris: Economic Cooperation Administration), 16-9. For a comprehensive review of the Mutual Security Agency (MSA) Information Service (which succeeded the ECA Information Service and took over its staff and activities) and which includes discussion of the mobile exhibitions, see Leo C. Nulty, “Exhibit L: MSA Information Service,” in *Foreign-Aid Program in Europe: Report of the Investigations Division of the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, Relative to Activities of the Foreign-Aid Program in France and in the Regional Offices of the MSA in Paris*, United States Congress Senate Committee on Appropriations, comp., (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953.), 69-72.

21. The content of each exhibition warrants an independent study. One such study already exists in Jorrit van den Berk, “The Intermediary Is the Message: US Public Diplomacy and the Marshall Plan Productivity Drive in the Netherlands, 1948–52.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 56, no. 2 (April 2021): 411–33.

22. “1,442,647 See Europa-Zug in Munich on Eve of Tour,” Information Bulletin, May 1951, “Train of Europe,” Information Bulletin, September 1951, 23-7, “In and Around Germany: Train of Europe in Italy,” Information Bulletin, July 1952, 23.
23. Jorrit van den Berk, “The Intermediary Is the Message.”
24. “Four Mobile Exhibitions,” 225.
25. Capillary is a word Michel Foucault uses throughout his corpus to describe power that works throughout the social body, contributing to the local formations of subjectivities, see for example Michel Foucault, “Prison Talk” interview by J. J. Brochier, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Edited by Colin Gordon, Translated By Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall John Mepham and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 39.
26. Save for Harnden and Bernard Pfriem.
27. *Overseas Information Programs of the United States: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Eighty-Second Congress, second Session, [-Eighty-third Congress, First Session]: On Overseas Information Programs of the United States.* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office: 1953). Throughout the report, which discusses the Barges, among other things, uses “propaganda” and “psychological warfare” interchangeably.

## Figures



Fig. 1: Europe Builds at the Piazza del Plebiscito, Naples in 1950. L'Arxiu Històric del Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya.



Fig. 2. “Visual Information Unit Head, Peter Harnden (right) discussing mobile caravan exhibition with architectural designer Franco [sic.] Bombelli” PAR 1593; Paris Picture File, Photographs of Marshall Plan Programs, Exhibits, and Personnel; Department of State. Agency for International Development. Record Group 286; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

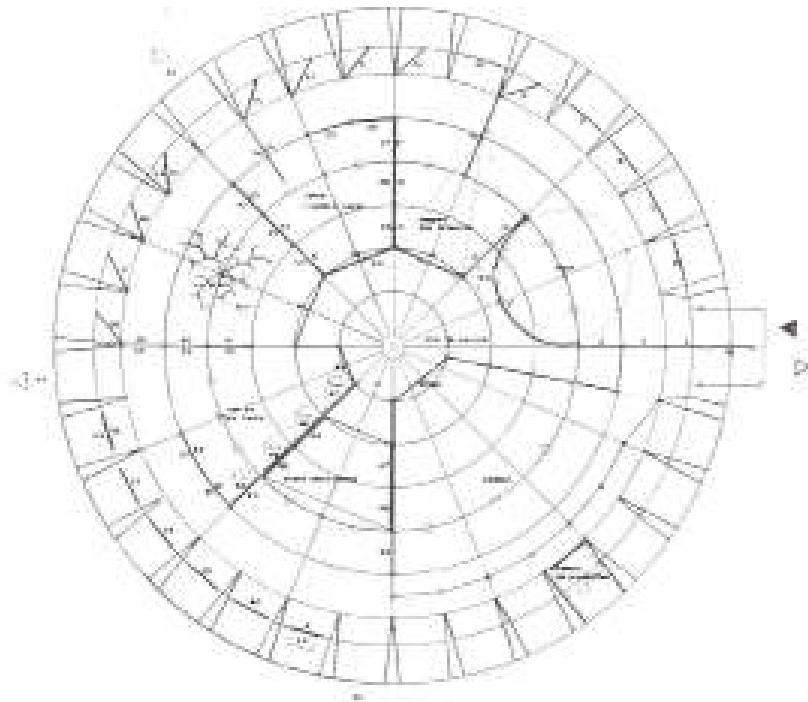


Fig. 3. Plan of Europe Builds Marquee. *Das Werk*, Volume 40, 1953.



Fig. 4. Europe Builds display panel, L'Arxiu Històric del Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya.

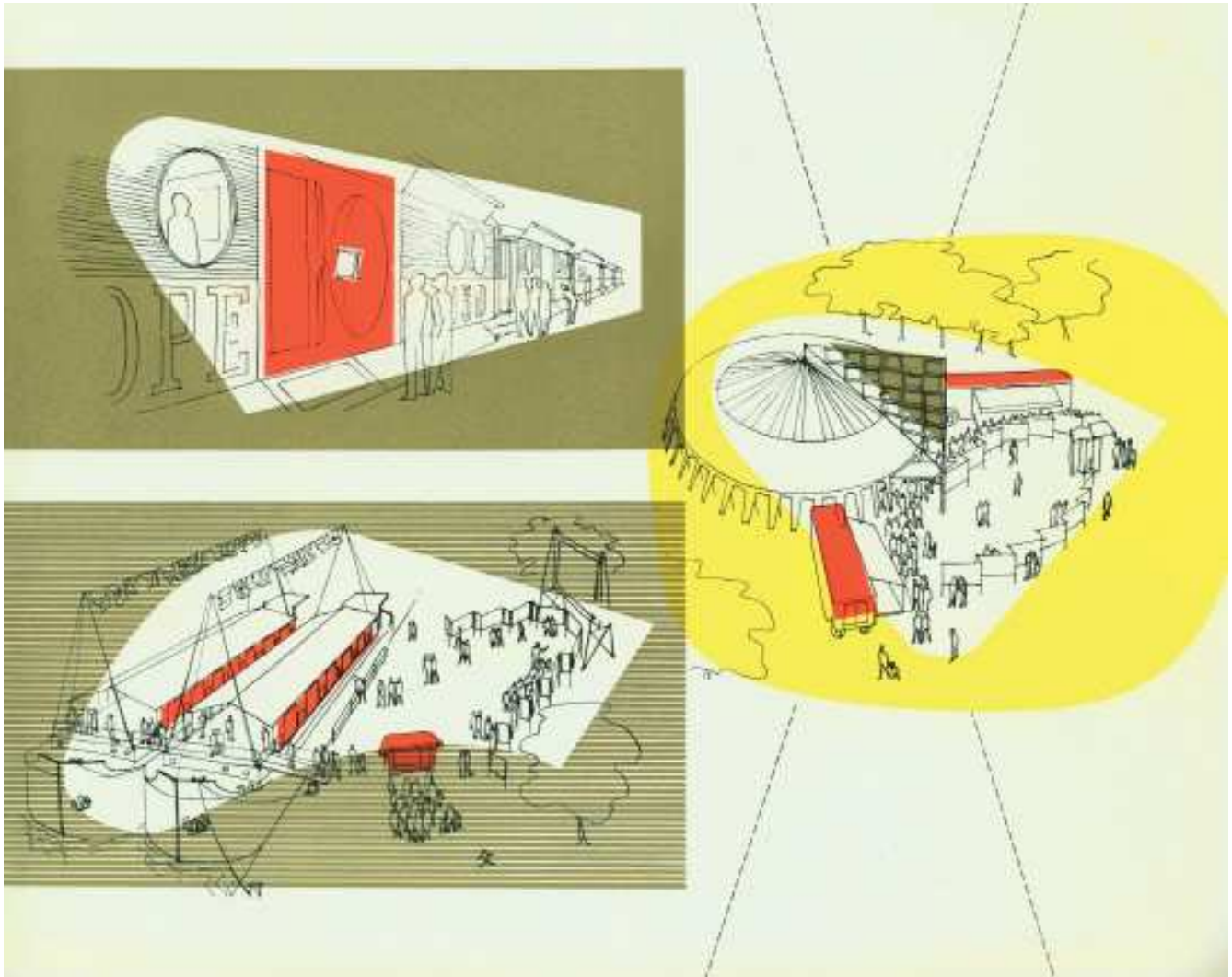


Fig. 5. Mobile Exhibitions, from Overseas Information Program: Economic Cooperation Administration 2nd Year, Paris: Economic Cooperation Administration), 17.

# REDISCOVERING BARCELONA'S "COREAS" THROUGH LATIN AMERICAN EXPERIENCES: MARGINAL URBANIZATION STUDIES AT LUB/UPC

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## Abstract

This paper focus on the development of marginal urbanization studies Urbanism Laboratory of Catalunya Polytechnic University (LUB/UPC) led by Manuel de Solà-Morales and Joan Busquets. It aims to demonstrate that the borrowing from Latin American slum and squatters settlements managing and planning experiences not only supported LUB in its discovery of marginal urbanizations in Barcelona and Mediterranean Europe but also has helped this research group to build a pioneer Ibero-American approach and construct its distinctive contribution to typomorphology studies: the greater emphasis on urban form as a process and on the role played by urban infrastructure networks in it. In order to do that we analyze the ensemble LUB researchers' publications on this subject between 1971 and 1976 through this double key: the quest for proximity to the Latin American context and innovations in typomorphology studies.

## Keywords

Marginal Urbanization, Barcelona's Neighborhood of Corea, Typomorphology Studies, Latin American Cities

## Introduction

At the turn of the 1970s, three experts of the Center for Studies and Promotion of Development of Peru – DESCO – stated that Lima’s *Barriadas* were being invaded by “a multitude of private institutions (national, foreign, international)”<sup>1</sup> whose goals supposedly were to perform actions of social welfare, awareness and others. In their own words, “the squatters were being squatted” by crowds of volunteers, missionaries, agents, scientists, and social assistants. Corroborating with this statement, Licia Valladares recovers the data of Peace Corps Volunteers between the 1960s and 1970s: at last, 31,186 were sent to Latin America and Caribe to help urban and rural needy populations<sup>2</sup>.

A decade after the publication of the first scientific report about of Favelas of Rio de Janeiro led by the French priest Lebret<sup>3</sup>, not only social studies about slums and squatters’ settlements were now consolidated and been conducted in postgraduate studies<sup>4</sup>; but urban planning and architecture culture seemed to have discovered them. John Turner’s experiences at Lima’s *Barriadas* (between 1958 and 1964) were broadly published and known; Chile’s *Callampas* and *Campamientos* were object of interest of the urban sociologist Manuel Castells<sup>5</sup> as well as the architectural publisher Monica Piegion<sup>6</sup> and, mediated by the British architect, the Bras do Pina Slum Urbanization – Brazilian pioneer experiment lead by Carlos Nelson Ferreira dos Santos between 1964 and 1971 – was also internationally known<sup>7</sup>. Slums and squatters’ settlements were often described as to be typically from underdeveloped countries:

*In Latin America, the prevailing situation in the generation of an urban habitat is marked by the quantitative question. [...] The massive presence of a popular ‘building typology’ includes not only the cordoned-off, self-built, and decidedly marginal habitat in the socio-productive aspect – villas de miséria, poblaciones, callampas, favelas, or cantegriles – but also the extensive suburban fabric of the broad layer of middle sectors [...]. All these questions give rise to a kind of relationship between Architecture (as a disciplinary activity) and City in Latin America that is decidedly different from a certain contemporary concern in Europe and the USA.*<sup>8</sup>

In this context where Latin American squatters’ settlements were the focus of European and North American experts’ studies, research about marginal urban spaces in a European country would sound at least unexpected. But not only it

was the case of one of the first researches of the *Laboratorio de Urbanismo* (LUB) at Catalunya Polytechnic University (UPC); it was also awarded a grant from the *Colegio de Arquitectos de Cataluña* in 1968<sup>9</sup>.

This paper aims to demonstrate that the borrowing from Latin American slum and squatters settlements managing and planning experiences not only supported LUB in its discovery of marginal urbanizations in Barcelona and Mediterranean Europe but also has helped this research group to build a pioneer Ibero-American approach to construct its distinctive contribution to typomorphology studies: the greater emphasis on urban form as a process and on the role played by urban infrastructure networks in it. In order to do that we analyze LUB researchers' publications on this subject between 1971 and 1976 – from the English publication of the text *Teoría y experiencia de la urbanización marginal* [Theory and experience of marginal urbanization] (1971) to the three numbers of *Monografies ETSAB* dedicated to this subject in 1976 – entitled *Urbanización Marginal* [Marginal Urbanization] I, II and III, where Joan Busquets' thesis was first published – through this double key: the quest of proximity to the Latin American context and innovations in typomorphology studies.

### **As well as in Latin American Cities**

Only five years after Turner's first article about Peruvian Barriadas in *Architectural Design* magazine<sup>10</sup>, Joan Busquets, then a 22-year-old architect, applied for a grant to support his Doctoral Studies about Coreas of Barcelona – as were called poor-quality housing – having Manuel de Sola-Morales as his advisor. Solà-Morales himself still was a junior researcher, seven years older than his student, who had just become the head of the Urbanism Laboratory (LUB) and Urbanism professor at Catalunya Polytechnic University.

One of the first LUB's publications about the results of this research appeared three years later, in a book organized in 1971 by David Neville Lewis, "The Growth of Cities" – where John Turner was among of the other 24 book chapters' authors<sup>11</sup>. This was a first attempt to describe Barcelona's Corea Neighborhood and its urban evolution. The development of de marginal urbanization, its densification, and the joint management for the incorporation of urban services and infrastructure were then for the first time understood as a way of urban growth.



The statement that European semi-developed countries' cases were not so far from Latin American ones was then commonplace in most of LUB's publications about marginal urbanization (Fig 1). Examples not only in Spain but also in Greece and Portugal were called in order to demonstrate it. Being still under Franco's dictatorial regime, Spain's entrance into European Union was not under discussion, and nor was the Fifth Centenary Celebrations of Colombo Arrival in America, which would allow a series of Ibero-American events and interchanges<sup>12</sup>, but advancing in a movement that would take place in 20 years, the LUB architects had already chosen this second direction:

*The works on Marginal Urbanization in cities of underdeveloped countries, in Africa and in Latin America are well known in the sociological and geographical literature. The 'gourbis' of Tunisia, or the 'favelas' of Rio, the 'barriadas' of Lima or the 'ranchos' of Caracas, have already been the object of numerous studies with a more or less descriptive approach or with economic-social macro-interpretations, consider the phenomenon of occupation of large areas of peripheral land by popular settlements of precarious residence.*

*But such a phenomenon is not exclusive to those countries. In smaller proportions without a doubt, but with similar characteristics, it also appears in cities of semi-developed countries, especially in the European Mediterranean. The 'clandestine' of Brandoa, Caparica, Amadora, etc. occupy in Lisbon an extension equivalent to the rest of the normal growth.<sup>13</sup>*

By marginal urbanization, LUB's researchers used to "refer to those forms of urban growth that, precarious and unrecognized in their origin, tend to consolidate as definitive and to integrate into the conventional city"<sup>14</sup>. In this sense, they took the side of scholars that – like John Turner, Mangin and Leeds – would defend the slum as a solution to public housing policies, and not anymore, an urban and social problem that should be removed<sup>15</sup>. As Manuel de Solà-Morales wrote in 1974:

*Analyzes in Santiago, Bogotá, and other cities Latin Americans show the complexity of the demographic characteristics and social aspects of the peripheral inhabitants, irreducible to a common denominator of marginality. Much closer, studies on Lisbon and on Barcelona further confirm the independence between a process of growth, ecologically or urbanistically marginal (because of its location, its constitution, and its linkages), and a population content with levels of integration into the economic and social system that is sometimes very high.<sup>16</sup>*

Not the intrinsic characteristics of this phenomenon, nor its urban dimension relevance in Barcelona's urban space would allow neglecting and underestimating Corea's neighborhoods, as advocated Solà-Morales and Busquets. Through the analyses and classification of three periods of marginal urban growth, LUB' researchers indicated that "up to a total of thirty-two neighborhoods have been counted, affecting a land surface of more than 800 hectares, whose proportional part in the period 60-70 accounted for a quarter of the newly urbanized land in this area"<sup>17</sup>. The importance of the increase of these illegal urban spaces in a moment of a deep urban control and diffusion of urban planning practice put in evidence a gap between the formal and the informal city:

*In other words, it can be verified that while one part of the city – the central part – grows and remodels itself with its own (recognized) mechanisms, another grows and develops illegally and without following the established rules.<sup>18</sup>*

And, just as it was frequently characterized in Latin-American cities, it had played a role in the urban extension and the constitution of surplus-value in urban land prices:

*Thus, with periods of low capital investment and urban development (as in the times indicated), where there is no extension of external infrastructures that value the external crowns nor is their operations of internal restructuring that cause new differential rents, the peripheral pressure of the Marginal Urbanizations can be decisive in maintaining the expansion of the system of capitalist formation and exploitation of surplus-value.<sup>19</sup>*

In this sense, three Latin-American approaches to marginal urbanization were analyzed and compared as possibilities of alternative housing policy in Barcelona's context and other semi-developed European countries: (1th) welfare policies (as the actions of Peace Corps); (2nd) self-construction policies, been subdivided as proposals of regulation of the land domain (like Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela<sup>20</sup>), plotting land with elemental structure of services (as Bras do Pina, Brazil<sup>21</sup>), provision of an initial service module (like Valdivieso, Peru<sup>22</sup>) and evolutionary housing (like projects presented to PREVI, Peru<sup>23</sup>, Frei's *Operación Sitio* [Site Operation] and *Operación Techo* [Ceiling Operation], Chile<sup>24</sup>); (3rd) policies of transformation (as *Unidad Popular* policies, Chile). And after examining the positives and negatives aspects of each of these cases, they advocated for:

*a public assistance action that does not be the reflection of speculative traders and that facilitates the legalization, the provision of equipment and the urbanization of the neighborhood. Politics of assistance whose process and nature of inversions must conform to the conditions of development in which the neighborhood is located (processes or family of residents, management capacity, etc.) and the characteristics of the neighborhood.*<sup>25</sup>

## **Contributions from the Marginal Urbanization Studies to Typomorphology**

As soon as Solà-Morales became chair of urbanism at the School of Architecture of Catalunya Polytechnic University, in 1968, he undertook the project of defining and teaching “urbanism of architects”<sup>26</sup>. This expression has had later great fortune in Spain and has characterized the interest in typomorphology studies<sup>27</sup>.

Associated with the developments of Italian research from the works of Save-rio Muratori in Venice, in the mid-1950s, the typomorphology studies had soon found in Barcelona a fertile soil to blossom. Actually, it was not an isolated episode, between Spain and post-war Italy – and, more specifically, between Milan and the Catalonian region – an assiduous dialogue was established. In this context, one can understand that the first translation of the book “The Architecture of the City” by Rossi, for example, was for the Spanish language, published by Gustavo Gili, in 1971, and prepared by Salvador Tarragó – who, as editor of the *2c* magazine, organized three monographic issues on the Italian architect between 1975 and 1979. Moreover, in the quest for the specificity of the urbanism of architects, LUB itself was responsible, between 1968 and 1970, for the first translations into Spanish of texts by Gregotti, Rossi, Aymonino, among other architects of *Tendenza* that otherwise would be inaccessible<sup>28</sup>. However, unlike the Italian references, the work developed with the LUB soon has placed greater emphasis on urban growth as a relationship between morphology and social forces and on the role played by urban infrastructure networks and services.

One of LUB’s the first attempts to adapt typomorphology apports to contexts different from traditional European urban fabric was held in the marginal urbanization research. Busquets engaged himself in the challenge of characterizing the ‘coreas’ – as were called the original edifications of marginal urbanizations in Barcelona – as a type (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3), in other words, “organizational-structuring elements, obtained as a common analogy through the process of identifying

a series of works that reflect a complex of rational, managerial and cultural factors”<sup>29</sup> aroused in certain historical and social conditions.

From the detection of analogies or common invariants detected through the process of identifying a sequence of works produced in the neighborhoods of ‘coreas’ (the result of marginal urbanization processes), Busquets has proposed three defining elements of the typological process of the neighborhoods of marginal urbanization, one at the management level, other in the technical level, and last but not least the cultural level:

*1- At the management level, the individual nature will be significant both in the occupation of the plot and in the construction of the house (‘coreas’) as well as the conditions of illegality that frame any action of the user of the ‘coreas’ neighborhoods. These conditions in management preside over the formation and growth of the neighborhood until in future times the possible constitution of a neighborhood association changes the form of management in order to claim or process the legalization of the neighborhood or the construction of urban services.*

*2 - In the technical order, the most significant invariant is the simplicity and rational logic in each phase of the construction process, which are expressed by the maximum suitability of the land, the use of low-cost and easy-to-handle traditional materials, as well as in the system of deferred realization and in the forecast of possible annexations.*

*3 - At a cultural level, it should be noted that the typological process in the neighborhoods of ‘coreas’ represents the evolution from very primary habitat solutions where the fundamental thing is a built surface as minimum shelter, to other more urban solutions obtained through gradual construction of other annexes and the subsequent incorporation of the basic minimum services. Such evolution occurs as an adaptation to basic needs according to the resource capacity of the user family at any given time.<sup>30</sup>*

Indeed, in characterizing the neighborhood of coreas and its urban expansion periods LUB introduced the urban infrastructure network construction as a moment in urban growth. One cannot avoid perceiving similarities to Latin American cases reported:

*[Corea’s Neighborhoods] are formed by subdivisions of rustic land, almost always built by self-construction by the residents themselves, and all without legal authorization. The subdivision and construction of the land lack any urbanization work (infrastructure or services), especially in the early stages.’<sup>31</sup>*

The role revealed by urban infrastructure and service in marginal urbanization allowed LUB to understand urban growth as a process of interaction between urban plot, infrastructure, and building, elements which would later be identified as the distinctive apportion of this group<sup>32</sup>. In fact, this contribution changes the intimate relationship between urban form and building type proposed by original Italian studies and integrates the management process in the comprehension of urban growth.

### **Back to Latin America**

In fact, if one can easily recognize that LUB's marginal urbanization studies were not the first ones to describe this phenomenon from the evolution of its physical and structural aspects and from the architectonic perspective – we can point to the precedent of the Brazilian architect Helio Modesto in the characterization of Favelas of Rio de Janeiro in 1958, for example,<sup>33</sup> – it has achieved, after extensive research based on typomorphology analysis, to identifying aspects that could help in its comprehension and in the definition of urban integration policies.

If, on one hand, the study of Latin American cases created the possibility for LUB to conceive its own way of describing urban growth, on the other hand, these studies were not as known in Latin American countries. Until the 1990s, it was common to affirm that there was not, within the European debate, a single theoretical contribution relevant to the Latin American periphery<sup>34</sup>.

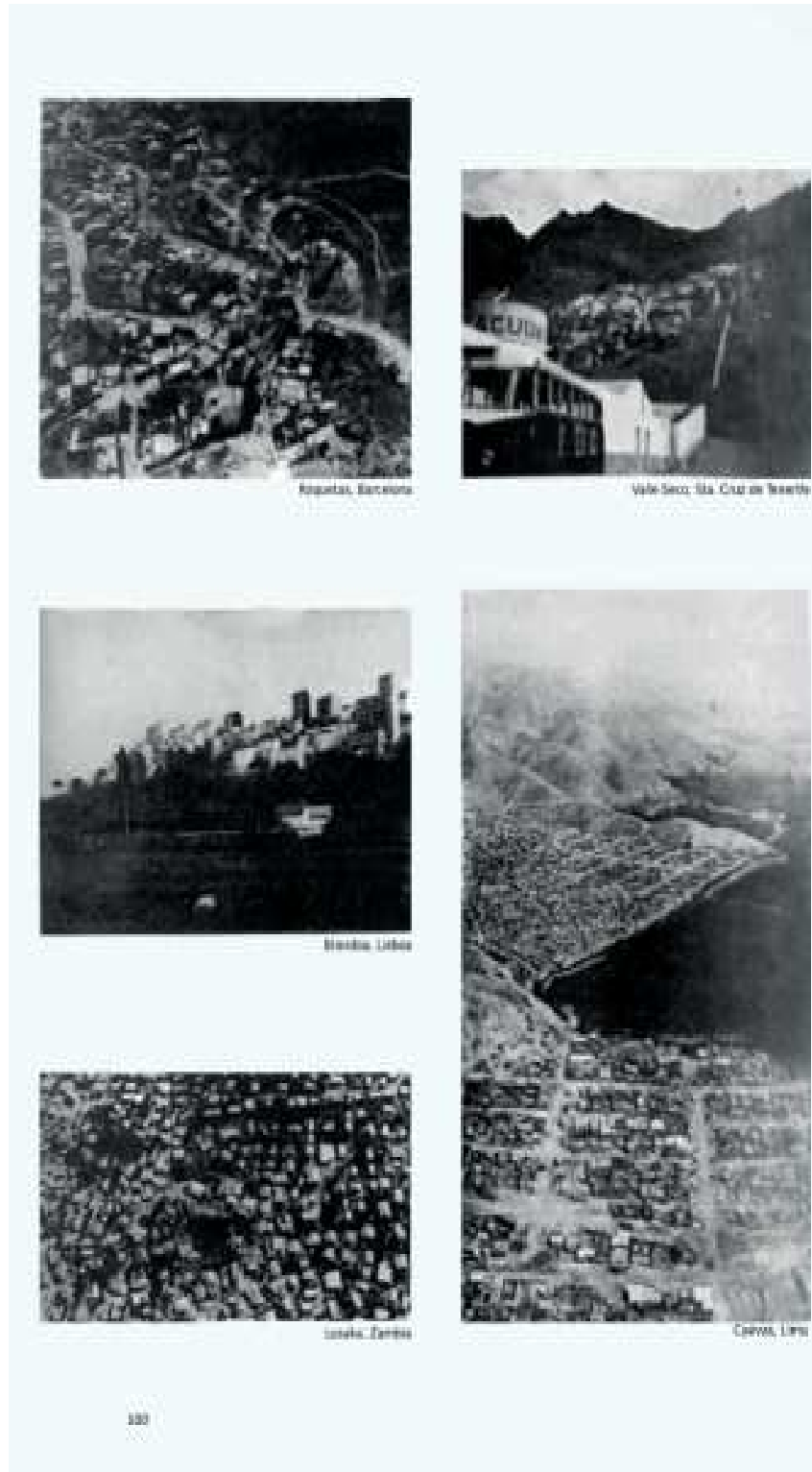
The contribution of typomorphology studies were frequently associated with interventions in historic centers. The only texts about urban periphery that were profoundly diffused in South America were those texts of Aldo Rossi reunited in the book *Para una architettura de tendencia* [For a trendy architecture] (1977), and originally published at *Casabella Continuità* in the 1960s: *Il problema della periferia nella città moderna* [The problem of the urban periphery in the modern city] (1960); *La città e la periferia* [The City and the periphery] (1961); e *Nuovi problemi* [New problems] (1963)<sup>35</sup>. Even though the doctoral thesis of Joan Busquets was re-published in 1999, in a moment in which several Latin American architects were pursuing master and doctoral studies at Barcelona, it still remains unknown.

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## Figures

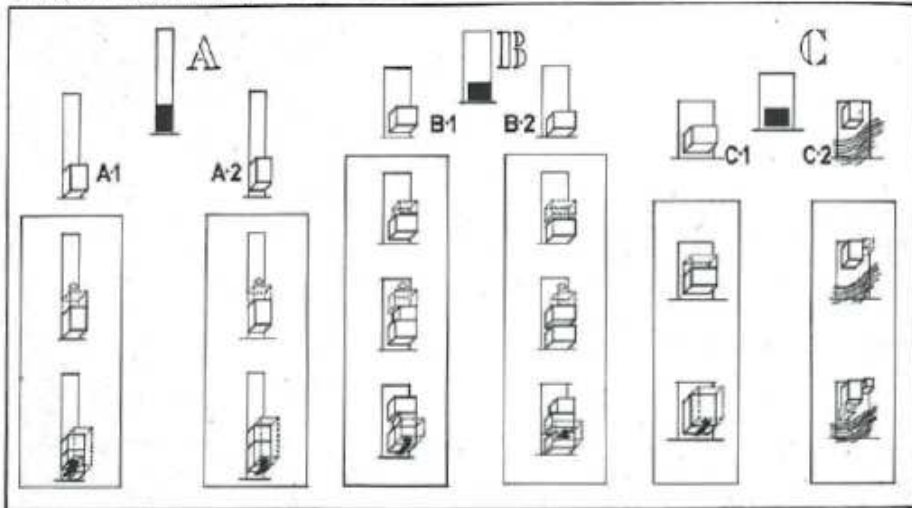


**Figure 1.** Photo of the page 100 of *La urbanización marginal en Barcelona II* (1976) of Joan Busquet where marginal urbanization from Barcelona, Sta. Cruz de Tenerife, Lisbon, Zambia, and Lima are compared. Source: photo of the author.





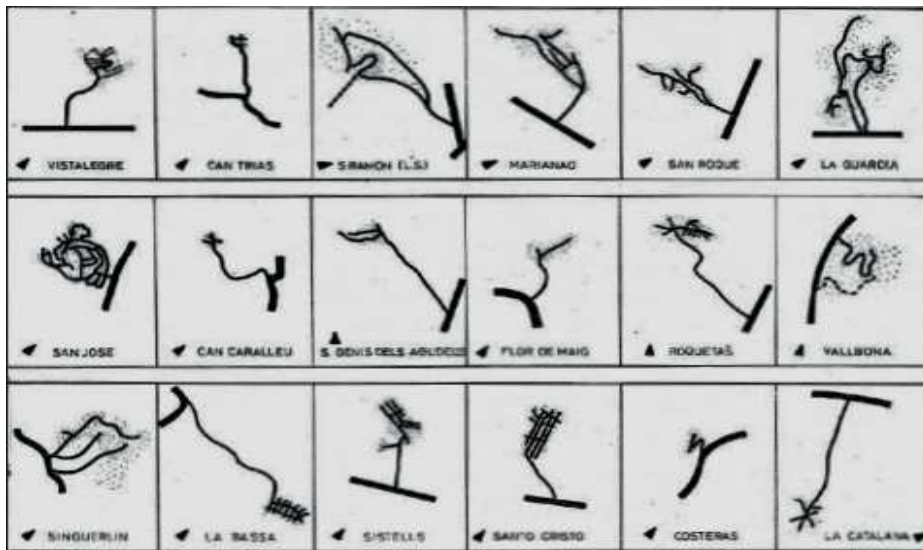
El proceso de ocupación y construcción del barrio de Vistalegre en Barcelona.



Variantes de evolución tipológica del proceso de Urbanización Marginal. Barcelona.



El barrio de U. M. (en el fondo de la imagen) como avanzada de la urbanización. Barcelona.



Esquema y estructura interna de los barrios.

# ARCHITECTURAL GUIDES IN A HYPERCONNECTED WORLD: PROPER DISSEMINATION TOOLS?

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## Abstract

In a few years, social networks have led to the paradigm shift that had been announced since the generalization of the Internet. Architectural guides -a very specific type of publication, halfway between architectural criticism and the pure compilation of data and practical information- have been, after decades of comfortable continuity, headed towards a double change: one, necessary, of format; another, more debatable, of content. New technologies have quickly rendered obsolete an editorial format tremendously conditioned by its practicality and ease of use.

However, the most delicate change they face affects their content. Architectural guides have traditionally been publications aimed at a very specific market niche. The leap to a digital and hyperconnected environment and the generalization of its use also propitiate different criteria for generating content: prioritizing the pure novelty or passing trends can multiply downloads or positive reviews, while direct contributions from users, in the same way of social networks, allow exponential growth with minimal economic cost. In both cases, offering a selection of architecture works far from academic consensus.

Do digital architectural guides take advantage of their new potential without losing sight of rigor and quality? Do they act as proper tools for the dissemination of architectural culture? Collecting popular trends is necessary, but they should be channeled through a critical and analytic approach that fosters well-founded criteria and opinions in the user.

## Keywords

Architectural Guides, Mobile Applications, Apps, Architourism, Architectural Tourism.

## **Introduction. What is (what *was*) an Architectural Guide?**

In this communication we analyze the new generation of architectural guides that, since the beginning of the last decade, began to be available in mobile application format, with the aim of clarifying whether this transition is affecting their character as reference publications in the field of architectural dissemination.

We will delimit our concept of architectural guide as follows: a portable element that shows a more or less extensive catalog of architectural works; offers certain information about each of them; and locates them on a map. We will start from this definition of minimum, to consider that a given product is an architectural guide. Other characteristics can be added to these, but the ones mentioned above must always be present.

Until a few years ago we would have been talking about a printed publication in the traditional sense of the term: that is, a book, or even simply a map with some additional information. But since approximately 2010,<sup>1</sup> the development of the smartphone has made it the perfect medium for architectural guides, with a series of obvious advantages in a device that, moreover, anyone carries with him today: a potentially infinite map, always updated and with geolocation of the user; a catalog of works with no limit of extension and which can be ordered, filtered, or searched at will; a virtually unlimited space for information on each work; and instantaneous content updates. Faced with these possibilities, the limitations of the printed format seem directly unaffordable. But are mobile applications the future of architectural guides? Has the move to the digital world meant a decline in the quality of these publications?

## **Objectives and Methodology**

The study is structured in two parts. We will start with a broad approach aimed at analyzing the general panorama of existing digital architectural guides. Then, based on the data obtained in the first part, we will focus on a few selected ones, with an in-depth analysis that will allow us to draw additional conclusions regarding format and content.

Our object of study will be those guides that have their own mobile application (hereinafter app) for smartphone, leaving out other formats such as web pages, although these could be consulted and viewed correctly from a mobile device. The

apps must be available for download in at least one of the two main application stores: Apple's App Store and Google Play.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this limitation is to include in the study only those digital guides that constitute a solid project -with the capacity to have a certain impact- and are accessible to the general public. The apps analyzed must meet the conditions set out in the second paragraph of this text in order to be selected for the study.

Then, a new screening is carried out based on content, leaving out of the research those apps that we could place on the margins of what constitutes an architectural guide: those with a catalog of works according to excessively alternative or marginal criteria; those that cover only an architectural festival or other temporary events; those that constitute a guide to a single building; and those that, while sometimes showing only works of architecture, are based on an approach more related to art in general or directly to tourism, including monuments and buildings of historical relevance but no architectural significance.

It should be noted that, although it is not usual -and even less so in apps conceived as travel tools-, there may be those whose access is restricted to local markets, so they could not be located from a search performed from Spain, as has been done for this study.

Finally, it is necessary to take into account an important difficulty that does not occur with paper publications: mobile applications are an extremely volatile format in which, when a product is no longer published, it is also no longer available for download and becomes impossible to consult. Therefore, it has not been possible to include some discontinued apps in the present study, despite their relevance to the research. This, added to the rapid evolution of technologies, makes the very scarce existing literature on the subject easily obsolete: pioneering texts on the matter are Koutamanis (2007),<sup>3</sup> Lewi and Smith (2011),<sup>4</sup> and Grevtsova (2013).<sup>5</sup>

The sampling used in this study was carried out between December 21, 2021, and February 11, 2022, with the availability of all the apps included still being confirmed at the latter date. Apps were explored and browsed from an iPhone X with iOS 15.3.1.

## **Part I: A Complete Panorama of Digital Architectural Guides**

Following the criteria set out above, we obtain a list of the 47 mobile applications that will be the subject of this study (Table 1, Fig. 1). Our first approach is to classify them according to different aspects, in order to obtain an accurate x-ray of the whole.

First thing we need to know in a guide is its geographical frame. More than half of the apps analyzed (25) are based on a local approach, focused on a specific city or town. Others, more ambitious, are regional (three), national (six) or even supranational (two), covering several countries. But the most interesting are those with a worldwide purpose: six apps have no geographical limits when it comes to incorporating content. The quantitative leap in terms of the information that can be included in a digital guide makes it possible to have these ‘total guides’, which would be unfeasible as a paper publication. Geographical coverage does not differ excessively from what we are used to while surveying paper guides: the majority of apps is strongly focused on Europe and the United States. Only a few guides cover architecture in Asia or South America.

Regarding the time span covered, about half of them (19) include architecture from all periods. The next largest group limits its content to contemporary architecture, generally covering 21st century and part of the 20th century (eight). From here, there is great variety: strictly 20th century; whole 20th and 21st centuries; or from the mid-18th or 19th century to the present. Six apps focus on narrower time arcs, mainly centered on the first and/or second modernity. Finally, there would be those guides dedicated exclusively to the work of one architect: only Frank Lloyd Wright (three) and Antoni Gaudí (one) have their own digital guides.

### **Who is behind?**

When assessing the soundness and accuracy of digital guides, a crucial factor should be who is in charge of their edition. 18 of them arise from the initiative of an architecture-related association: mainly professional guilds or local heritage foundations. The next largest group are the 12 applications that come from an individual entrepreneur, almost always professionally or academically related to architecture. Only six apps are promoted by universities, usually as collaborative projects. Other six guides come from private companies, some of them app de-

velopers, others linked to the architectural publishing world. Another agent would be public administrations, with apps aimed at boosting cultural tourism.

Guides coming from architectural foundations are expected to be serious and accurate products. But it is striking how many of the apps (25%) are the initiative of a single person. Given that the publication of a mobile application requires much more modest means than those needed for a printed one with a similar scope and distribution, it is difficult to foresee the rigor and quality of these guides. On the other hand, since these are not very commercial apps, it is to be expected that those who embark on an initiative of this type have some academic training and do so for reasons other than economic ones.

### **Basic structure: defining a type**

The length of this paper does not allow us to discuss those few applications that show a unique approach; we will focus on the main trend. It is possible to speak of a basic structure that can be found in the vast majority of the examples, and that includes three main screens: map, list, and building facts.

The map, except for the graphic aspect, does not admit many variations; technically, it is an external element, a third-party application embedded in the app and showing the geographic location of the works, as well as -in most cases- the user's position. The list of works allows us an alternative way of browsing through the contents of the guide, without relating the works to their geographical location; usually it is possible to filter and sort the results according to different criteria. This screen can show very different configurations depending on the app we are consulting. In a few apps, this list does not even exist, and accessing the building information is only possible through the map. Finally, the facts screen is dedicated exclusively to the building we have selected, where we are shown all the information about it.

These three elements would constitute the most immediate transposition of the canonical paper architectural guide to a digital format. To them, often other functionalities or utilities derived from the possibilities of the digital support are added, such as the selection of favorites, or the possibility of contributing or suggesting content. But we could say that this basic configuration constitutes the 'type' of the digital architectural guide.

## Part II: Four Case Studies

After the initial overview, we selected four apps for an in-depth analysis (Table 2). In order to make the comparison more equitable, we took advantage of the variety offered by the group of architectural guides with a global vocation: after excluding two of them because of their unusual approach, we have four apps that allow us to compare numerous factors: ArchiMaps,<sup>6</sup> Architracker,<sup>7</sup> C.Guide,<sup>8</sup> and Nómada.<sup>9</sup>

The most significant thing about our choice is that, while the four share a similar scope, they all have promoters of a diverse nature: ArchiMaps has been developed by a Spanish architect, Ángel Camacho Pina, who is also the author of this text;<sup>10</sup> Architracker is the product of a private London-based company, ARCHITRACKER Limited;<sup>11</sup> behind C.Guide is the Fundación Arquitectura Contemporánea, a private entity from Córdoba, Spain, which aims to promote contemporary architecture;<sup>12</sup> finally, Nómada is a project of the Instituto de Historia de la Arquitectura (IHA) and the Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo (FADU) of the Universidad de la República, Montevideo, Uruguay.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, we have an individual entrepreneurship, a private commercial initiative, an architecture-related foundation, and a university project.

Regarding the content, the time frame covered is also varied: ArchiMaps and Nómada include architecture from all periods; Architracker, 20th and 21st centuries; and C.Guide is the most restrictive, limiting itself to contemporary architecture since 1979.

### Content management

We start analyzing how these apps offer the user such a complex and extensive content, conceptually and quantitatively speaking (Fig. 2). Two of them, ArchiMaps and Nómada, package it, that is: despite their global approach, internally they are organized into a kind of individual guides, focused on specific cities or towns in the case of Nómada, and both on cities and architects in the case of ArchiMaps. Therefore, in these apps there is no relatively homogeneous geographical distribution of works of architecture, but rather they are presented in complete ensembles, quite concentrated on the map, and it is necessary to previously access one of them to start browsing the content. ArchiMaps also presents ano-

ther level of packaging within each guide: *ArchiRoutes* are themed selections of content that help structure the vast catalog of works within the same city. 112 *ArchiRoutes* can be found through the app.

Architracker has a simpler structure, initially locating the user on a global map from which he can access all the works of architecture included in it. These are scattered throughout the world, with the expected concentrations in urban areas. But, unlike the other three apps, relevant works have been introduced individually, regardless of their geographical location. This configuration initially makes it difficult to manage the large amount of information available, although there is something similar to the *ArchiRoutes*: *Collections* group various works around a common theme, although only three predefined ones are offered; a subscription allows you to customize them or create new ones.

C.Guide offers an intermediate solution, because although its content is clearly packaged, with entries only in certain cities, it is fully accessible from the initial map, as is the case with Architracker. C.Guide does not include the predefined themed selections that we saw in the other two apps, although it allows you to create your own ones. So does Nómada, offering just one predefined example.

### **Navigation and functionality: the real step forward**

The structure-type (map-list-file) defined in part I, and used by the four apps, is something not very far from what a paper guide can offer. It is in the way of navigating through these three sections, that digital features make a difference compared to traditional guides (Fig. 3).

Only Nómada does not have the maps part embedded into its own structure, more based on the catalog of works, and refers the user to a third-party app, Maps.me,<sup>14</sup> for the geolocation of entries. In terms of functionality, Nómada allows searches, favorites, adding personal notes and creating itineraries that can be later exported to Maps.me. As this is outside the app itself, all these functionalities are not available while in map mode, which is a strong handicap.

On the contrary, the map is always the starting point for navigating Architracker, and its few functionalities (search, favorites and sharing) mean that the list screen is not a very powerful tool to explore its vast content. C.Guide allows fluid navigation both from the map and from the catalog. Search and a powerful filtering tool help in content exploration. It is possible to mark



works as favorites, add comments, and share. Tags are also included, which help in searches.

Like C.Guide, ArchiMaps does not prioritize map or list when exploring its database. Search, filter, and favorites functionalities operate in both navigation modes, although it is possible to sort the catalog of works according to different criteria, a functionality that the rest of the apps do not perform and that is useful when browsing through a vast list of items.

ArchiMaps also takes advantage of the customized design of the Points of Interest (POI), assigning them a color and an icon: this allows the function and the historical period of the building to be identified without having to open its file, transmitting a large amount of information just browsing the app. This feature, which is not unrelated to paper maps either, is present in other apps consulted, but not in the other three that are the subject of this analysis.

### **Quality vs. quantity**

It is perhaps on the content where we can draw more conclusions. Quantitatively, the four applications differ greatly. Always in round figures from its developers, Architracker has a database of 27,000 buildings;<sup>15</sup> Nómada, 3,700;<sup>16</sup> ArchiMaps, 2,445;<sup>17</sup> From C.Guide it has not been possible to obtain this precise data, but it would be possible to estimate it at around 2,500 works.<sup>18</sup>

A serious analysis of each app on the accuracy of their content or its coherence as a whole would require much more space than is available here, so we will limit ourselves to a few quick brushstrokes. Architracker, with a database ten times larger than its direct competitors, is the only one developed entirely by a private company, and it is reasonable to assume that economic performance is its main objective: it is the only application with In-App Purchases, in the form of a Premium user mode. Architracker also supports direct contributions of content by users, with little or no review, since it is easy to find duplicate projects or erroneous data.<sup>19</sup> The sheer amount of work required to rigorously curate and compile content, even just proper oversight of external submissions, makes it difficult to reach those numbers. C.Guide and ArchiMaps support suggestions, but these go through a review process, efficient at least in a first approach to them, in which its content is correct and accurate. In the case of C.Guide, its coverage of only contemporary architecture makes it easier to obtain information directly from

the authors of the buildings, although its catalog runs the risk of collecting some works included more for novelty than for quality. Architracker, despite compiling buildings from c.1860 onwards, is also strongly oriented towards contemporary architecture.

Nómada, conceived as a collective university project, prepared, and supervised by a large team of people,<sup>20</sup> has been able to reach higher figures -although far from those of Architracker-, without the need for external contributions and maintaining control over its content.

Regarding the information displayed about each building, it varies significantly from one application to another (Fig. 4). It is worth noting the conspicuous absence of the year of construction as an independent and prominent data in Architracker, although it is common to find it in the description text. Unlike its competitors, ArchiMaps does not usually include a general description for each entry, but rather delegates that information to external links; the other three apps include it, although it is not always an in-house creation, and the quality is uneven. C.Guide is the one that offers the user the most data, -followed by ArchiMaps and Nómada- classifying the buildings through several criteria that allow very detailed searches and filtering.

## **Conclusions: Embrace New Formats, Keep Criteria**

Undoubtedly, future of architectural guides goes through the digital conversion. As we have been able to verify, a paper guide cannot compete with the format that constitutes a smartphone or another digital device. Obviously in portability and amount of information available, but especially in ease of navigation through it. Perhaps the most definitive fact in this regard is the London Architecture Guide<sup>21</sup> and AIA Guide to Boston<sup>22</sup> apps: the latest editions of the London and Boston reference architectural guides are published exclusively as a mobile application, after five and three editions on paper, respectively. And both, for free.

It is precisely the economic aspect perhaps the biggest obstacle, not only in the most obvious sense. Apps are popular, architectural guides are not. The target audience of an architectural guide is small, and also demanding in terms of accuracy. We have seen in our analysis that generating quality information is expensive, and monetizing the product is complex: MIMOA, a pioneering and benchmark application since 2010, ceased to exist in 2019<sup>23</sup> after a renovation attempt;<sup>24</sup> of

the apps analyzed, only Architracker includes in-app purchases, and has focused on quantity over quality; C.Guide is the most recent proposal, and significantly its commitment is to collect only works from 1979 onwards, prioritizing novelty and above all the image (Fig. 2, 4), very much in line with the current times of Instagram and ‘like’ culture. ArchiMaps, an individual initiative of the author of this text, grows at a much slower rate than desired, mainly due to the difficulty of making it economically profitable; and the only architects with apps focused exclusively on his work are Antoni Gaudí (for obvious tourist reasons) and Frank Lloyd Wright (three apps, two of them at a download cost of 9,99€; the main one is also the product of an individual undertaking).

But these problems are not given by the new format but inherent to architectural guides. We can be optimistic: there is currently a wide range of apps in this regard, with very interesting examples around the world in which rigor is not lacking. The biggest handicap is probably the temptation to achieve a more commercial product, sometimes prioritizing quantity over quality, but specially focusing more and more on purely contemporary content, which has not yet passed through the filter of established criticism, and whose interest is sometimes very debatable, no matter how much it generates impressive images of fast consumption and success in social networks.

An adequate dissemination tool must reach a wide audience: if, paradoxically, this occurs at the expense of the quality of the content disseminated, what will be achieved will be the opposite. That of architectural guides is a long-distance race, and it is necessary to continue insisting on the need to focus on good architecture, as many apps already do, and not only the most recent and ‘instagrammable’ works, since quality is independent of fashions, styles, or times.

## Endnotes

1. MIMOA, now discontinued, and maybe the first reference architectural guide app, was launched that year. Gina Federico, “MIMOA to Have an iPhone App,” *Modern. Modern Houses. Modern Architects. Modern Design*, March 3, 2010, accessed February 11, 2022.
2. <http://modernhousenotes.blogspot.com/2010/03/mimoa-to-have-iphone-app.html>
3. Unless an alternative website is indicated, all information about each app was obtained through its page on the App Store for iOS, or Google Play if it is only available there:
4. <https://www.apple.com/app-store>, accessed January 7, 2022.

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19. Nómada, App Store. <https://apps.apple.com/uy/app/nomada/id1090119799>, accessed January 7, 2022.
20. Daniel Díez Martínez, "Así Funciona Archimaps, la Aplicación Española que Cambiará la Forma de Viajar de los Amantes de la Arquitectura", *Icon Design*, July 16, 2021, accessed January 7, 2022.
21. <https://elpais.com/icon-design/creadores/2021-07-16/asi-funciona-archimaps-la-aplicacion-espanola-que-cambiara-la-forma-de-viajar-de-los-amantes-de-la-arquitectura.html>
22. According to a press release for C.Guide, Córdoba (Spain) has 160 entries. Extrapolating this figure to the 12 cities that the app covers at the time of writing, we can estimate (given that Córdoba is one of the smallest) that the app will contain around 2,000-2,500 buildings on its database.
23. [https://sevilla.abc.es/andalucia/cordoba/sevi-nuevos-iconos-arquitectonicos-cordoba-202107040816\\_noticia.html](https://sevilla.abc.es/andalucia/cordoba/sevi-nuevos-iconos-arquitectonicos-cordoba-202107040816_noticia.html).
24. A search for Frank Lloyd Wright on Architracker, for example, gives us two different entries for the Marin County Civic Center, and attributes the Wayfarer's Chapel to him, while it is the work of his son Lloyd Wright (although the work is correctly attributed in the accompanying text).
25. Créditos, Nómada.

26. London Architecture Guide, App Store. <https://apps.apple.com/es/app/london-architecture-guide/id1179176485>
27. AIA Guide to Boston, App Store. <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/aia-guide-to-boston/id1136848990>
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## Tables

Table 1. Currently available digital architectural guides

	Geog. frame	Location	Time frame	Main promoter
ArchiMaps	Global	World	All	Single private developer
ARCHTRACKER	Global	World	c.1850-today	Private company
C.guide	Global	World	1979-today	Architectural association
Nómada	Global	World	All	University
Timeline Travel	Global	World	All	University
Typology City Guides*	Global	World	20th century	University
Architectures	Supranational	Europe	c.1850-today	Single private developer
BOQUE app	Supranational	Benelux	Contemporary	Private company
Chile Arch	National	Chile	Contemporary	Public administration
DAC - Dansk Arkitektur Center	National	Denmark	All	Architectural association
BDA	National	Germany	Contemporary	Architectural association
Larsa	National	Iraq	All	Private company
Japan Architecture Map	National	Japan	All	Single private developer
Tarpukario architektūra	National	Lithuania	1918-1940	Public administration
Architekturführer BW	Regional	DE Baden-Württemberg	c.1750-today	Architectural association
ArchXXL	Regional	FR Var (coast)	c.1900-today	Public administration
NE Architecture	Regional	US Nebraska	c.1850-today	University
Guía Arqi Buenos Aires	Local	AR Buenos Aires	c.1700-today	Architectural association
Moderna BA	Local	AR Buenos Aires	1930s-70s	Architectural association
Architekturwanderer	Local	CH Area near Zurich	21st century	Architectural association

Architector Basel	Local	CH Basel	Contemporary	Single private developer
GVARCHI	Local	CH Geneve	Contemporary	Architectural association
Architekturführer Köln	Local	DE Köln	Contemporary	Private company
Guía Arquitectura Madrid	Local	ES Madrid	All	Architectural association
Soria - Arquitectura moderna	Local	ES Soria	Partial 20th century	Single private developer
Archiguide LYON Métropole	Local	FR Lyon	c.1900-today	Architectural association
Guide Paris Archi.	Local	FR Paris	c.1900-today	Architectural association
AURA Guide Architecture	Local	FR Paris	Contemporary	Single private developer
Pure Milano	Local	IT Milano	All	Single private developer
Atyrau Go	Local	KZ Atyrau	All	Architectural association
Amsterdam 1850-1940	Local	NL Amsterdam	1850-1940	Single private developer
Archimapa	Local	PL Warsaw	20th century	Museum
Inverness Architecture	Local	UK Inverness	All	Single private developer
London Architecture Guide	Local	UK London	All	Architectural association
Palm Springs Modernism Tour	Local	US CA Palm Springs	Mid-century modern	Private company
Columbus, IN Tours	Local	US IN Columbus city center	1850-20th century	Public administration
AIA Guide to Boston	Local	US MA Boston	All	Architectural association
Discover Detroit!	Local	US MI Detroit	All	Single private developer
Mid-Century Modern Midland	Local	US MI Midland	Mid-century modern	Architectural association
Landmarks New York	Local	US NY New York Mnahattan	All	Single private developer
ArchiTour Cincinnati	Local	US OH Cincinnati	All	Architectural association
Seattle Architecture	Local	US WA Seattle	All	Architectural association
Brown FACADES	Other	US RI Brown University	c.1900-today	University
Gaudi's BCN	Other	ES Barcelona	Gaudi's lifetime	Public administration
Frank Lloyd Wright Tour	Other	US IL Oak Park	Wright's lifetime	Private company
Frank Lloyd Wright Trail	Other	US Wisconsin	Wright's lifetime	Company
Wright Guide	Other	United States	Wright's lifetime	Single private developer

\*Typology City Guides are a series of eight separate apps, each focused on a specific city, but with identical structure and functionalities. Here we will treat them as a single app.

Table 2. Comparative analysis between the four selected apps

	ArchiMaps	Architracker	C.guide	Nómada
General				
Geographical frame	Worldwide	Worldwide	Worldwide	Worldwide
Time frame	All	1900-today	1979-today	All
Content structure	Separate maps: cities and architects. No transversal navigation allowed.	One global map, entries worldwide	One global map, entries only on certain cities	Separate maps. Transversal navigation allowed
Content downloads needed	No	No	No	Yes, always
Type of entries	Works of architecture	Works of architecture	Works of architecture	Works of architecture; countries; cities; architects
Number of entries	2445 (according to creators)	Over 27.000 (according to creators)	2.000 (estimated)	3700 (according to creators)
Login required	No	No	optional	Yes
iOS mobile version	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
iOS iPad version	Yes	No	Yes	No
Adroid mobile version	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mac OS desktop version	Yes	Yes	No	No
Web desktop version	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Monetization				
App purchase	No	No	No	No
Premium content	No	No	No	No
Premium mode	No	Yes	No	No
Ads	No	No	No	No
Main screens				
Map view	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, from external app
List view	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Project details	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Main access sequence	Choose Map > Map	Map	Login > List	Choose country > Choose city > List
Navigation				
Search	Yes, no categories	Yes, by categories	Yes, no categories	Yes, by categories
Filtering	Yes	No	Yes	No
Routes /themed selections	Yes, by developers (112)	Yes, by developers (3) and user	Yes, by user	Yes, by developers (1) and user
Geolocalization	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

“Go to” function	Yes, from external map app	Yes, from external map app	Yes, from external map app	Yes, from external map app
Project details	-	-	-	-
Architect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Sometimes, in general info	Yes	Yes
Complete address	No	Sometimes	Yes	Yes
architectural type/use	Yes	No	Yes	No
Historical period/style	Yes	No	No	No
Description	Sometimes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Practical info	Sometimes	Sometimes	Yes	Sometimes
Tags	No	No	Yes	Sometimes
External links	None/one/many	No	None/one/many	None/one
Nearby works	No	Yes	No	No
Rating	No	No	Yes, by developers (3 levels)	Yes, by developers (special mark) and users (5 levels)
Images	None/one/many	one/many	None/one/many	None/one/many
Image credits	Yes, sometimes link to origin	No	Yes	Yes/Link to origin
User interaction				
Mark as favorite	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Add to routes/themed selections	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rate	No	No	No	Yes
Add notes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Share entries	No	Yes	Yes	No
Submit entries	Yes, by e-mail	Yes, by form in website	Yes, by form in app	No
Contact	Yes, by e-mail	No	No	Yes, by form
Send image	Yes, by e-mail	No	No	No
Social media	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



# Figures

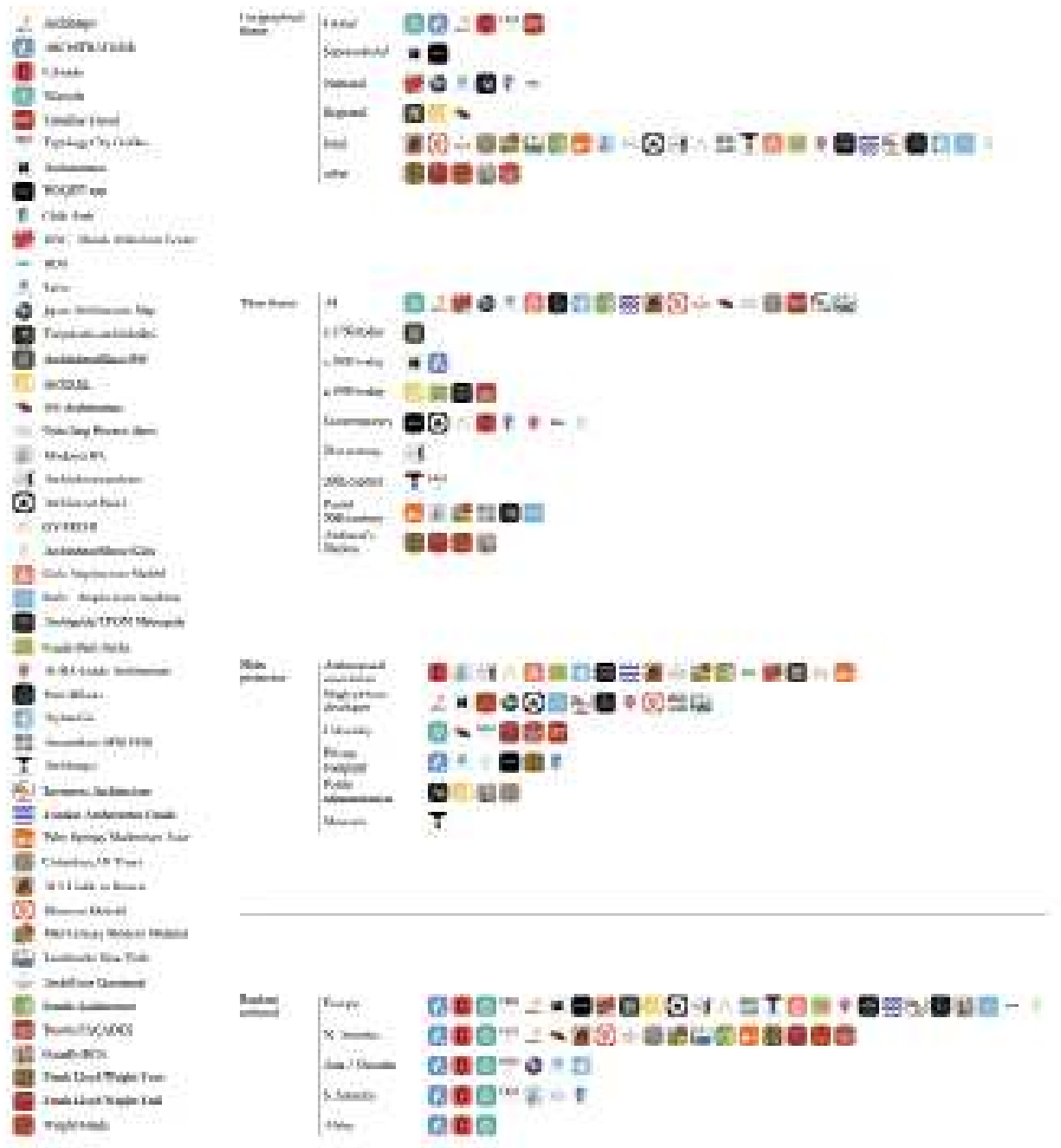


Figure 1. The first three graphs show the 47 apps classified, from top to bottom, according to geographical frame, time frame and main promoter. The fourth graph shows the global regions covered by them, so certain apps appear several times. Elaborated by the author.

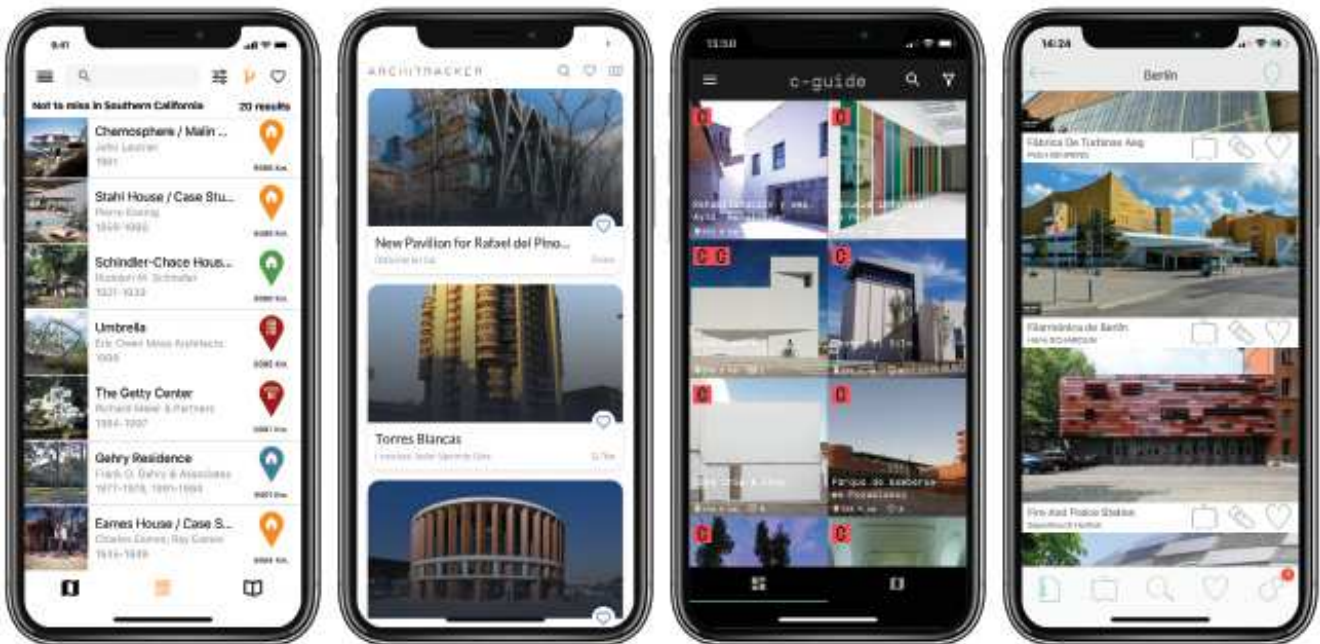


Figure 2. List screens from the four apps analyzed, from left to right: ArchiMaps, Architracker, C.Guide and Nómada. Screenshots and further elaboration by the author



Figure 3. Map screens from the four apps analyzed, from left to right: ArchiMaps, Architracker, C.Guide and Nómada. Screenshots and further elaboration by the author.

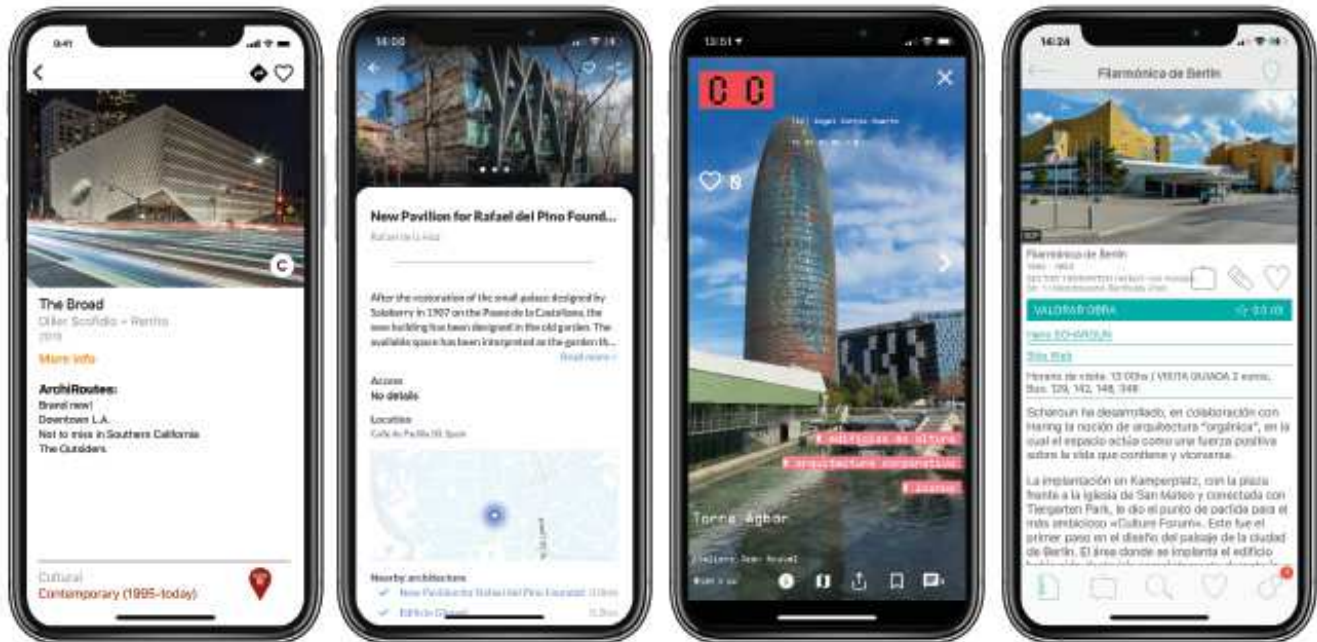


Figure 4. Building facts screens from the four apps analyzed, from left to right: ArchiMaps, Architracker, C.Guide and Nómada. Screenshots and further elaboration by the author.

# LIVING IN CENTRAL PERIPHERIES

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## Abstract

The retroactive reading of the planned city, allows balancing the relation between the ville (the physically built context) and the cité (the character of the urban life) (Sennett). When we build a new fragment of the city, the balance between “the lived and the built” will certify, or not, the fact that “the simply urbanised space is not a city” (M. Soto). In this sense, the research questions which are the contemporary conditions that allow a new urban fragment to be part of the “city making” (Solá-Morales). The relationship between “life and form” (Gehl) is experienced and measured through the quality of public space and architecture, the feeling of belonging, the demographic diversity (Jacobs), the real value of the pre-existence, the efficiency of mobility, or the sustainability of urban planning.

In Denmark, economic growth has fostered new urban developments such as Nordhavn (Copenhagen) or Aarhus Ø (Aarhus), both located on an artificial central seafront. They constitute the two major developments in the two largest and important cities of the country and evidence a trend that appears in other secondary Danish coastal cities. Aarhusgade is the first phase of Nordhavn’s development, and is the result of the transformation of an industrial sector into residential space. Aarhus Ø is a residential neighbourhood built on a large concrete platform formerly occupied by port logistics uses. Once both developments have been realized and nearly completed, it is time to “check the efficiency of physical planning” as claimed by Banham, Barker, Hall, and Price in “Non-Plan: An experiment in freedom” (1969). In consequence, a critical, retroactive and collective analysis takes place based on the immersion in physical reality, experiencing the built through the everyday on-site city life, photography and press reports, in order to measure the distance from planning to life in the central peripheries.

## Keywords

Central peripheries, Non-plan, city life, belonging, harbour developments

## From the Non-plan to two Danish central peripheries

The urban models of growth and development have been a central theme in the history of urbanism and architecture; since Modernism, growth models were part of the collective debates at CIAM congresses. Most of these models were based on the *tabula rasa*, and the post-war urban reality questioned this approach. Some critical voices pointed out the need to combine “what is new” with the complexity of what is “already built” (or in ruins). Despite the fact that those critical voices, such as the Team X, assumed the complexity of what was built, developments such as those of the Garden City,<sup>1</sup> and their reinterpretations, have been replicated throughout the planet to this day, without an effective retroactive analysis to review them (and learn from them) once they were put into operation. In this sense, the feeling of belonging to the city so claimed in the 1960s remains weak in many cases because the new fragments of the city show that the capacity for integration (“being a city” in Manuel de Solá-Morales terms)<sup>2</sup> is not an easy task. As Jane Jacobs<sup>3</sup> pointed out, the integration of the new city is also a matter of time. Jacobs,<sup>4</sup> was compromised with quality of life in cities; she did not completely agree on the absence of planning, but argued for the *slow* development and the learning from experience and use; therefore, lessons from experience can guide physical form. On the one hand, this argument highlights the awareness regarding not considering a planning *fulfilled* when it is simply *completed*; and on the other hand, it places the city maker in a position of modesty.<sup>5</sup>

The transformation of the urban peripheries, for instance the ones evolving from industrial parks to residential districts can be read as new city fragments. These new areas ask for a revision and assessment regarding whether they have been able to be part of the city and how they address the current social reality. In addition, this retroactive reading is linked to current challenges as the ecological crisis and the scarcity of resources, taking in consideration that the sustainability condition of these city fragments also relates to the social context.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, beyond the reflections on *built matter* and urban planning, the architectural discipline raises other pertinent questions, generally neglected until now, and which directly affect the idea of belonging to the city. “How will we live together?”<sup>7</sup> refers to the “softest” part of architecture: life (the spontaneity of life) and links to the need for a FREESPACE that refers to the generosity

of space in architecture, and the need of that space could be extended to the entire city.<sup>8</sup>

With the same critical (Anglo-Saxon) spirit of Team X, “Non-Plan: An experiment in freedom”<sup>9</sup> focused on the retroactive criticism. The article was published in the magazine *New Society* in 1969 when Paul Barker, one of the article authors, was its editor. *New society* was founded seven years earlier in 1962 seeking to address the social concerns of the moment; in Barker’s words “trying to work out what sort of place Britain really was and might become. [...] The magazine was obsessed with pinning down how things were, rather than how things were supposed to be”.<sup>10</sup>

The initiative of the article “Non-plan” appears as a consequence of the discouragement of Barker and the geographer Peter Hall about what planning was producing in the United Kingdom. In this situation, the question “could things be any worse if there was no planning at all?” arose.<sup>11</sup> The article was a claim for deregulation, on how people could take control of their environments.<sup>12</sup>

Barker and Hall invited two collaborators to join this enterprise: Reyner Bahman “because the quality of his writing and his loving observation of everyday objects”<sup>13</sup> and Cedric Price whose projects had already been published in the magazine,<sup>14</sup> for example, Potteries Thinkbelt. This project explores a new way of planning based on the balance between centres and peripheries and, specifically the revitalization of an industrial are in decline by establishing university centres linked to the recovery of the existing industrial and human fabric.

The analysis of three case studies<sup>15</sup> of the English countryside helped Barker, Hall, Bahman and Price, to theorize about the development of these territorial segments from the perspective of their planning, or on the contrary, the possible absence of it if Non-Plan would have been applied. At a time of social commitment, the role of planners to impose ways of living was questioned, as well as the role of future dwellers or their possibility to make decisions, both at a spatial and aesthetic level. The authors proposed the retroactive vision of a reality which works as a tool for evaluating the successes and failures of planning, and speculating on other possible options to put the “inhabitant” in another position.

Every time planners and/or architects take decisions, there is a manipulation of “the conditions of people’s lives”.<sup>16</sup> As a consequence, it is important to ask about the relationship established between “form”, what the planning establishes, and “life” what allows this form (the planning),<sup>17</sup> taking into account the architecture and the space that arises from said decisions.

The relationship between “life and form” is directly related to the balance between the *ville* (the physically built context) and the *cit * (the character of the urban life).<sup>18</sup> The *cit * allows dwellers to become who they are and develop their skills as individuals to manage the complexity of the city. When we build a new fragment of the city, the observation of “the lived and the built” will bring to light how much the city maker is aware that “the built environment is one thing, how people dwell in it is another”.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, paraphrasing Montserrat Soto, the simply urbanised space is not a city (a *cit *).<sup>20</sup>

One of the interrogations that Banham, Barker, Hall and Price addressed in their investigation was how the planning “let people shape their own environment”,<sup>21</sup> a question that it is still valid today to evaluate existing urban fragments strongly dictated by planning. While in the XIX century city makers tried to connect the lived and the built, in the XX century *cit * and *ville* turned away from each other very often.<sup>22</sup> Currently, in the XXI century the great decision-making power of real estate imply that the ways of dwelling and inhabiting the city are limited, and the overview of the fragment and the entirety are not always a requirement.<sup>23</sup>

The retroactive assessment was already crucial in the methodology of the “Non-plan: An experiment in freedom” (1969) article by Banham, Barker, Hall, and Price. In that time, the observation and analysis of completed/built urban designs projects, allowed the authors to assess their success or their failure. This methodology is still valid and efficient, and can be translate to the study of the two new central peripheries (previously integrated in harbour infrastructures) recently completed in Aarhus and Copenhagen (Denmark). In consequence, a critical, retroactive and collective analysis takes place based on the immersion in physical reality, experiencing the built through the everyday on-site city life, photography and press reports, in order to measure the distance from planning to life in the central peripheries.

Within this contextual framework, this investigation asks how currently things are in these new planned developments as contraposition of how the things should have been according to the planning intentions.

In this retroactive analysis we ask, what are those parameters that make a fragment of the city belong to it? And consequently, what are those parameters that contribute to the success or failure of planning?

Contrary to what “Non-Plan” proposes, this paper does not claim for deregulation, but ways of seeing the observation of how a certain degree of “deregulation” (the one that planning allows) in the form of appropriation and domestication of the space by the inhabitants implies an impact in the life within this new city fragments. In short, the daily life routine, and the possibility of domesticating the urban space, can be read as parameters capable of measuring the functionality, spatial quality, hospitality, and character of a city. The observation of a city fragment was already an exercise that George Perec systematically repeated until it become a method: “Method: you must either give up talking of the town, about the town, or else force yourself to talk about it as simply as possible, obviously, familiarly. Get rid of all preconceived ideas. Stop thinking in ready-made terms, forget what the town planners and sociologist have said.”<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, the potential (greater or lesser) of belonging of a city fragment to it questions, according to each case, the role of planners to impose ways of living. The learning from experience and use should project data understood as a scientific part of the design process.

## **Developments on Concrete Platforms**

Due to the economic growth of Danish regions the two biggest cities in Denmark present new urban fragments that are evolving and changing at a great speed. Nordhavn (Copenhagen) and Aarhus Ø (Aarhus) are new developed city fragments still uncompleted but already inhabited both located on artificial concrete platforms on the seafront. Both fragments constitute the two major developments in the largest cities of the country and evidence a trend that appears in other secondary Danish coastal cities. Their proximity to the historical centre and the urbanity created due to the characteristics of their development identify them as central peripheries (Fig. 01).

Aarhusgade gives name to the first phase of Nordhavn’s development, and is the result of the transformation of a harbour industrial sector into residential and office space. Aarhus Ø is a residential neighbourhood built on an area formerly occupied by port logistics uses. Once both developments have been partially developed and already inhabited, it is time to “check the efficiency of physical planning” as claimed by Banham, Barker, Hall, and Price in “Non-Plan: An experiment in freedom” and “learning from the experience of use” as Jacobs suggests.<sup>25</sup>



The retroactive observation of the “how form influences life and how life interacts with form”<sup>26</sup> is experienced and measured through the characteristics of public space and architecture, the efficiency of mobility, the sustainability of urban planning, the feeling of belonging, the demographic diversity, the real value of the pre-existence, the intermediate space and the domestic space and its intimacy and *homoness*.<sup>27</sup>

### Aarhus Ø (Aarhus)

Aarhus Ø sits on the concrete platform of the old port of Aarhus. This surface located on reclaimed land from the sea is about five hundred metres away from Aarhus Cathedral and extends one kilometre to the northeast (Fig. 01). However this proximity to the centre, the no-land (*terrain vague*) and emptiness in between centre and Aarhus Ø indicates a direction towards the periphery (Fig. 03).

In 1997 Aarhus Kommune proposes the masterplan for the development of the port of Aarhus which includes the construction of approximately 700,000 square metres of residential (25% social housing), offices-commercial and institutional space.<sup>28</sup> In 2003, the architectural office Knud Fladeland<sup>29</sup> won the competition for the development of the port with a project that proposed breaking up the concrete platform into independent islands separated by channels. The urbanization of these islands proposed to densify the perimeter, reinforcing the idea of an urban facade and, consequently, of a street facade towards Bernhardt Jensens Blvd, following the traditional urban block of the centre of Aarhus. The planning foresaw buildings losing density as they moved closer to the sea, towards east. This plan was not materialised; however, the initially *ideal* islands are the seed for the development.

It can be stated that Aarhus Ø has been conceived from two masterplans: the Fladeland plan and the current masterplan (Fig. 02). The latter has been developed based on singular iconic buildings, designed by renowned practices such as BIG, AART, Dorte Mandrup, CEBRA, SLETH, etc. under the premise: if you have a large number of unique buildings designed by well-known architects, the new city fragment should therefore have a high quality.<sup>30</sup> This premise is evidenced in the northern corner of the concrete platform; in Fladeland’s plan an empty area, and today occupied by a high-rise building of 142 meters branded with the name “Lighthouse”, the most iconic building of the Aarhus Ø identified in

this new urban settlement.

The architectural appearance of each building is exceptionally autonomous and independent of its immediate context, and acquires greater or lesser prominence depending on the form it adopts while seeking to find its place at Aarhus Ø. Particularly, this aesthetic diversity of the exterior envelopes disappears once the homogeneous (almost identical) domestic space is discovered as multiple images of the interior spaces demonstrate (Fig. 05). Who dwells and how one dwells is very standardised in Aarhus Ø, opening up the debate if a city could be composed by a homogeneous kind of people, and if so what kind of city is created.<sup>31</sup>

Building on reclaimed land from the sea implies addressing extreme constraints<sup>32</sup> makes difficult to initially imagine a city with green spaces in which citizens are in contact with the soil. Likewise, due to its location and the winds and climatology that characterize the area, a strategy that favours shelter in public spaces is considered necessary as a starting point. On the contrary, planning has opted for high rise (average 8-9) and isolated buildings which, in an area exposed to harsh weather conditions,<sup>33</sup> tend to reinforce the wind compromising the use of the public space in terms of vegetation survival and human comfort.<sup>34</sup> The feeling of solitude (or evident loneliness) is present at the empty public spaces unless an exceptionally sunny day.

In Aarhus Ø the hardness of the zero level is very present despite the planning attempts to arrange green surfaces with trees and vegetation. Based on this condition, the neighbours on the ground floor timidly try to soften the toughness of the ground with plants and flowerpots and furniture with the intention of domesticate a public space that sometimes acquires the condition of an uninhabited plot (Fig. 04). Almost like an automatic action, the appearance of greenery near the facades is understood as a desire to dress a naked architecture that has not foreseen the needs of the human scale, and to incorporate the privacy and intimacy that is sometimes necessary.

Water could represent one of the greatest potentials for the public space of Aarhus Ø and a space for interaction and community, however, in the majority of the occasions, urban planning and landscape and architectural design treats water as a merely visual element, a fact that does not contribute to its integration or the possibility of enjoying it. The planning has foreseen channels with intention to make water more protagonist still it becomes a rigid limit when it is not incorpo-

rated into the architecture as an active part of the public space.<sup>35</sup> Exceptionally, Irma Peddersens Gade, with its south-west orientation, represents a promenade that, with more informal architecture and programs linked to the sea and leisure (Fig. 04), becomes the public space par excellence on days when weather conditions allow it.<sup>36</sup>

## **Nordhavn**

Nordhavn, the northern harbour, gives its name to the largest metropolitan development in Scandinavia. Construction on it began at the end of the 19th century as an industrial port (and freeport) for the city. It is located 4 km to the east from the centre of Copenhagen and clearly separated from it by northern corridor to enter and exit the city (Fig. 01). Nordhavn extends over the Øresund Strait on land reclaimed from the sea to house a constructed area of approximately 3,600,000 square meters, in which 40,000 inhabitants will live and 40,000 jobs will be created. The current urban project<sup>37</sup> won an international competition<sup>38</sup> in 2008 with the aim of being a “sustainable city of the future”.<sup>39</sup> Sustainability is present at any explanation about the urban project, and developers (By & Havn) see the area as an opportunity to test new solutions on smart city, energy efficiency, electric mobility, heating, etc. However, the initiatives seem to be focus on the sustainability that is possible to quantify, and less on social sustainability.

The district of Aarhusgade, the first to be developed in Nordhavn, seeks to consolidate itself as a continuation of the district of Østerbro, despite the infrastructure barriers that separate them. The continuation of the street that gives the name to the district (Aarhusgade) is a clear gesture to achieve this objective, though the linear transport infrastructure and the still no-one’s land next to it, gives the new district a peripheral feeling. Arriving in Aarhusgade on foot or by bike evidences a feeling of leaving the consolidated city and entering a developing place, of new growth, similar to that of suburban areas. Arriving with the underground one reaches a construction site with the Nordhavn’s in the background (Fig. 03).

Aarhusgade is the result of the transformation of an industrial sector into an urban residential space, with production and an economy typical of the tertiary sector<sup>3</sup> to resolve the lack of space for Copenhagen’s growth. The intention of living and working in the same place and having good public transport con-

nections are part of the initial premises of Nordhavn. Due to these conditions, the new postcode of the city (2150) has become the area of Denmark with the highest price per square meter (58,000 DKK)<sup>40</sup> targeting the new homes to a very specific type of dweller, despite the 20% of social housing that is required in the development.

The planning understands Aarhusgade as a combination of existing buildings to maintain the industrial memory of the place (and the highest constructions),<sup>41</sup> and residential space that is mainly resolved using the traditional city block typology (in this case around smaller courtyards) with balconies to introduce density (an average of five stories) (Fig. 02, 04). Göteborg square represents one of the main public spaces of the district and a sign of a new urbanity. The square is framed by three of the most representative and buildings of the old and the new Nordhavn: the Portland Towers (DesignGroup), The Silo (COBE), and Frihavns Tårnet (Praksis). The fourth façade of Göteborg square is a stepped waterfront open to the sea and that constitutes, together with the rest of Sandkaj, the more direct link of Aarhusgade to the sea in the form of a public space. Its south orientation consolidates it as the public space par excellence to represent the urbanity of the place. The second most representative public space is located at 24 meters high, and one arrives after climbing 135 steps lined with planters and the history of Nordhavn printed on the metal façade (Konditaget Lüders, JAJA arkitekten). On the roof of this parking lot, a playground and an outdoor gym occupying 2,400 square metres enjoy the view of the sea, the centre of Copenhagen, and the green rooftops and terraces of neighbour buildings.

From this contemporary *belvedere*, and walking through the ground floor level, one can see the different strategies dwellers acquire to use the space provided to make it their own. Quotidian elements are repeated at different heights as a sign of domesticity and appropriation of the initially generic space (Fig. 04).

## Conclusion

Central peripheries are a global reality. Once peripheries detached from the centre due to its distance, its isolation, or its morphology has been overcome (industrial city peripheries), there is a need to address another kind of peripheral urban fragments, also from the sustainability of the point of view (proximity to the traditional centre and its services). The case studies of this investigation gather two new

seafront districts of the cities of Aarhus and Copenhagen that share a harbour background and which are disconnected from the centre until recently, but close to it. They represent two *New Towns* that as the opposite of the ones explaining in “Non-Plan”, they belong to the city centre and their target social group is the one that afford their rents.

In consequence, this investigation shows how the identity of a city centre evolves when adding a new fragment, in these cases, a new waterfront in the form of concrete artificial peninsulas. Aarhus Ø and Nordhavn are not just new quarters, but they are also conceived as destination locations that open the city towards the sea (Fig. 01).

The coastline implies a privileged situation due to its landscape conditions, but at the same time it evidences the difficulty of dealing with a rigid built system developed on top of a natural dynamic system. The artificiality of the soils is a parameter that conditions the urban identity of these new neighbourhoods and, consequently, their ability to be a continuity of the cities they want to join. The artificial condition of the land makes more difficult to achieve the translation of the existing (sometimes historical) urban fabrics, to these new lands in both cities. Though, exceptionally in some corners (experiencing Nordhavn) the atmosphere and the flavour of the ancient old city tries to be slightly present. It is difficult to think that, for example, green areas or public spaces could acquire the same appearance as in the city settled on “natural soil”. In short, the green that we find in these neighbourhoods is superimposed on the platform and therefore planted in *containers* (Fig. 04).

Nordhavn responds to this artificiality by proposing exceptionally a high-rise public space taking over the roof of a parking lot building that can only be built as a tower due to the impossibility of being underground. In both areas the most popular ground floor public space is a boulevard with south orientation that runs parallel to the sea. In Aarhus Ø, Irma Peddersens Gade and the informal constructions with cafes constitute the public space per excellence, and the added bathhouse, which is an artefact laying on the sea, represents the main direct public interaction with the water. In Nordhavn the limit between the water and the platform blurs due to the different stepped border areas along Sandkaj (Fig. 04).

Additionally, in both neighbourhoods, the need to occupy public space beyond the edge of the sea and to create a transition between an extrovert and introvert

space is detected. In this sense, the inhabitants of the ground floors dwellings take their furniture out into the street and surround it with flowerpots with the aim of extending their habitats beyond the interior, while at the same time elements such as curtains or interior decoration creates a layer to control privacy.

The dimension of the interstitial spaces is key to measuring the potential for space appropriation by the neighbours (Fig. 02). Despite the density of the two districts, the will to recognise these spaces and self-construct limits of intimacy is evident in many urban niches. A dweller driven domestication of the district and its intermediate spaces is expressed with the intention of soften the city, customized it and build a feeling of belonging. In some corners, mainly in Aarhus Ø, this task becomes harder due to the soil nature and the harshness of the climatic conditions where the toughness of the buildings meeting the ground contrasts with the will of an exterior domesticity. In turn, the public space due to maybe lack of awareness from the planning results on a fragmentation that punctually weakens the potential uses of these spaces, making it difficult for these neighbourhoods to integrate into their daily life (Fig. 04).

Urban planning and urban design should be able to anticipate, as far as possible, the evolution of contemporary ways of life. In this sense, “Non-Plan” developed its critical approach beyond the physical construction of urban growth models, and anticipated parameters that would be key in future ways of life. Thus, the authors predicted the future relevance of: the cybernetic revolution, the mass welfare revolution, and the pop or youth cultural revolution. “Non-Plan”, announced an increasing lack of freedom on the citizen when deciding how to live, and, therefore, a certain imposition of the system in the ways of life, especially the one that takes place in the interiors. A life of “clichés” in terms of the authors, which pop culture illustrated with Richard Hamilton’s collage “Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?”.<sup>42</sup> The review of the interior life model in the homes of the new development models reveals a consolidation of a generic life (Fig. 05).

An update of Hamilton’s photomontage would today give notoriety to the computer and the internet, to aesthetic concerns, to growing consumerism, but it should also include, against the flow, more minority wishes for social ecological concerns. In any case, it would seem that the most significant is the constant review of what kind of city do we want to live in and what city are we building;<sup>43</sup>

a review of freedom, spontaneity,<sup>44</sup> and ways of life that existing cities and their development models should offer to dwell according to who dwellers are. One should reflect whether planning as buildings are completed artefacts or permanent work-in-progress, “as real estate or as tools”<sup>45</sup> avoiding their performance “as a tyranny governing everything from matters of taste to the conduct of life itself”.<sup>46</sup>

## Endnotes

1. Kenneth Frampton, *Historia Crítica de La Arquitectura Moderna*, 4th ed. (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1985). The Garden City designed by Ebenezer Howard in 1898, was conceived as a regional settlement, surrounded by fields dedicated to agriculture and livestock, with a satellite status in relation with the large cities. “Howard concibió su ciudad como una comunidad económicamente autónoma y de ayuda mutua, que produjera poco más allá de sus propias necesidades.” [“Howard envisioned his city as an economically self-sufficient and of mutual aid, producing little beyond its own needs.”]
2. M. Solà-Morales et al., *A Matter of Things* (NAi Publishers, 2008).
3. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).
4. Jacobs.
5. Gordon Cullen, *Townscape* (London: The Architectural Press, 1961).
6. Felix Guattari, *Les Trois Écologies* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1989).
7. “How will we live together” is the title of the last XVII Venice Biennial of Architecture directed by Hashim Sarkis, focused on the intensifying climate crisis, massive population displacements, political instabilities around the world, and growing racial, social, and economic inequalities, among others.
8. “FREESPACE” is the title of the XVI Venice Biennial of Architecture directed by Grafton Architects.
9. Reyner Banham et al., ‘Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom’, *New Society*, no. 338 (20 March 1969): 435–43. The subtitle of the article is: “Town-and-county planning has today become an unquestioned shibboleth. Yet few of these procedures or value judgements have any sound basis, except delay. Why not have the courage, where practical, to let people shape their own environment”.
10. Paul Barker, ‘Thinking the Unthinkable’, in *Non-Plan: Essays on Freedom, Participation and Change in Modern Architecture and Urbanism*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), 2–21.
11. Barker.
12. Jonathan Hughes and Simon Sadler, ‘Preface’, in *Non-Plan: Essays on Freedom, Participation and Change in Modern Architecture and Urbanism*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), VIII–IX.
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14. Cedric Price, ‘Potteries Thinkbelt’, *New Society*, 1966.
15. Constable Country however Banham focused on Royston-Stansted; The Solent’s hinterlands identified with the name Montagu Country; and Lawrence Country which addressed the east of Peak District.

16. 'Life and Form: An Interview with Jan Gehl', accessed 5 March 2022, <https://www.planetizen.com/node/80438/life-and-form-interview-jan-gehl>. Gehl continues stating: "[...] but most planners don't know enough about this manipulation."
17. Jan Gehl, '□ Let's Talk Architecture: Architecture Is the Interplay between Form and Life: Jan Gehl on Apple Podcasts', accessed 5 January 2022, <https://podcasts.apple.com/dk/podcast/architecture-is-the-interplay-between-form-and-life/id1492098620?i=1000538909829>.
18. Richard Sennett, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City* (UK: Allen Lane, 2018).
19. Sennett.
20. Fernando Samaniego, 'Montserrat Soto vigila los cambios y límites urbanos de Madrid', *El País*, 31 May 2005, sec. Cultura, [https://elpais.com/diario/2005/06/01/cultura/1117576808\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/diario/2005/06/01/cultura/1117576808_850215.html).
21. The subtitle states: "Why not have the courage, where practical, to let people shape their own environment".
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23. Nuria Casais and Ferran Grau, eds., *Quaderns d'arquitectura i Urbanisme. Cosmetic Techniques*, vol. 272 (Barcelona: COAC - Polígrafa, 2019).
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25. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.
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27. Adam Caruso, 'La Ciudad Emocional = The Emotional City', *Quaderns d'Arquitectura i Urbanisme*, 2001.
28. 'Udviklingsplaner', accessed 6 March 2022, <https://aarhusoe.dk/om-aarhus-o/udviklingsplaner/>.
29. Knud Fladeland Nielsen, 'The Waterfront of Aarhus', ARKITEKT FIRMA ET KNUD FLADELAND NIELSEN, accessed 6 March 2022, <https://www.fladeland.dk/the-waterfront-of-aarhus>.
30. Gehl, '□ Let's Talk Architecture'.
31. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*; Aristotle, *Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905). "A city is composed of different kinds of men; similar people cannot bring a city into existence".
32. The first is to solve an unnatural foundation that technically and economically requires a great effort. Consequently, the waterproof of the floor is mandatory.
33. Its peninsula geometry exposes the platform to the prevailing winds that come mainly from the west or southeast directions.
34. Gehl, '□ Let's Talk Architecture'. Gehl makes this statement when talking about the development of Ørestad.
35. Kristian Emil Mariager and Nana Elving Hansen, 'Aarhus Ø er blevet den ultimative developer-by', *Bolig*, 15 November 2020.



36. Havnebadet interacts directly and naturally with the sea to complement its role as public space.
37. Collaborators involved in the current urban project: COBE, SLETH, Polyform, Ramboll, Sandberg, WERK.
38. Thomas Bo Jensen, 'The North Harbour Quarters' (Aarhus School of Architecture, Aarhus, Denmark, 16 March 2022). The Duch office West8 developed the initial studies on the area prior to the international competition.
39. 'Cobe - Nordhavn', accessed 6 March 2022, <https://cobe.dk/place/nordhavn>.
40. 'Nordhavn: Sustainable City of the Future', Danish Architecture Center - DAC (blog), accessed 8 March 2022, <https://dac.dk/en/knowledgebase/architecture/nordhavn-2/>.
41. Jensen, 'The North Harbour Quarters'. In 1983, there is an awareness in Copenhagen of keeping as much as possible from what exists to maintain the memory of the place. As the opposite of what occurs in Nordhavn, in Sudhavn every building was demolished.
42. Richard Hamilton and Richard Field, Richard Hamilton. *Image and Process. Studies, Stage and Final Proofs Form the Graphic Works, 1952-82* (London and Stuttgart: The Tate Gallery & Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1983). The famous photomontage by Richard Hamilton produced in London expressly for the "This is Tomorrow" exhibition in 1956 is an example of the artist's interest in the domestic definition of interior space. Years later, this work led to *Interior* (1964-65), another collage based on the frame of the film *Schockproof* and in which the author continues to explore the idea of contemporary domesticity through the superimposition of a traditional interior and a modern interior.
43. Samaniego, 'Montserrat Soto vigila los cambios y límites urbanos de Madrid'.
44. Banham et al., 'Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom'. "Spontaneity and space" is the title of the conclusions of the article "Non-Plan".
45. Hughes and Sadler, 'Preface'.
46. Hughes and Sadler

## Figures



Fig. 01. Location of the case studies in relation to the city centre (Aarhus Ø above, Nordhavn below). Developed by the authors.

Fig. 02. Footprint and urban form of the case studies (Aarhus Ø above, Nordhavn below). Developed by the authors.



Fig. 03. Pictures of the urban access to the new city fragments (Aarhus Ø above, Nordhavn below). Pictures by the authors.



Fig. 04. Taxonomy of strategies of domestication of private, intermediate and public spaces (Aarhus Ø above, Nordhavn below). Pictures by the authors.

# TOWARDS A TRASH ARCHITECTURE

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## **Abstract**

Popular media and historical accounts often depict handmade variants of Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome as an architectural hallmark of US counterculture during the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than any specific architectural form, however, it was the process of assembling a shelter from scrap materials that encapsulated the counterculture ideal of shelter as an adventure in self-building, both in the literal meaning of do-it-yourself construction and the figurative meaning of producing a new sense of selfhood. The home of Barry Smith in Canyon, a Northern California community of "outlaw builders," provides a case study in the use of illegal settlement practices to produce a built critique of postwar affluence and its inherent byproduct of environmental destruction. In crafting a domestic habitus entirely from post-consumer debris, Smith blurred the categories of architecture and performance art in a bravura display of the counterculture's ecofreak ethos.

## **Keywords**

Buckminster Fuller, Geodesic, DIY, Ecology

## Introduction

Popular media and historical accounts often depict handmade variants of Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome as an architectural hallmark of US counterculture during the 1960s and 1970s. Architectural history's penchant for attributing cultural meaning to built form rather than building process forged an enduring association between counterculture lifestyle and the geodesic dome, an engineering invention patented by Buckminster Fuller in 1954. The conflation of hippies with domes emerged at Drop City, a scrappy art colony said to be the counterculture's first back-to-the-land commune. Its architectural language crystallized when Clark Richert and Gene Bernofsky, artists who had purchased six acres of remote Colorado scrub with a group of accomplices, attended a 1965 lecture by Fuller at the University of Colorado. Captivated by his hallucinatory futurism, they cobbled together a dome from lumber scraps, factory-reject plywood, tarpaper, and chicken wire as a habitable art installation. Built without the benefit of Fuller's patent drawings, their "Great Pumpkin" dome soon was revealed to be not a geodesic but a dodecahedral mutant. Correspondence with Fuller's office paid off: by 1966, three of Drop City's six pavilions were true geodesics. Impressed by Drop City's enthusiasm and tenacity, Fuller presented the commune with a newly concocted Dymaxion Award "for the remarkable initiative, spirit, and poetically economic structural accomplishments." It included \$500 in prize money, more than the cost of the art colony's site.<sup>1</sup>

Drop City left an outsized imprint on the counterculture. A visit by Steward Brand prompted the creation of the Whole Earth Catalog, providing rural communards with user reviews of the material, spiritual, and intellectual tools needed to support their Aquarian lifestyle. An opening dedication proclaimed: "The insights of Buckminster Fuller initiated this catalog," insuring his place in the counterculture canon. Another early Drop City visitor, the Swiss-trained mathematician Steve Baer, produced a self-published Dome Cookbook, the first D.I.Y. geodesic handbook. Broader in impact were Domebook One (1970) and 2 (1971) issued by Lloyd Kahn, a dropout San Francisco insurance broker turned D.I.Y. builder and editor of the Shelter section of the Whole Earth Catalog. Kahn's guides were based on his work at Pacific High School, a residential academy south of San Francisco, where students under his tutelage built seventeen

domes as experimental residences between 1969 and 1971. Their geodesic shantytown served as a case study in Kahn's publications. A successful first printing by an independent Bay Area press inspired Random House to snap up the rights to *Domebook* for a new and highly profitable line of "alternative lifestyle" publications.

Royalties allowed Kahn to build his own geodesic home just as he was coming to realize its disadvantages. Fuller's pristine geometries demanded close tolerances achievable only with expensive kiln-dried lumber. Triangular sheathing panels produced waste when cut from materials manufactured in rectangular sheets. The faceted surfaces were difficult to insulate and nearly impossible to weatherproof. A hallucinogenic epiphany crowned his discontent. Hiking in a Marin County Forest while on mescaline, Kahn was stopped in his tracks by an apparition. Tucked in a glade, a spectral dome raced through time. He watched awestruck as Plexiglas windows turned a milky yellow and plywood panels warped and delaminated, defiling defiled the pristine setting. Suddenly realizing that by promoting such buildings he was doing irreparable damage to his karma, Kahn instructed an equally horrified Random House editor to recall all unsold copies of *Domebook 2* at the height of sales.<sup>2</sup> His D.I.Y. handbook had made Fuller's geodesics "look too easy, too much like a breakthrough solution, too exciting."<sup>3</sup>

"Smart But Not Wise," an essay in *Domebook 2*, foreshadowed Kahn's geodesic disillusion. At a conference sponsored by MIT's Architecture Machine Group, founded in 1967 by Nicholas Negroponte and Leon Grossier, Kahn viewed a prototype interface for digitally designed plastic buildings manufactured by robotic equipment on site. He was "disturbed by the vision of the architect sitting at the cathode tube, drawing his design into the computer, the computer causing the foam truck to build the house." It glamorized the same techno-spectacle that had popularized geodesics, "making plastics and a totally weird shelter outlook appear seductively appealing." As Kahn reviewed lessons from his own building experience, he realized that the "use of human hands is essential. [...] Used lumber looks better than new lumber, but you've got to pull nails, clean it, work with its irregularities."<sup>4</sup> Modern fabrication strategies emphasizing standardization, efficiency, and time-saving were incompatible with craft production involving recycled materials. D.I.Y. architecture required an entirely different paradigm, and Kahn's *Domebook* co-editor, Bob Easton, knew exactly where to find it.

Easton believed that geodesic domes were not architecture at all, but rather industrial design inventions: a distinction Kahn understood, having paid a hefty licensing fee to publish Fuller's patented diagrams in the first Domebook. The argument had far-reaching implications. It repudiated developments in modern architecture dating back to the early-1920s when Walter Gropius guided the Bauhaus away from Expressionist handcraft and instead toward mass production, machine culture, and the cult of the engineer. Easton had long been captivated by the global vernacular buildings depicted in *Architecture Without Architects: An Introduction to Nonpedigreed Architecture*, the catalog of Bernard Rudofsky's 1964 exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art, which had made the rounds of drafting tables while Easton studied architecture at Berkeley.<sup>5</sup> *Shelter*, the successor to the Domebook series, envisioned a collective tradition spun from themes and variations on the hand-built shed, a departure from geodesics that inverted the chronology of Fuller's evolution as a designer. In a 1966 *New Yorker* interview, the inventor recalled using childhood birthday money to purchase a hammer and nails which he used to build "experimental houses," his term for the shanties littering the grounds around the Fuller family summer home.<sup>6</sup> Shelving crystalline geometries in favor of funk and junk bricolage, Kahn and Easton's post-geodesic gospel threw Fuller's architectural ontogeny into reverse.

*Shelter*, the successor to the Domebook series, envisioned a collective building practice based upon global vernacular traditions and, recognizing that "the only growing resource is trash," proposed crafting it from rubbish. Using biographic conventions typically reserved for architects, they profiled masters of the scavenging arts. Captain Bill, an 82-year-old wrecker, merited an extended profile. Mo van Nostrand, who abandoned a career in architecture to found Basho Demolition, shared his basic laws of salvage. Ed Miller, of Ed's Bottle Depot in Vancouver, was praised for "an eye that can spot a brass coupling in a heap of rubble the way a biologist spots rare mushrooms."<sup>7</sup> The assertion that "wrecking is a way of thinking" connected *Shelter* to Drop City and Buckminster Fuller's legacy, however inadvertently.<sup>8</sup> Assembling Colorado "zomes" from a palette of scrap, including sheet metal sheathing hacked from the roofs of junked autos, produced unexpected consequences, according to Drop City resident Peter Douthit. His 1967 manifesto announced: "We have discovered a new art form: creative scrounging. We dismantle abandoned

bridges by moonlight. We are sort of advanced junkmen taking advantage of advanced obsolescence.”<sup>9</sup> Beyond providing free construction material, scrounging catalyzed human transformation. “Trapped inside a waste economy, man finds an identity as a consumer,” Douhit asserted. In learning to “tear down abandoned buildings, use the unusable,” an alternative self-emerged.<sup>10</sup> In terms of counterculture subjectivity, the most radical aspect of Drop City’s domes and “zomes” was, in fact, their means of production: the building process rather than the built form.

Douhit’s paean to scofflaws dismantling abandoned bridges by moonlight recalls one of Fuller’s concepts that had a more enduring impact upon the counterculture than the geodesic dome. “In the Outlaw Area,” as his 1966 *New Yorker* interview was titled, advanced an eccentric origin myth for technological innovation. Fuller believed that early civilizations produced breakthroughs only upon taking to the open sea, an “outlaw area” that imposed novel challenges in a setting unconstrained by land-based covenants. Sailors became “world men.” Lawlessness begat piracy and weaponry (or “killingry,” in Fuller’s terminology) but ultimately yielded advances in “livingry,” his term for objects that supported and enhanced daily life.<sup>11</sup> Securing a counterculture legacy for the outlaw zone idea, Brand celebrated it in the *Whole Earth Catalog* as “an Aquarian haven for the most useful pioneers – the cream and the dregs of society.”<sup>12</sup> The equation of innovation with social and spatial marginality resonated among an avant-garde mocked for its lifestyle experiments and criminalized for using cannabis and psychedelics.

Canyon’s craftsmen erected their “livingry” in an outlaw zone of their own making. Handmade homes assembled with flagrant disregard for building and zoning regulations championed ecological consciousness over consumer affluence, tribal clans over insular families, and circadian rhythms over clock-based lifestyles. These challenges to the established order triggered escalating counter-offensives in Northern California’s “Code Wars.” Strike teams composed of the county and federal officials armed with guns and bulldozers countered the threat of hippie builders wielding saws and hammers, revealing an intention to regulate much more than just construction, as Felicity Scott observes.<sup>13</sup> A raid on Canyon by building inspectors in February 1969 included an armed escort of sheriff deputies, three narcotics agents, child welfare social workers, and a dogcatcher brandishing a tranquilizer rifle.<sup>14</sup> Authorities targeted outlaw building sites less



as health and safety hazards than as materialized outposts of a parallel reality in which entrenched attitudes toward titled property, sexual propriety, nuclear families, drug use, and gender norms had been rendered null and void.

Residents of Canyon, a settlement perched high above Oakland, mounted years of organized resistance to demolition offensives intended to expand a municipal watershed district. Over the course of the 1960s, a protean collection of outlaw shelters joined the outmoded vacation cottages dotting slopes of second-growth redwoods. Newcomers included a barn-like citadel framed in heavy timber, a cluster of plywood domes, patchwork cabins walled with salvaged windows, an A-frame resembling an overturned ship's hull, treehouses, and assorted shacks and shanties. Canyon's construction fraternity orbited around Dave Lynn (later known as Deva Rajan), who marveled: "Canyon is loaded with carpenters. That and Indian musicians."<sup>15</sup> While working on a graduate degree in arts practice at Berkeley in the mid-'60s, Lynn freelanced as a carpenter. A lecture by Walter Horn, an art history professor and scholar of medieval architecture, exposed Lynn to European traditions of timber barn construction: a legacy reflected in his work thanks to inexpensive supplies of heavy timber from razed local buildings.<sup>16</sup> Wood structures created by Russian colonial settlers at Fort Ross, 100 miles to the north, also proved inspirational.<sup>17</sup> After purchasing a condemned home in Canyon, Lynn fought building inspection demolition threats by promising local television coverage of the forced removal of his pregnant wife: a tactical use of media to which his neighbors would return repeatedly in the years to come. In 1966, Lynn founded Canyon Construction, a contracting firm that employed the community's craftsmen at top wages. By limiting contract work to six months out of the year, Lynn made his "separate peace" with capitalism without fully endorsing its culture of commodified time.<sup>18</sup>

One Canyon home, more than any other, demonstrated outlaw architecture's vanguard aesthetics in ways impossible to replicate, or perhaps even imagine, within professional design practice. Its owner-builder was Barry Smith, a lifelong anti-war and anti-nuclear activist; member of the IWW or "Wobblies," an anti-authoritarian labor union; and co-founder of "the Water Brothers," a hippie shareholder association that, through ads placed in the Berkeley Barb, assembled investors to successfully outbid the East Bay Municipal Utility District for a land purchase critical to the survival of the Canyon community.<sup>19</sup> Smith had studied

aeronautical engineering at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and worked at Standard Oil in Richmond, before dropping out to live in a shanty at Big Sur. Moving to Canyon, he learned building trades to gain “a basic feeling for materials and an understanding of how things were put together.” On a road trip to Mississippi with friends from the Wobblies on a mission to rebuild a community church, Smith made a stop in Arizona at Arcosanti, Paolo Soleri’s prototype “arcology”: a neologism fusing “architecture” and “ecology.” Dazzled by Soleri’s materialized utopia, Smith pursued an Arcosanti internship the next summer and returned to Canyon ready to build his own home. Atop an existing set of concrete retaining walls cut into a steep hillside, he constructed a platform from wrecking yard boards and shaded it with a canopy built of eucalyptus poles culled from the site. Vertically stacked day and night spaces provided a lower sleeping area sheltered from winter rains and an open pavilion above for daily life. Both floors were totally open on the home’s downhill side, capturing views of a forested ravine and reflecting a taste for “living without walls” acquired during a four-month lockup in a Santa Rita jail.<sup>20</sup> Improvised from salvaged materials with new finds guiding each successive step, Smith’s home defied the usual process of plan submission and acquisition of permits before construction.

Photos and descriptions in books and periodicals attest to the Smith Home’s notoriety.<sup>21</sup> A compelling set of color photographs appears in the 1973 pictorial *Handmade Houses: A Guide to the Woodbutcher’s Art*. Author Art Boericke and photographer Barry Shapiro scoured Northern California for D.I.Y. masterpieces built in flagrant violation of building codes and local zoning regulations. Aware that inspectors could use their book as a hit list of illegal construction sites, Boericke’s text identifies neither building owners nor locations.<sup>22</sup> Shapiro’s exterior photograph of the Smith House, shot in precise alignment with the floor plane separating day and night zones, emphasizes its most striking feature: a saddle-shaped roof, rustic in construction but sophisticated in its hyperbolic paraboloid geometry. Smith acknowledged as precedent the Mexican work of a contemporary architect, Felix Candela, renowned for his sculptural expressions of Latin American Futurism.<sup>23</sup> Blurring distinctions between “First World” and “Third World” material cultures, Smith celebrated the warped wooden framework used in casting Candela’s monolithic shell structures. In the Global South, the symbolic modernity of thin-shell concrete demanded visual suppression of their massive

investment in semi-skilled labor, a sleight-of-hand accomplished by burnishing cast forms to produce smooth surfaces that proclaimed the technological prowess that heralded an incipient era of rapid economic development. Smith's appropriation warps the form anew, using it to celebrate a trash-based material culture of subsistence and scavenging unexpectedly situated in the Global North.

Smith's primitive hut, a hybrid of prospector's shanty and modernist pavilion, reinterpreted *Sunset* magazine's iconic notion of Californian outdoor living for the acid-fueled ecofreaks of an Aquarian age. Whatever its relationship to the Primitive Hut canonized by the Enlightenment theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier, this was no manifesto for an architecture purged of artifice.<sup>24</sup> Rather than invoking Laugier's myth of archaic purity, Smith acknowledged his shelter's position in an age of excess and its profligate waste. In his most striking image, Boerike composed a glowing still life centered on the Smith kitchen's Escher-like maze of plumbing: a declaration of independence from the Uniform Building Code that telegraphed outlaw virtuosity rather than an "inlaw" builder's ineptitude. The battered phantasmagoria provoked estrangement, particularly within a culture that fetishized the suburban kitchen and its consumer technology as signifiers of the good life provided by corporate capitalism: a claim made explicit in Richard Nixon's 1959 "Kitchen Debate" with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.<sup>25</sup> Like the ragged "sculpture pavilions" created by Thomas Hirschhorn decades later, Smith's kitchen revels in a sensorium fashioned from the upended contents of what Hirschhorn called "the capitalist garbage bucket."<sup>26</sup> Its slapdash quality is more apparent than real: Smith invested far more time and effort in crafting his surrealist galley than is needed to plumb a standard sink and faucet. Providing clues to the constructive and aesthetic logic of the Smith House, the sink and its splashboard are "tell-the-tale details," a term coined by theorist Marco Frascari for metonymic building elements that constitute "the minimal units of signification in the architectural production of meanings."<sup>27</sup> Flickering between art and detritus, Smith's domestic collage violates modernism's purist sensibilities not out of hardship, but on principle.

Boerike's photograph of this interior detail is as aesthetically informed as to the contorted roof above it. He frames pipes, pressure gauges, scavenged implements, and a scatter of wall-hung objects--a teardrop of mirrored glass set on muslin, a curled and yellowed photograph, a can bristling with pencils, a flattened kettle--

as funk assemblage, a Bay Area aesthetic that critic Peter Plagens calls “the first home-grown California modern art.”<sup>28</sup> A San Francisco avant-garde coalesced in the late-1950s around practices of coaxing art from refuse. Bruce Conner, one of its pioneers, dubbed his circle the Rat Bastard Protective Association: a name inspired by the Scavenger’s Protective Association, a trashman’s union. Connor was quite literally a garbage collector, scrounging assemblage material from Victorians slated for demolition by misguided urban redevelopment authorities. In *Looking Glass* (1964), he holds a mirror to mass culture, reflecting back its portrait in detritus. Conner dubbed his aesthetic “funk,” and soon moved on to filmmaking, editing together scraps of found footage to prove that assemblage was a method applicable to any medium.<sup>29</sup> His sculpture appeared in the 1967 Berkeley Art Museum exhibition *Funk*, staged just as Smith was pursuing an architecture of funk assemblage in nearby Canyon. In the exhibition’s catalog, curator Peter Selz asked: “What is funk?” One exhibited artist replied: “Funk is concerned with man and the funk image of man is the final inversion... It’s a groove to stick your finger down your throat and see what comes up. This is funk.”<sup>30</sup> The provocation was unerringly accurate for both Connor’s sculpture and Smith’s house. Both stick a finger into the resource stream that transforms commodities into waste products, displaying what comes up.

The results shock modernist sensibilities. As a developmental regime, modernity insists that waste never be seen, pondered, or touched: its middens vanish by design. Bauhaus master László Moholy-Nagy correlated hygiene to visual culture in his 1925 pronouncement that “the hygiene of the optical, the health of the visible, is slowly filtering through.” The trauma of the 1918-19 global influenza pandemic no doubt accounts for much of modernism’s fixation on hygiene.<sup>31</sup> Half a century later, Bay Area artists inverted their sensibilities in response to the epidemic now called “affluenza.” The Bay Area’s prodigious consumer surplus underwrote Smith’s trash-based lifestyle, from construction materials to home furnishings and provisions. “It’s a very rich area, brimming over with garbage, and a lot of it’s usable,” he informed an interviewer. “A lot of it’s edible.”<sup>32</sup> Like Beat Assemblage artists a decade earlier, Smith worked with the atavistic materiality of detritus. Junk does not whisper what it wants to be, as Louis Kahn said of a brick’s aspirational future, but instead proclaims what has been, regurgitating a clot of undigested pasts. In a society that fetishizes consumer novelty, building

with debris entails a “disturbance of the sensible,” as Jacques Rancière says of his concept of “dissensus.”<sup>33</sup> In deploying funk to stage an aesthetic confrontation with consumption’s solid waste, the repressed Janus face of mass affluence, Connor and Smith shattered the tabula rasa ideology and purist sensibility of modernism. Both outlaw makers deployed trash to tap temporalities and layers of affect absent from chaste, first-use materials.

The Smith House was no less an inhabited sculptural installation than Drop City. Built at a crossroads where Canyon’s outlaw builders bordered an older zone of cottage residents, Smith’s open-air dwelling showcased an idiosyncratic theater of the everyday. Anyone walking by was welcome to eavesdrop upon his rituals of domesticity, “observe him tinkering at the large workbench beside his entrance or call down to him for a drink of water, which he’ll let you draw from a strange, convoluted faucet,” as Canyon’s chronicler John van der Zee noted. This spectacle of privacy deprivation was open to public participation as well as the public gaze: “His parties are enthusiastically regarded as the best in Canyon, yet his privacy remains intact. It seems to spill outward like lava, absorbing everything it comes in contact with, then cooling into stone, an unconcealed fact of the landscape, requiring no protection of its own.”<sup>34</sup>

A 1971 portrait of Smith and his partner bathing, shot by Magnum photographer Bruce Davidson, documents their disruption of bourgeois household etiquette. A bathtub, ejected from its lavatory quarantine, is shown nesting precariously above a forested slope. The dislocated fixture and unabashed gaze of its users deconstruct middle-class domesticity by demolishing conventions of visual propriety. Smith’s public staging of the everyday while encased in post-consumer debris transgressed architectural modernism, yet resides comfortably in contemporary art production. In blurring the boundaries between performance and building arts and in rethinking domesticity and spectatorship, Smith’s home was an open platform in both the architectural and polemical senses, anticipating trends in aesthetic production away from static objects and toward discursive interaction, dramaturgy, and relational environments. “The role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real,” curator, critic, and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud asserts. “Nowadays, modernity extends into the practices of cultural do-it-yourself and into recycling, into the invention of the everyday and the development of time lived.”<sup>35</sup>

Rather than an architectural outlier, the Smith house alternately can be positioned at the core of emergent contemporary aesthetic practices cultivating “small-scale, interactive, D.I.Y. [do-it-yourself] art (and art-like output) that is concerned less with high art style or confrontational politics and more with tentative explorations of temporality, place, affiliation, and affect – the ever-more-uncertain conditions of living within contemporaneity on a fragile planet,” according to art historian and theorist Terry Smith.<sup>36</sup> If, as he maintains, shifts from modernism to contemporaneity were prefigured in the 1960s, Barry Smith’s Canyon home merits consideration as a fully developed precursor of the aesthetic sensibilities and practices that are shaping the art of an Anthropocene era.

## Endnotes

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16. Dave [Rajan], "Dave," in Annabelle Williams et. al., eds., *Handmade Lives: A Collective Memoir* (San Francisco, Firefall, 2002), 53-4.
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# TOWARDS NON-EUROCENTRIC HISTORIOGRAPHIES: CHALLENGING EUROPE'S POSITION IN THE FORMATION OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIES

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## Abstract

The point of departure for this paper is the idea that Europe as a concept is related to the project of thinking and accomplishing universality. It represents the potential for an enlightened resistance in a world that is progressively becoming dominated by the mono-perspectivism of globalism. In this sense, Eurocentrism is specifiable only within the context of modernity and is crucial for thinking modernity. The tendency of architectural historiographies to place Eurocentric narratives under critical scrutiny since the dissolution of colonialist models is accompanied by the questioning of the earlier *Zeitgeist* theories, which had served to legitimize modernism. By depicting Europe and the West as a homogeneous power of domination over the rest of the world, postcolonial criticism turns Europe into the blind spot of its own discourse. The colonialist character of dichotomies, such as western/non-western or Eurocentric/non-Eurocentric, becomes evident if we bear in mind that various societies have adopted aspects of western modernity without fully adopting them, fitting them into the indigenous culture. The tension between the scientific ethos of the historian's task, which demands a commitment free of preconceptions and value judgments, and the political function of the project of history, which is based on a certain social order, has always existed since the emergence of the profession of the historian. The objective of the paper is to explore the place of the aforementioned tension within the framework of the efforts of architectural historians to shape models of architectural historiography that manage to challenge the western canon, it is indispensable to avoid labels such as "other" or colonial. Particular emphasis is placed on the complicity of architecture with structures of power and dominant ideological agendas in society.

## Keywords

Eurocentrism, *Zeitgeist*, Universality, Models of Architectural Historiography, modernity

## Introduction: On Eurocentrism and its problems

The starting point of this paper is the idea that models of architectural historiography that intend to challenge Eurocentrism should place particular emphasis on revealing the different agents that contributed to the realization of architectural and urban projects under study<sup>1</sup>. Archival research plays a major role in bringing to light the aspects concerning these different agents. Moreover, the study of primary sources should include investigation in archival sources that represent both western and non-western as well as both Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric perspectives<sup>2</sup>. Europe, as a concept, represents the potential for an enlightened resistance in a world that is progressively becoming dominated by the mono-perspectivism of globalism. The educational mission of the nineteenth century university should be interpreted in relation to the ideals of Enlightenment, which are at the core of the task of the historian to challenge the articulations between will, authority, and the use of reason. According to Anthony D. King, “[p]ostcolonial criticism may be briefly described as an oppositional form of knowledge that critiques Eurocentric conceptions of the world”<sup>3</sup>. Taking into account the idea that, as Dipesh Chakrabarty remarks, in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*, “Europe [...] has already been provincialized by history itself”<sup>4</sup>, the paper aims to render explicit that, during the last four and a half decades, in many cases, the endeavours to incorporate post-colonialist criticism into architectural discourse failed to go beyond the peril of “provincializing” Europe.

Edmund Husserl’s work and more particularly *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* are pivotal for understanding the notion of Europe<sup>5</sup>. The latter was centred on the following question: “Can we live in this world, where historical occurrence is nothing but an unending concatenation of illusory progress and bitter disappointment?”<sup>6</sup>. Among his most significant analyses of the notion of Europe is that presented during a lecture he delivered on 10 May 1935 in Vienna. In this lecture, which was entitled “Philosophy **and the Crisis of European Man**” and is also known as “The Vienna Lecture”, Husserl argued that “Europe itself [...] [was] [...] in critical condition.”<sup>7</sup> At the core of the reflections he developed during this lecture, he addressed the following question “How is the spiritual image of Europe to be characterized?”<sup>8</sup>. As he mentioned in his speech the way he used the term did not refer to Europe as a geographic

entity, but in a “spiritual sense”, to borrow his own words. More specifically, he understood Europe as “the unity of a spiritual life and a creative activity - with all its aims, interests, cares and troubles, with its plans, its establishments, its institutions”<sup>9</sup>. He tried to examine which was “[t]he spiritual image of Europe”<sup>10</sup> at that specific historical time, referring to a “spiritual telos of European Man”<sup>11</sup>.

Dominic Sachsenmaier, in “Global History and Critiques of Western Perspectives”, analyses, among other issues, the global turn in architectural historiography. A remark of Sachsenmaier, in the aforementioned article, that is useful for exploring how non-Eurocentric architectural historiography models would be possible is his thesis that “transcultural history do not want to continue the Eurocentric paradigms that characterized most of universal history”<sup>12</sup>. The problem of Eurocentrism became a historiographic problem in the nineteenth century in line with other concurrent themes such as “exotism,” “orientalism,” “archaeology,” and “culturalism.” Sir Banister Fletcher’s *History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* is a good illustration of the Eurocentric biases of architectural historiography, periodization, and classification.<sup>13</sup> More than forty years before the publication of Sir Banister Fletcher’s *History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, James Fergusson published *The Illustrated Handbook of Architecture*, which aimed to provide “a concise and popular account of the different styles of architecture prevailing in all ages and countries.”<sup>14</sup> Fergusson’s three volumes of *A History of Architecture in all Countries, from The Earliest Times to The Present Day* was an attempt to write a comprehensive survey of world architecture.<sup>15</sup> Despite his interest in writing about non-Western architecture such as the Indian architecture, as Peter Kohane has remarked, “[c]entral to [...] [Fergusson’s] stereotypical account of the East as Other is the assumed superiority of European civilization.”<sup>16</sup> Kohane has also noted that Fergusson’s “gaze is that of an enlightened Westerner, who momentarily delights in a strange, confused, and claustrophobic spatial experience, but ultimately remains in control.”<sup>17</sup>

Immanuel Wallerstein, in “Eurocentrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science”, related “non-Eurocentric [...] structure of knowledge [to] [...] a more inclusively universalist vision of human possibility.”<sup>18</sup> Wallerstein distinguishes five ways of understanding Eurocentrism in social sciences. The first way has to do with historiography, the second is related to universalism, the third is associated with issues of civilization, the fourth is closely connected with the

concept of orientalism and the fifth has to do with progress. The main argument of Wallerstein is that “modern world-system has developed structures of knowledge that are significantly different from previous structures of knowledge”<sup>19</sup>. Wallerstein maintained that “[w]hat is specific to the structures of knowledge in the world-system is the concept of the ‘two cultures’”, arguing that “[n]o other historical system has instituted a fundamental divorce between science and philosophy/humanities.”<sup>20</sup>

### **The task of historicising globalisation**

Robert Young claims that “total, or, elsewhere, global, history assumes a spatio-temporal continuity between all phenomena, and a certain homogeneity between them insofar as they all express the same form of historicity”<sup>21</sup>. The task of historicising globalisation goes hand in hand with the questioning of the role of the sources, on the one hand, and with the exploration of the possibilities and limits of the transnational perspective in historical research, on the other<sup>22</sup>. A seminal book for grasping how historians can challenge Eurocentrism is Peter Gran’s *Beyond Eurocentrism: A New View of Modern World History*, in which the author argues that social history played an important role in the development of the critiques towards Eurocentric models of writing history<sup>23</sup>.

The notions of place, nation, identity do no longer seem sufficient for architectural historiographies. Useful for establishing non-Eurocentric methods of writing architectural history are the debates about transnational historiography, which focuses on exploring the mutations of ideas through their circulation and their incorporation in different national and institutional concepts<sup>24</sup>. The syncretic dynamic of the ways that urban forms, function as condensed expressions of the conflicts, dialogized or not, between different cultural landscapes, architectural expressions, desires, and ideologies are evoked through their unavoidably material representation of the crossings and interactions of the forces that are involved in their formation. Architectural and urban historians should try to trust the potential and communicative force of the artifacts to transmit what is in the air at a specific moment acting as condensers of the interaction between the social, economic, and political parameters that affect the perception and all the stages of concretization of architectural and urban artifacts from their conception to their materialization. How the movement of people, ideas, technologies,

and institutions across national boundaries influences these fractal movements between material expression and textual interpretation and between intention for autonomy and intention for heteronomy? How could the concept of “microphysics of power” (*microphysique du pouvoir*) of Michel Foucault<sup>25</sup> and the concept of “micropolitics of desire” (*micropolitique du désir*) of Félix Guattari<sup>26</sup> contribute to architectural and urban historians’s efforts to grasp these movements of hunting of the concept of progress in the evolution of architecture and urbanism?

To understand how problematic are dichotomies as western/non-western and Eurocentric/non-Eurocentric for architectural historiography, we should not forget that different societies adopted aspects of western modernity without fully adopting them. The rejection of colonialist models of writing architectural history goes hand in hand with the endeavour of placing Eurocentric narratives and Zeitgeist theories under critical scrutiny. In parallel, the efforts dichotomies as western/non-western and Eurocentric/non-Eurocentric in architectural history are accompanied by an intention to scrutinize the interactions between architecture, on the one hand, and structures of power and dominant ideological agendas in the societies under study, on the other.

Spiro Kostof, in *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, included both non-monumental and non-western traditions in architectural survey, and aimed to challenge the western canon in writing architectural history<sup>27</sup>. However, Kostof’s perspective in the aforementioned book remained quite Eurocentric. An aspect that is central when architectural historians are called to choose a type of structure while writing an architectural history book is the structure according to which they would organise their survey. A case that is useful for reflecting on the potentials of different structures is Jean-Louis Cohen’s *The Future of Architecture since 1889*<sup>28</sup>, in which the author adopted a narrative structure based on Fernand Braudel’s conception of multidimensional “planes”<sup>29</sup>. Cohen’s main objective in this book was to incorporate in his historiographical perspective the multiple and overlapping temporalities that characterise the evolution of our understanding of architecture. Kenneth Frampton, in the fifth edition of *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, intended to “widen the scope [...] in order to redress the Eurocentric and transatlantic bias of previous editions of this history”<sup>30</sup>.

## Comparing the notions of *Zeitgeist*, episteme, *dispositif* and *Kunstwollen*

The recognition that historiographical methodologies in architecture and urbanism cannot be based on a genealogy of *Zeitgeist* moments goes hand in hand with the idea that architectural histories that were based on the discourse on *Zeitgeist* failed to challenge the dichotomy between the aesthetic dimension and the functional dimension of architecture and urbanism. Thinking architectural and urban histories beyond the *Zeitgeist* is related to the questioning of the notion of progress. Each of regimes that the historian tries to understand is characterized by its own specific systems. A key question that emerges when architectural and urban historians attempt to compare regimes in different national and cultural contexts are the following: is there a certain inner structure or ordering among the paradigms or the case studies that the historians aim to construe? And if the answer to this question is positive then an additional challenging question comes to light: is it possible to conceive a kind of commensurability among paradigms?

To understand the differences of the different historiographical models analyses in the present paper, it is of pivotal importance to examine the affinities and variances of the concepts of *Zeitgeist*, *episteme*, *dispositif* and *Kunstwollen*. A common characteristic of the aforementioned notions is the fact that their emergence is related to the intention to show that there are certain problems that correspond to a specific historic time. These concepts share an understanding of the creative activity – in our case of the activity of creation of architectural and urban artefacts – not as the result of the genius or the talent of a creator but as an expression of an epoch. For instance, “[t]he term *Zeitwille* expresses simultaneously a Schopenhauerian ‘will of the age’ and a ‘will of time.’” Moreover, the “concept of *Zeitgeist* is related to the ‘formation of modern politics’”<sup>31</sup> and to the intention to “capture key aspects of how ideas are disseminated within societies and across border, providing a way of reading history horizontally”<sup>32</sup>. To better grasp the notion of *Zeitgeist* and how closely related is to the dominance of Western ideals, we can bring to mind Gevork Hartoonian’s remark that “[t]he social *Weltanschauung* grasped by artists was expected to map historical contingencies: meaning that the ‘world view’ should be considered as part of a broader process of historical development constructive for the evolution of the ‘I’ of a Western subject”<sup>33</sup>.

Sigfried Giedion, in *Space, Time, and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*<sup>34</sup>, tried to interpret modernism in architecture, through “a totalized vision of the spirit of the modern zeitgeist attributed to the work of avant-garde painters, and industrial products that were motivated by the Bauhaus’ teaching and the prevailing aesthetic theories”<sup>35</sup>.

A characteristic of the concept of *dispositif* is the fact that, apart from discursive forms of expression, also refers to non-discursive forms of expressions, such as the architectural drawings and architectural artefacts. Whereas the notion of *episteme* is primarily discursive in nature, the concept of *dispositif* is characterised by heterogeneity and an intention to capture the links between discursive and non-discursive aspects<sup>36</sup>. Here I refer to the concept of *dispositif* as understood by Michel Foucault. Gilles Deleuze remarks, in “What is a Dispositif?”:

*But what is a dispositif? In the first instance it is a tangle, a multilinear ensemble. It is composed of lines, each having a different nature. And the lines in the apparatus [dispositif] do not outline or surround systems which are each homogeneous in their own right, object, subject, language, and so on, but follow directions, trace balances which are always of balance, now drawing together and then distancing themselves from one another.*<sup>37</sup>

As Georges Didi-Huberman has remarked, in *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, the term *Kunstwollen* is translated as “artistic volition” or as “will-to-form”<sup>38</sup>. The concept of *Kunstwollen* comes from Alois Riegl’s “The Main Characteristics of the Late Roman *Kunstwollen*” (*Die Spätromische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn*)<sup>39</sup>. According to Christopher Wood, “*Kunstwollen* was Riegl’s loose way of designating the aesthetic impulse within culture, the aesthetic principles of an individual artist, or the aesthetic dimension of a given artefact”<sup>40</sup>. Following Margaret Iversen’s analysis of Riegl’s history and theory, in *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory*<sup>41</sup>, we could claim that the concept of *Kunstwollen* or artistic volition emerged as a counter-concept to narrowly empiricist and determinist histories of art that were dominant in his time.

## **Digital Curation and Intersectionality: Diversity in the Dissemination of Architectural Primary Resources**

Today, digital curatorship of the primary resources conserved at institutions such as the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), the Getty Research Institute (GRI)



and the Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo (MAXXI), among others, has become one of the most effective tools of dissemination of their agendas. The increasing importance of the role of digital curators within institutions holding architectural archives is accompanied by the necessity to shape digital curation agendas that are able to take into account diversity issues<sup>42</sup>. This means that architectural historians are called to elaborate tools coming from intersectional theory and practice in order to produce an understanding of how women and black men are represented in the digital curation of architectural drawings. The theory of intersectionality is useful for enhancing diversity in the dissemination of primary sources contained in architectural collections.

It is important for architectural historians to apply concepts and tools coming from the theory of intersectionality in order to examine how aspects concerning gender and race can be taken into account when establishing digital curatorship strategies. Visualisation strategies can show the evolution of the role of women and black people in architectural discourse. Putting into place digital curatorship ideas based on the incorporation of visual diagrams showing how often women, black men and social minorities appear in the database of the archives, how often they are involved in projects and how central a role they play within exhibitions is one of the ways that intersectionality can be applied to strategies and plans for digital curatorship. The use of visual diagrams as major components of online platforms could help their visitors to clearly and immediately grasp how different groups are represented in the primary sources and exhibition materials. An important factor that should be taken into account is that the aforementioned institutions are situated within a context having the following characteristics, which are contradictory to a certain extent: on the one hand, they hold in their collections archives of architects that are paradigmatic of the dominant discourse given the fact that they wish to acquire the fonds of architects that influenced and are significantly influencing the dominant discourse, but, on the other hand, they are called to shape interpretative models based on perspectives able to take into account diversity issues.

Intersectional theory draws upon Kimberlé Crenshaw's work. During recent years, the theory of intersectionality has been incorporated in digital humanities and digital labour studies. A seminal text by Crenshaw in her article entitled "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against

Women of Color”, published in *Stanford Law Review* in 1991. In this article, Crenshaw argued that “both women and people of color” are marginalized by “discourses that are shaped to respond to one [identity] or the other”<sup>43</sup>, rather than both. Most recently, the theory of intersectionality was introduced into the digital humanities in order to address issues regarding gender and race conjointly. As far as the field of architecture is concerned, the question of race is becoming more present in ongoing debates, as is evidenced by the recently published book *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*<sup>44</sup>, edited by Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II and Mabel O. Wilson, and projects such as the Black Architects Archive (BAA) by Jay Cephas, whose aim was to collect and display the work of Black architects across history in an effort to bring to light underrepresented practitioners in architecture. The same is valid for the question of gender, as appears through the organisation of events including the symposium “The Fielding Architecture: Feminist Practices for a Decolonised Pedagogy”, which took place at the University of Brighton in June 2019, and the emergence of collectives such as Feminist Art and Architecture Collaborative, which in its manifest published in the *Harvard Design Magazine* describes itself as “a transnational coalition of feminists, awake to [...] [their] positioning as “Others” within the patriarchy; awake to [...] [their] exclusion from unmarked norm(s), awake to [their] [...] emergence from a history of subjugation, subordination, and colonization”<sup>45</sup>.

To respond to the necessity to address these issues of race and gender conjointly in the ongoing architectural debates, architectural historians are called to shape a method of digital curation bringing these aspects together. Recent developments in the domain of intersectional digital humanities would be useful for such an effort. An important benefit of tackling gender and race issues simultaneously is the capacity to “address the structural parameters that are set up when a homogeneous group has been at the center and don’t automatically engender understanding across forms of difference”<sup>46</sup>, as Moya Bailey has argued. A noteworthy characteristic of the intersectional perspective is the endeavour to interrogate its own positionality and the very processes of knowledge production. Digital curation strategies can unsettle existing assumptions about race, gender, class, ability, sexuality, or other categories of difference while interpreting the primary sources that are disseminated through online platforms.

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# ROBERT VENTURI'S CAMOUFLAGED ACADEMICISM

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## Abstract

In 1954, Robert Venturi won a Rome Prize fellowship from the American Academy, joining a centuries-old stream of multinational architects for whom a sponsored stay in Italy provided an educational capstone and a professional launching pad. Venturi pursued and embraced this opportunity with unusual determination and a distinctive double consciousness, committed equally to modernism and to positioning himself in strategic relation to architecture's academic heritage, even as this tradition underwent a postwar evolution. This dual allegiance, accompanied by criticality towards both ideologies, would be a defining aspect of the career he built after his return from the Academy in 1956, in which the Rome of both Colbert and Le Corbusier was a fixed fulcrum.

One early project that demonstrates the many tensions and possibilities of this intersection for Venturi is his Fire Station no. 4 in Columbus, Indiana (Venturi and Rauch, 1966-68). The design of this modest, familiar project fulfills the paradigmatic strictures of academicism with a hierarchical, axial, figural, and historically referential composition of traditional masonry and legible forms. Yet even as it accomplishes the strictures of Beaux-arts aesthetic dogma, his treatment of its volumes, surfaces, materials, and spatial arrangements addresses the demands of modernist orthodoxy with equal fidelity. One value shared by both systems that this structure confounds that of clarity. His seemingly lucid expression of two sets of ostensibly competing values operates as a form of camouflage for oscillating conceptual and aesthetic strategies. Unlike the servant in the parable faced with the paradox of serving two masters, Venturi did not come to hate the one and love the other. He instead forged his own non-synthesis, a form of subversive fidelity that would persist throughout a body of built work for which no label—academic, modernist, or postmodern—is entirely adequate.

## Keywords

Robert Venturi, Rome Prize, Beaux-arts Academicism, Fire Station No. 4 (Columbus, IND)

## Introduction

By many measures, Robert Venturi is obviously part of architecture's academic tradition, given his career-long association with the American Academy in Rome. It began in 1954, when he won its Rome Prize fellowship, a privately funded award established in 1894 to emulate the venerable French Prix de Rome.<sup>1</sup> This brought Venturi into a three-hundred-year-old multinational fraternity of architects, all of whom received lengthy, academy-sponsored stays that used Italy's artistic patrimony as an educational capstone and professional launching pad.

Venturi not only participated in a practice at the heart of the academic tradition; he leveraged it into international prominence and credited it for his achievements. This burnished the Rome Prize's reputation among late twentieth century architects and made the American Academy an epicenter of postmodernism. Despite his proud academic affiliation, Venturi did not adopt the label "academic" architect, but instead called himself "a Modern architect—not a Postmodern or neo-Beaux-Arts architect."<sup>2</sup> Why this disavowal? How does Venturi fit into architecture's mid-century academic legacy, and what does his inclusion reveal about these categories' contours?

## Journey to and from the Janiculum

Venturi postwar pursuit of a Rome Prize was unusually persistent. He won on his third attempt with a painstakingly revised essay that was uniquely lengthy, thoughtful, and purposeful. Although he had already visited Italy, and had other ways to arrange an extended stay, Venturi approached an Academy fellowship as a crucial career move.<sup>3</sup> Most contemporary architecture fellows, in contrast, were uncertain about the professional value of a sojourn on the Janiculum. Little wonder the Academy's postwar director called him "the perfect architect to send here."<sup>4</sup>

One thing that distinguished Venturi was an informed understanding of the Rome Prize's heritage. While many postwar architecture curricula limited historic discussion to modernism's operative genealogies, his education at Princeton reflected its position within a department of art history. Led by Jean Labatut, a graduate of the *École des Beaux-arts* in Paris and a 1926 Prix de Rome runner-up, it offered an expansive panorama of historic architecture.<sup>5</sup> This included lessons from one of America's few scholars of the Beaux-arts: Donald Drew Egbert, one

of Venturi's mentors.<sup>6</sup> While generations of American architects were educated in the Beaux-arts tradition and propagated its values, Egbert provided a historian's perspective, positioning France's academic system within its cultural and political context.<sup>7</sup> This included framing the Prix de Rome as the crowning honor of architecture's oldest and first globally influential educational system.<sup>8</sup>

Venturi's unusual historic awareness did not, however, make him an anachronism. Like his school's design program, he embraced modernism and interned for Louis Kahn and Eero Saarinen. They also shared a new perspective on the Rome Prize; both had firsthand knowledge of the American Academy's postwar efforts to shed its Beaux-arts reputation.<sup>9</sup> It had decoupled fellowships from analysis of classical architecture, and brought prominent modernists like Saarinen, Kahn, and George Howe to Rome.<sup>10</sup> Venturi also witnessed Howe and Kahn (who both reviewed Venturi's master's thesis in 1950) enjoy pivotal upswings in their careers following their Academy stays. Howe left Rome to lead Yale's architecture school in 1950, and after Kahn's 1951 return, he won the Yale Art Gallery project that launched his celebrated final two decades of practice.

Venturi thus acquired a dual consciousness regarding the Rome Prize.<sup>11</sup> He knew the powerful tradition of elite authority inherited from Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who designed Louis XIV's academy system to ensure French cultural preeminence, a machinery that persisted through a century of bloody revolutions.<sup>12</sup> Venturi also saw the American Academy generate contemporary success for Howe and Kahn, which reinforced another influential message from his foremost modernist hero. Le Corbusier's "The Lesson of Rome" in *Vers une architecture* of 1923 presents the Eternal City as a place where architects can discern the essence of architectural greatness—pure, sublime form—and the inspiring genius of Michelangelo. Yet what probably made Le Corbusier's vision of Rome most compelling for the young, ambitious Venturi was its ambivalence. Unlike the unalloyed perfection of the Athenian Acropolis, Rome's lessons lie beneath misleading surfaces, testing whether an architect has discerning "eyes that can see." Le Corbusier also denigrates academicism: he calls the Villa Medici, home to France's Prix de Rome artists since Napoleon, the "cancer of French architecture," and declares that sending young architects to Rome will maim them.

Le Corbusier's ambivalent essay thus attacked the Beaux-arts and exalted Michelangelo, an artist that academics since Blondel had condemned for his dange-



rous rule-breaking, while also endorsing academicism's underpinnings in antiquity and ideal formal principles.<sup>13</sup> His paradoxical argument claimed the foundations of academic authority for modernism. It also prefigured how the postwar American Academy worked to reconcile itself with a new era. By shedding classical discipline for open-ended individual exploration, its redefined Rome Prize wove the vision of Le Corbusier into that of Colbert.

### Post-Academy pseudo-academicism

Venturi's hybrid fellowship was "traditional" in its location and interdisciplinary community. It was also "modern": aesthetic freedom supplanted elaborate *en-vois*, attracting neo-Bauhaus architects from Harvard and MIT. Venturi immersed himself in Rome and Italy and travelled from Egypt to Sweden to Spain, visiting sites from all eras, from antiquity to Le Corbusier's just-completed Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp. He also interacted with the Academy's stimulating circle: architectural historian Richard Krautheimer, a late antique specialist and baroque enthusiast; Milanese architect Ernesto Rogers, a modernist rooted in his Italian context; and dozens more architects, artists, and classical scholars, experiences documented in photographs and reflective letters home.<sup>14</sup>

In 1956, Venturi returned from Rome determined to make his hard-won stay pay dividends. He spent the next decade establishing a practice, running his family business, teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, and processing his ideas into a book manuscript. His 1966 "gentle manifesto" *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* may have fulfilled Vincent Scully's hyperbolic characterization as the successor to Le Corbusier's (less gentle) manifesto of 1923. As Venturi's reputation soared through work with Denise Scott Brown (including their *Learning from Las Vegas* of 1972 with Steven Izenour), he remained involved with the American Academy, returning as a resident, and serving on Rome Prize juries and as a trustee.<sup>15</sup> But his most valuable service was his success, manifest in his (solo) 1991 Pritzker Prize and oft-expressed gratitude.<sup>16</sup> By the late 1970s, Venturi was the emblem of a revitalized Rome Prize, a paragon of the "academic architect" for the newly minted postmodern era.

While Venturi consistently resisted the label "postmodern" (convincingly or not), he neither accepted or rejected the title "academic", a term he wielded less freely than "classical."<sup>17</sup> He brought the two together most directly in a 1978 discussion, delivered

at one of many events following the Museum of Modern Art's 1975 exhibition on Beaux-arts architecture.<sup>18</sup> Venturi began "Learning the Right Lessons from the Beaux-Arts" by declaring, as usual, that he and Scott Brown (who had delivered her scathing "Learning the Wrong Lessons from the Beaux-Arts" the night before) "consider ourselves part of the Modern movement, evolving within it." Venturi credited Princeton with teaching him to see himself as "part of a historical evolution...that today's rear guard can be tomorrow's avant-garde".<sup>19</sup> He positioned himself within modernism as not a definitive revolution, but a tradition holding internal changes (including his own contributions), whose external status oscillates with surrounding events, as radicals take over Parliament and become a new establishment.

Yet Venturi also said that: "in a general way architects are always modern, modern with a small 'm,'" and that "the architects of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, in all its periods, considered themselves modern."<sup>20</sup> This equated lowercase "modern" with something nearly universal, conscious participation in one's own moment, an index of creative intention rather than artistic results. We find (no surprise) a seeming contradiction: he claims participation in a capital-M Modern movement, whose nature and position are in flux; yet he also calls Beaux-Arts architects "modern," at least in their own estimation.

Venturi's hazy distinction of "modern" and "academic" carries into a discussion of projects in relation to Beaux-arts principles. He compares the Football Hall of Fame to Labrouste's Bibliothèque St. Geneviève, both with nave-like interiors and exterior surfaces presenting legible signage. The Tucker house in rural New York (1975) is "both Classical and classic. Classical because of its central focus and essential symmetry and its monumentality considering its small size; classic because of the conventional quality of its form and its elements".<sup>21</sup> He defines capital-C Classical architecture through "compositional unity and symmetry, big scale, and hierarchies of conventional elements", generalizing Beaux-arts design principles apart from design language.<sup>22</sup> His lowercase "classic" refers to something even more pervasive: use of visual conventions that could derive from anywhere.

Venturi ends "Learning the Right Lessons from the Beaux-Arts" with a proposed plaza for Washington D.C.'s Pennsylvania Avenue, a project he ties to the French baroque era.<sup>23</sup> But rather than the capital "C" classicism of the French Academy's founding architects, he invokes its counterpoint, "another method in the [French] Baroque tradition, that of André Le Nôtre" who in the gardens at

Versailles “placed nothing central at the end of the principal axis” but “made the combination of open space and bare horizon positive by framing the vista with two sets of trees.” Venturi invokes the same strategy for his design: two freestanding pylons frame a distant view of the Capitol dome, the resulting void a counterpoint to that terminating focus. The pylons’ panel-like thinness “contradict[s] their Classical symbolism on the front,” creating “a Classical solution to a Classical program. But it is not too Classical”.<sup>24</sup> Venturi’s Beaux-arts tradition is Janus-faced, its rules a source of legitimacy and an authority to resist through subversion. Yet it is not tyrannical, but a flexible, multifaceted system with a range of available ideas to invoke.

Venturi calls one project “classical” in a distinct way. He describes the Fire Station No. 4 in Columbus, Indiana (1966–8) saying: “while most of the buildings I have been describing here have been Classical ducks, this is a Classical decorated shed”.<sup>25</sup> In Classical “ducks”, like the Tucker house and twinned Nantucket homes, iconic domestic forms operate as three-dimensional symbols, while the fire station’s enclosing volumes are derived from the functions within. A site-driven trapezoidal plan contains three volumes: one large box is the apparatus room for firefighting vehicles; a much shorter one houses a dormitory and living areas, domestic spaces for humans. A tall hose-drying tower stands between. “This economical shed,” as Venturi described it, encloses no extraneous volume. But it features one extraneous element: a tall “parapet” extending the residential half’s height to mirror the other side. This, plus fenestration in two distinct scales, produced what Venturi called “a distortedly symmetrical composition around a central axis in the form of a hose tower.” The extended façade and campanile-like tower produced layers of associations: he mentions *palazzini pubblici* and false fronts from Lombard cathedrals and the American west.<sup>26</sup> It also gave academic compositional hierarchy to an prosaically pragmatic arrangement.

The flat envelope of this “Classical decorated shed” contains further depths. Venturi noted that Beaux-arts classicism “always employed a conventional vocabulary of elements; we do here too, although our elements are symbolically ordinary rather than monumental”.<sup>27</sup> The fire station’s conventional elements are its garage door and the legibly residential windows marking the kitchen and lounge, mirroring fenestration at his mother’s house. As these openings puncture the brick veneer, they also interrupt another compositional layer, which Stanislaus

von Moos described as “a second ‘graphic’ façade of white-glazed brick [applied] to screen the building’s squat, supermarketlike proportions” to “signify the station’s importance as a public building.” Von Moos called this a “conceptual” wall, a “partly real, partly ‘ghost’ façade...that is not physically there”, associations evoking abstraction.<sup>28</sup> Venturi instead rooted this element’s significance in yet another, heretofore uninvoked aspect of the classical: “its glazed brick ornament juxtaposes ideal proportions upon the facade that the real functions inside the building would not permit.”<sup>29</sup> His false front and blank white surface are screens on which modernist and academic ideals can be projected simultaneously, recalling Colin Rowe on Le Corbusier’s Villa Schwob.<sup>30</sup> Through its hierarchy, figuration, and legibility, the fire station fulfills the paradigmatic strictures of Beaux-arts aesthetic dogma. Yet Venturi’s treatment of its organization, volumes, surfaces, and materials addresses modernism’s ideals with equal fidelity.

### **Academic ambivalence**

One value academicism and modernism often share, which this structure rejects, is clarity. Venturi’s preferred flavor of classicism was, famously, its most ambiguous. Mannerism provided a paradigm for simultaneous adherence to and subversion of orthodoxies, a pedigree that dignified his pious heresies.<sup>31</sup> Venturi began the Columbus Fire Station design while finalizing *Complexity and Contradiction*, whose discussions of mannerism and conceptual framework were shaped by Wylie Sypher’s *Four Stages of Renaissance Style*.<sup>32</sup> This study devotes equal attention to the fourth and final stage of seventeenth century “academic” classicism. Sypher, who preferred “late-baroque” over “academic” or “neoclassical,” considered this a “residue” that is “implicit in the baroque,” but also modifies its excesses. He believed it attempted “to impose ‘regularity’” through a codification that “returns to the tectonic principles of renaissance art.”<sup>33</sup> As a mode to be understood on its own terms, Sypher’s view of (early) academicism echoes Egbert’s curiosity rather than Le Corbusier’s hostility, his reference to lucid structure adding another link with modernist values.

Sypher added to Venturi’s many available reasons to style himself an “academic” architect. Its regressive aura in the 1960s U.S. would have sweetened the deal, making it as subversive as the “ugly and ordinary” he and Scott Brown claimed as a slogan. Why, then, did he eschew “academic” while embracing both “mo-

dern” and “classic”, knowing these categories were close, if competitive, siblings? I propose that Venturi hoped, once again, to follow Le Corbusier through work that generates a “both/and” by holding opposing forces in dynamic suspension. To do so, however, those forces must be distinct, which pitted Venturi’s creative ambition against his appreciation of academicism’s inherent ambiguities. Le Corbusier could blithely declare the Beaux-arts a melodramatic villain to modernism’s hero, but Venturi knew better.

Instead of adopting “academic” or pretending to misunderstand it, Venturi chose camouflage. He called himself a modernist to claim avant-garde legitimacy through eyes that saw new value in the rococo; a classicist whose work elevated commercial realism; a functionalist who fulfilled its ethos while looking nothing like its icons; a mannerist cloaking rule-breaking in the guise of orthodoxy. If this suggests the capricious detachment, like the Beaux-arts eclecticism of his costume-changing pavilion (a “garden party of the styles”), I contend that Venturi avoided the “academic” label because it hit too close to the mark. His commitment to reconciling architectural opposites to achieve meaningful quality was intense, sincere, and enduring, as his frequent repetition of Mies’ thoroughly academic appeal to be “good rather than original” shows.<sup>34</sup>

Venturi’s pragmatic, monumental “classical decorated shed” in Indiana is not only a snapshot revealing how he refused to hate one master to serve the other, as the parable of the servant demands. This humbly aspirational firehouse holds competing conceptual and aesthetic strategies in abeyance, allowing him to simultaneously claim and disavow the modern and the classical, exposing a subversive, fully “academic” fidelity to both Le Corbusier and Colbert. Venturi’s faithful non-synthesis of two entwined ideologies gave their kinship new form in the postmodern era.

## Endnotes

1. For histories of the American Academy and architecture fellowships, see Alan and Lucia Valentine, *The American Academy in Rome, 1894-1969* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1973); Fikret Yegül, *Gentlemen of Instinct and Breeding: Architecture at the American Academy in Rome 1894-1940* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Annie and Gabriel Verger, *Dictionnaire biographique des pensionnaires de l’Académie de France à Rome 1666-1968*. 3 vols. Rome: Académie de France à Rome et Dijon: Éditions de l’Échelle de Jacob, 2011. Windholz, Angela. *Et in Academia Ego: Ausländische Akademien in Rom zwischen künstlerischer Standortbestimmung und nationaler Repräsentation*. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2008

2. Robert Venturi, "Learning the Right Lessons from the Beaux-Arts," in *A View from the Campidoglio: Selected Essays 1953-1984*, ed. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 70.
3. "I Will Try My Best to Make It Worth It": Robert Venturi's Road to Rome," *Journal of Architectural Education* 70, 2 (October 2016): 269-283. In 1958, architect Ronald Dirsmith also won a fellowship on his third attempt; see my "The Lessons of Rome: Architects at the American Academy, 1947-1966" (PhD diss, The Pennsylvania State University, 2009). For Venturi's 1948 and 1952 trips to Italy, see Rosa Sessa, *Robert Venturi e l'Italia: Educazione, viaggi e primi progetti 1925-1966* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2020).
4. See my "A Truly Liberal Orientation?: Laurance Roberts, Modern Architecture, and the Postwar American Academy in Rome," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 74, 2 (June 2015): 223-247.
5. See the catalog of the January 1977 exhibition, *Princeton's Beaux-Arts and its New Academicism: An Exhibition of Original Drawings over Fifty Years* (New York: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, n.d.).
6. "Donald Drew Egbert: A Tribute" in *Venturi's Iconography and Electronics Upon a Generic Architecture: A View from the Drafting Room* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996). Venturi absorbed Egbert's course four times in different roles.
7. For an overview of U.S. design pedagogy, see Joan Ockman and Rebecca Williamson, eds., *Architecture School: Three Centuries of Educating Architects in North America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012).
8. Egbert's research was posthumously published as *The Beaux-Arts Tradition in French Architecture, Illustrated by the Grands Prix de Rome*, ed. David Van Zanten (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). Venturi's introduction to this book states: "for Egbert the influence of the Beaux-Arts was an important part of the architectural history of the 19th and 20th centuries."
9. For the American Academy's postwar changes and internal backlash, see Costanzo, "A Truly Liberal Orientation."
10. Venturi's colleagues in Saarinen's office included Spero Daltas, a recently returned Rome Prize fellow and later Academy trustee; Costanzo, "I Will Try My Best."
11. I use "dual consciousness" aware of W.E.B. Dubois' "double-consciousness" in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015 [1903]), describing the internal consequences of life under U.S. racism.
12. In 1947, Venturi's Princeton friend William Weaver, later a prominent translator of Italian literature, urged him to go to Rome, which "cannot help but stimulate and educate anyone with two eyes and a head." See Andrew Leach, "Dilemmas without Solutions," *Complexity and Contradiction at Fifty: On Robert Venturi's "Gentle Manifesto,"* ed. Martino Stierli and David Brownlee (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2019), 106.
13. For continuities between Le Corbusier's and early modern accounts of Rome's instructive value, see my "Horrors and Heroes, Renaissance and Recent: Rome as Architecture School," *Visualizing the Past in Italian Renaissance Art: Essays in Honor of Brian A. Curran*, ed. Douglas Dow and Jennifer Cochran Anderson (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers), 9-39.
14. Martino Stierli discusses Rogers' impact on Venturi in "In the Academy's Garden: Robert Venturi, the Grand Tour, and the Revision of Modern Architecture," *AA Files* 56 (2007): 41-62. For more on his Rome Prize experience, see Sessa, *Robert Venturi e l'Italia*.

15. Venturi and Scott Brown's entwined work is a complex topic. At Penn they taught coordinated courses (1961-1963) then co-taught (spring 1964). After teaching in California, Scott Brown joined Venturi and Rauch in 1967. She was in Italy (including Rome) during the same period as Venturi's Rome Prize, but within an academic affiliation. My focus is Venturi's individual struggle with this label, and a project that largely predates Scott Brown's involvement in his practice.
16. See "Robert Venturi's Response at the Pritzker Prize Award Ceremony at the Palacio de Iturbide, Mexico City, May 16, 1991" and "Notes for a Lecture Celebrating the Centennial of the American Academy in Rome Delivered in Chicago," both in Venturi, *Iconography and Electronics*.
17. Venturi made this association indirectly in 2004, when he asked whether the "Neomod" of the new millennium is "our Ecole des Beaux-Arts—our equivalent of the revivalist style that twentieth-century Modernism explicitly reacted against?" He then recalled Henry Russell Hitchcock describing modern architecture as having "reached completion and is applicable as an academic discipline" in 1936; Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Architecture as Signs and Systems: For a Mannerist Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 16-17. Venturi's array of thoughts in 1996 says nothing about academicism, suggesting it was not a term of major interest; "Mals Mots: Aphorisms—Sweet and Sour—By an Anti-Hero Architect," *Iconography and Electronics*, 299–329.
18. "The Architecture of the École des Beaux-arts" was held at the Museum of Modern Art October 29, 1975 – January 4, 1976. Besides the exhibition catalog, another related volume was Arthur Drexler, ed., *The Architecture of the École des beaux-arts* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977). Venturi and Scott Brown's lectures were delivered at the Architectural Association's Beaux-Arts Conference in May 1978, and published in *Architectural Design* 49, 1 (1979): 23-31, then *A View from the Campidoglio*, 70-95.
19. Venturi, "Learning from the Beaux-Arts," *A View from the Campidoglio*, 70. He further describes his Princeton education in the 1985 lecture "Essay Derived from the Acceptance Speech, the Madison Medal, Princeton University," in *Iconography and Electronics*, 93–5.
20. Venturi, "Learning from the Beaux-Arts," *View from the Campidoglio*, 70.
21. Venturi, "Learning from the Beaux-Arts," *View from the Campidoglio*, 78.
22. Venturi, "Learning from the Beaux-Arts," *View from the Campidoglio*, 72.
23. The city's urban plan was famously designed by Pierre L'Enfant, raised at Versailles.
24. Venturi, "Learning from the Beaux-Arts," *View from the Campidoglio*, 92–4.
25. "Learning from the Beaux-Arts," *View from the Campidoglio*, 80. David Brownlee called this project a "quintessential decorated shed"; "Form and Content" in *Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates*, ed. David Brownlee, David DeLong, Katherine Heisinger (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001), 38.
26. Von Moos 1987 p. 41; he calls it a proscenium.
27. Venturi, "Learning from the Beaux-Arts," *View from the Campidoglio*, 81.
28. Stanislaus von Moos, Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 41, 158.
29. Venturi, "Learning from the Beaux-Arts," *View from the Campidoglio*, 80. Interesting, Venturi elsewhere disavowed any interest in proportion.
30. Colin Rowe, "Mannerism and Modern Architecture," *Architectural Review* 107 (May 1950): 289-99.

31. As Rowe noted, mannerism requires an orthodoxy to establish its own heresy; “Mannerism and Modern Architecture,” 292.
32. Leach rightly characterizes Venturi as a “sometime” rather than a careful reader of such works; “Dilemmas without Solutions”, *Complexity and Contradiction at Fifty*, 102. Maarten Delbeke demonstrated Sypher’s influence on Venturi in “Mannerism and Meaning in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture,” *Journal of Architecture* 15, no. 3 (2010): 267–82.
33. Wylie Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature, 1400-1700* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978 [1955]), 252–55.
34. Venturi and Scott Brown, *Signs and Systems*, 38, 218.





# THE BEAUX-ARTS Poché AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN LATIN AMERICA

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## Abstract

Like many expressions in the Beaux-Arts vocabulary, the word “poché” had a clear, straight definition, which referred to the drawing convention of darkening the masonry sectioned in plan, but also comprised opaque meanings. “Composition,” another key word, was defined in the catalogue of the MoMA exhibition *The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts*, opened in 1975, as the bringing together of several parts into a unified whole, and “the conception of the building as a sequence of three-dimensional entity through which one mentally ‘walked’ as one designed”. The poché was essential to that idea of composition. The poché accommodated interior and exterior divergences, geometrically constructing figural spaces along this path through the building, and secured areas for both bearing structures and services.

Modern architecture in Latin America was introduced by academically trained architects. The paper wishes to show that the poché was widely employed by these architects in several situations, which range from its use as a technique to inscribe modern buildings into the urban fabric, preserving large interior spaces as regular figures, to its use to control functional components and allow transparency. As well as composition and character, the poché Beaux-Arts, with their multiple, and perhaps slippery meanings, did not seem to have been entirely abandoned by architectural practices that embraced the free plan, the free façade, the pilotis, the roof garden and the horizontal window, usually regarded as the prove of modernity.

## Keywords

Academic Tradition; Beaux-Arts; Poché; Modern Architecture; Latin America

## Introduction

Arthur Drexler's preface to the catalogue of the MoMA exhibition *The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts*, opened in 1975, highlighted the bond between the triumph of modern architecture and the pedagogy of the German Bauhaus. Drexler argued that Bauhaus vanished as an institution but flourished as a doctrine. Aspiring to a global role, the Bauhaus doctrine's blank was the available universal educational system, the one developed and disseminated by the École des Beaux-Arts, which came to be described as a system targeted on solving what were no longer "real problems", as Drexler put it. "And since history is written by the victors", he added, it "has helped to perpetuate confusion as to what was lost".<sup>1</sup>

Like many words in the Beaux-Arts vocabulary, "poché" had a clear, straight definition, which referred to the drawing convention of darkening the masonry sectioned in plan, but also comprised more opaque meanings. "Composition," another key word for the Beaux-Arts system, was defined by the exhibition's catalogue as implying the bringing together of several parts into a unified whole, with exterior volumes and corresponding interior spaces, and "the conception of the building as a three-dimensional entity through which one mentally 'walked' as one designed".<sup>2</sup> The poché was essential to that idea of composition. The poché accommodated interior and exterior divergences, geometrically constructing figural spaces along this path through the building, and secured areas for both bearing structures and services (Fig. 1).

Modern architecture in Latin America was introduced by academically trained architects. The paper wishes to show that the poché was widely employed by these architects in several situations, which range from its use as a technique to inscribe modern buildings into the urban fabric, preserving large interior spaces as regular figures, to its use to control functional components and allow transparency. Contradicting the Bauhaus' doctrinaire perception, it indeed tackled with "real problems".

## The Beaux-Arts poché

Authors who have recently focused on the architectural poché as a topic, including its historical and contemporary uses, largely agree that defining poché is "elusive

and elliptical.”<sup>3</sup> They also stressed the antinomy between the *poché* and the preferred structural system of modern architecture, identified with the independent skeleton. Michael Young noticed that the five points argument of Le Corbusier could be, in part, “an attack on *poché* as descended from academic and vernacular tradition.”<sup>4</sup> Christoph Lueder described the Beaux-Arts *poché* as a tectonic and drawing convention based on a presumed congruency between space and structure, “in opposition to the free plan theorized by Le Corbusier in 1926.”<sup>5</sup>

The ambiguities of the word *poché* in the Beaux-Arts vocabulary are probably not alien to the very way in which the academic training was organized. Officially, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts was established in Paris in 1819 and taught architecture until 1968. Yet, the genesis of the Beaux-Arts theoretical and practical foundations must be traced back to the Académie Royale d’Architecture founded in Paris by Colbert. As Richard Chafee has thoroughly explained, the Ecole was not newly formed in 1819, but had been transformed since 1793 from the schools of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture and the Académie Royale d’Architecture.<sup>6</sup> The role assigned to the Academy was both improving and controlling. It was aimed to the advancement of architectural knowledge, confronting theoretical problems, and perfecting the academic doctrine and its rules, understood as universal principles founded in the authority of Classicism.<sup>7</sup> The scope of activities promoted by the Ecole comprised lectures and courses, but what was taught there, as Chafee put it, “was material communicable in words.” The students’ drawing boards were in the ateliers, not at the Academy’s Ecole. Even after the French Revolution, and the posterior settlement of the Ecole in its definitive home at the Quai Malaquais, in the buildings adapted by Félix Duban, the students did not learn to design there but outside school, in an atelier supervised by an architect (*patron*).<sup>8</sup>

The use of the word *poché* to indicate the drawing convention of darkening the masonry sectioned in plan probably belonged mostly to the spoken jargon of the ateliers than to the academic literature. The *poché* was part of the “graphic code” shared by architects and builders, a system of representation that allowed the postponement of the more practical decisions related to construction and services, in favor of the immediate attention to more strictly artistic and architectural issues, as the figural, distributive aspects of composition.<sup>9</sup>

The word composition moved from painting to architecture towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Werner Szambien defined composition in the general sense as “a mental operation leading to the conception of whole which assembles several differentiated elements,” and noticed the potentially contradictory fact that “the very idea of heterogeneousness and confusion contained in that word was opposed to architecture’s asserted aim: to reach unity, harmony and symmetry.”<sup>11</sup> Strictly speaking, in the academic composition the “differentiated elements” corresponded to a stable repertory of elements of architecture, most of them consistent with the classical language, and as so, already shaped and categorized, which should be assembled according to an accepted set of rules, the “principles of composition”, mostly learned from the examples of the past.

“In the teaching of all the patrons”, observed Chafee, “two constants are evident: the importance of the plan, and the importance of a vague quality often called ‘character.’”<sup>12</sup> The usual Beaux-Arts plan would be subordinated to the principles of the axial composition, manipulating multiple sequences of linked spaces geometrically defined, and symmetrically arranged along major and minor axis. The axial composition implied a certain idea of movement, a unifying experience of the building’s interior space obtained through discrete, and even contrasting, adjacent rooms. As Corona Martínez has noticed, “spaces exist by their limits.”<sup>13</sup> The *poché*, understood as the solid, darkened zones of masonry in the plan, was crucial to shape void, giving the existence to the room as a geometrical figure. In the same sense, the *poché* was instrumental to both preserve the formal autonomy of each singular room and control the relationship to one another, accommodating the inevitable geometrical discrepancies among them. The word *poché* was also related to “*poche*” – little pocket, cavity – suggesting that these darked zones could be not entirely dense. A secondary meaning of the *poché* referred to the practice of inserting tiny utility compartments, auxiliary passages, service stairs, etc., within the solid sections of masonry, where they could be useful without being seen.

The *poché* was also related to character. Drexler remembered in the catalogue of the MoMA’s 1975 exhibition that “the majority of architects who reached professional maturity in the 1940s had received at least an American version of Beaux-Arts training.”<sup>14</sup> The manual written by John Harberson in 1926, *The Study of Architectural Design, with special reference to the program of the Beaux-Arts Institute of*

*Design*, summarized much of the pedagogy of the Ecole, as it had been transmitted to America. He adverted that the *poché* would “at once give scale and character to a plan”. The *poché* would show the hierarchy among rooms. The bigger and most significant rooms in a plan would have thicker walls, big enough to provide adequate support, but also to admit a “richer outline,” as the *poché* would may have “pilasters, engaged columns, panels, or niches, which would be lacking in corridors or rooms intended for the minor services of the building.”<sup>15</sup>

According to Alan Colquhoun, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century the principles of design developed and transmitted by the academic tradition were common to all styles: “composition, in academic usage, seems to presuppose a body of rules that are a-stylar.” And, as he argued, “this idea of composition was directly inherited by the 20<sup>th</sup> century avantgarde from the academic tradition.”<sup>16</sup> As well as composition and character, the *poché* Beaux-Arts, with their multiple, and perhaps slippery meanings, did not seem to have been entirely abandoned by architectural practices that embraced the free plan, the free façade, the pilotis, the roof garden and the horizontal window, usually regarded as the prove of modernity.

### **The critical recovery of the *poché***

According to Colin Rowe, the term *poché* had been forgotten, or “relegated to a catalogue of obsolete categories,” until Robert Venturi reminded its usefulness in 1966. Rowe uses the *poché* idea in his argument in favor of an articulated urban texture. Appealing to what he himself recognizes to be a “overhauled sense” of the *poché*, he values its ability to engage and to be engaged, to act as both figure and ground, suggesting that a building itself could become a type of *poché*.<sup>17</sup>

Venturi’s critical and historiographical recovery of the *poché*, exposed in “The inside and the Outside,” becomes a keystone in his argument concerning contradiction in architecture.

He claims that the so-called flowing space, produced by an architecture of related horizontal and vertical planes connected by areas of plate glass (as in the Barcelona Pavilion), has been considered as the boldest contribution of modern architecture. “Such cornerless architecture,” he says, “implied an ultimate continuity of space”, and the “oneness of interior and exterior space.” Nevertheless, he argues that “the old tradition of enclosed and contrasted inside space (...) has been recognized by some modern masters,” even though it has not been

emphasized by historians.<sup>18</sup> The *poché* is part of that tradition. Its persistence is exemplified by the work of Louis Kahn, whose “servant space,” sometimes used to harbor mechanical equipment, is compared to “the *poché* in the walls of Roman and Baroque architecture,” both regarded as “alternative means of accommodating an inside different from the outside.”<sup>19</sup> Besides, Venturi asserts that “contradiction, or at least contrast, between the inside and the outside is an essential characteristic of urban architecture,” and the *poché* was a way to cope with “the space left over by this contradiction.”<sup>20</sup>

### **The *poché* and the city**

The use of the *poché* in the urban sense suggested by Rowe and Venturi can be observed in the work of several modern architects in Latin America, although we would probably not find any recorded written mention of the term by the authors of these buildings. Venturi says that residual spaces are “sometimes awkward,” and quotes Kahn’s allegation that “a building should have bad spaces as well as good spaces.”<sup>21</sup> We might say that urban parcels are also frequently “awkward,” being the result of long-term processes of subdivision and/or reintegration, which in many times answered to private and circumstantial interests, and not to public planning policies.

The *poché* might have been a sort of “*realpolitik*” for modern architecture. As explained by José Luis Romero in the classic *Latinomérica: Las ciudades y las ideas*, the crisis of 1930 unified the destiny of Latin-American capital cities. The rural exodus, or the “offensive of the countryside on the city,” manifested itself in the demographic and urban explosion that changed the physiognomy of cities across the continent. The development of modern architecture in the region coincided with these social and economic processes, and certainly played a role in the construction of such a new physiognomy. The traditional urban block might be subdivided in awkward lots but had its internal and external constructive logic, mostly directed to obtain the maximum building capacity and lot coverage. Densification and verticalization of the traditional city block happened many times with what Carlo Aymonino called “distorted typologies,” in the sense that they were shaped a posteriori, to reach the limits of the solely pre-established non-aedificandi areas, that of the streets.<sup>22</sup>

The theater was among these distorted typologies. From Rino Levi’s Cine Ufa-Palácio (São Paulo) in the 1930s to Mario Roberto Alvarez and Macedonio Oscar

Ruiz's Theater General San Martín (Buenos Aires) in the 1950s, a series of similar urban equipment were designed accepting the external pressure of the shape of the lot.

Rino Levi designed the building of the Cine Ipiranga in 1941 and the Theater Cultura Artística in 1942-43. The Cine Ipiranga was inserted on the ground floor of a high-rise building, which housed the Hotel Excelsior, and occupied the whole surface of a trapezoidal lot. Levi stretched a regular portico along the street, aligned with the hotel's façade. The entrance to the above hotel was squeezed at one side of the portico, using the narrow but straighter part of the lot, perpendicular to the street. The major, deeper portion of the lot, the one in which was possible to slide the big movie room, had an angle in relation to the street. After the common portico, the entrance, the foyer, and the waiting room are designed as a sequence of regular spaces assembled along a central axis parallel to the parcel's angled limit. The ticket offices, symmetrically positioned at both sides of this axis, act as a *poché*, taking care of the irregularities provoked by this shift. At the second floor, taking advantage of the difference between the tapering figure formed by the acoustically shaped movie room and the trapezoidal figure of the parcel, Levi used the residual areas as a *poché*, harboring there the staircases to the galleries at both sides of the room.<sup>23</sup> The Theater Cultura Artística's bilateral symmetrical plan filled in a parcel that, except from the front alignment, had a broken outline. Using the *poché* technique, minor service spaces were transferred to the peripheral rear and side zones, allowing the architect to build major regular spaces inside an irregular site.

Mario Roberto Alvarez and Macedonio Oscar Ruiz's adopted a similar strategy in the Theater General San Martín (1953-1960), a huge complex installed in a depth lot between party walls (Fig. 2). The bold, unobstructed, regular foyer and exhibition hall of 260 m<sup>2</sup>, one of the most distinctive features of the building, was obtained due to the old *poché* idea. Service spaces, lifts and secondary stairs were organized at two rows at both sides of the building, acting as thick walls used to exclude behind themselves the angles of the parcel, and shaping the huge hall as a regular space. The hall serves a smaller underground theater and a larger one, which is suspended above it, as a relatively autonomous volume supported by a set of oblique columns. In an expended sense of the concept, we may suggest that this volume acts as giant *poché* for those who enter the building.



The almost contemporary Cine Ufa-Palácio, designed by Rino Levi in São Paulo, 1936, and the Cine Gran Rex, designed by Alberto Prebisch in Buenos Aires, 1937, do not occupy awkward parcels, but basically regular ones. Yet both designs call upon the *poché* to handle the discrepancy among the rectangular external volume of the building and the bowed shape of the movie room, in Rex case, or the subtle inflections of interior spaces, in Levi's Ufa-Palácio. Levi's symmetrical entrance space design, with two central columns set against a curved wall ending on both sides on generous circular volumes for the booking offices, improved by specially designed artificial lighting elements, remember the Beaux-Arts meaning of the *poché* as related to character, as something that could be even exaggerated or receive a richer treatment to express the importance of the building.

Lina Bo Bardi, ever surprising, used the Brazilian "varanda" as a *poché* in her design for the Diários Associados Building (São Paulo, 1947, not built). The contradiction between inside and outside (to quote Venturi) is not transferred to the backyard but solved at the front of the parcel, where Lina's "varanda" acts as a buffer between the inside semicircular foyer and the outside street.

The *poché* can be also observed in architectures that we might consider as being pieces of a "modern city" liberated from the traditional urban subdivision. Affonso Eduardo Reidy free-standing, wide serpentine building at the Pedregulho Complex (Rio de Janeiro, 1946-48), endowed with pilotis and free façades, also owes its meandering shape to the presumably forgotten *poché*. Reidy inserted thick walls between the dwelling units, sometimes used as cabinets, to absorb the internal angles provoked by the curvature of the building and preserve the regularity of interior spaces.

Lastly, if we adhere to the "overhauled sense" of the *poché* proposed by Rowe, in which it would not be limited to the inner part of a building, we could add to this list the plastic Covered Plaza by Carlos Raúl Villanueva (University City of Caracas, 1952-53), which softly engages the inflected Aula Magna and the orthogonal rectorate building.

### **The *poché* and the private life of buildings**

As Reyner Banham put it, iron, steel, and concrete were new topics when they were incorporated to modern architecture, but "their general category was old and familiar. Not so electric lighting or mechanical ventilation."<sup>24</sup> In

the Beaux-Arts tradition, the *poché* was associated to a structural, but also to a “functional” meaning, applying the term retrospectively. As already stated, as a shared graphic code, the *poché* implied the existence of a reserved area, held for future construction and structural arrangements. In addition, it also denoted the placing of tiny service spaces inside these mostly opaque zones of masonry.

The *poché* hold a sort of “Janus-like quality,” borrowing Rowe’s term to define architectural elements that could be both the expression of an objective functional purpose and of more open associations, central to the idea of character.<sup>25</sup>

The *poché* was used by modern architects to both discipline and hide the functional and mechanical components of buildings. Oscar Niemeyer’s *Casa do Baile* (Pampulha, 1942) is well known by its singular ovoid shape, prolonged by a flowing concrete slab over pilotis. Niemeyer’s scheme overlapped two off-centered circles, with slightly different diameters. The restaurant, the main space, was set in the smaller one. The kitchen and services filled the crescent left between the two circles, like a *poché*, enabling the restaurant to be perceived as a free, neat round room from the inside, while preserving the unity of the whole external volume (Fig. 3). A similar use of the *poché* can be found in Mario Pani’s circular rooms in the *Clube de Yates* in Acapulco (1956) and in Lina Bo Bardi study for a chapel from 1962. Later on, Lina would also appeal to the *poché* in order to accommodate the kitchen and services of the *Restaurant Coaty* (Salvador, 1986). The main space was a circular room around an existing tree. The kitchen was placed in an adjacent circular volume, but other services were pushed to the rear, taking advantage of the marginal space left between the circle and the straight edge of the parcel (Fig. 4).

Besides, the *poché* idea can be related to the condensed nucleus of services acting as solid interior volumes, as for example, in Amancio Williams’ design for the *UIA Building* (Buenos Aires, 1968) and Mario Roberto Álvarez’s *Somisa Building* (Buenos Aires, 1966-72). At the *Somisa Building*’s symmetrical plan, which coincides with the triangular shape of the lot, lifts and service compartments are disposed along a central axis, allowing the free façade and the transparent interior space. Williams packed two mega-pillars, service shafts, toilets, stairs, and lifts into four equivalent volumes at the center of a released floor plan. Clorindo Testa designed the four giant pillars of the *National Library* (Buenos Aires, 1962-95)

as hollow structures, where he inserted lifts, toilets, service shafts, etc. The service-poché might also pop out as an exterior volume, as Antonio Bonet showed in terrace of the *Hostería La Solana del Mar* (Portezuelo, 1946).

As for the relatively new categories pointed out by Reyner Banham, plumbing, electric lighting, mechanic ventilation, etc., perhaps the most interesting case to mention is the second expansion of the Museum of Bellas Artes in Caracas, accomplished by Carlos Raúl Villanueva in 1966-76 (Fig. 5). The earlier building of the Museum of Bellas Artes was built by Villanueva in 1935-38, with a symmetrical, Beaux-Art inspired plan and a Neoclassic façade, despite the use of reinforced concrete columns covered with white mortar. Villanueva designed a first expansion of the building in 1952, keeping the former axial scheme and the previous one-story height. In 1966, Villanueva enlarged the complex with a quite diverse building. He lodged the new galleries for the museum in a resolutely modern five-story tower in exposed concrete, accessible by ramps.<sup>26</sup> Following Louis Kahn's precedent at the Yale University Art Gallery (1951-53), in which Kahn unified structure, installations and ceiling into a reinforced concrete slab composed by hollow tetrahedrons, Villanueva designed the horizontal structure of the galleries' tower as a structural and functional poché.

The tower was supported on four reinforced concrete external walls. Each level housed a squared exhibition room of 21 meters width and four meters height, entirely column free. Villanueva developed a prefabricated system for the horizontal structure, to be casted at the construction site. It was based on a regular grid of three-by-three meters and was composed by distinct types of elements: the ones called "frames," used to form the ceiling; the ones called "crosses," found within the depth of the structure and used to unite the elements of the lower and upper cords; the ones called "plates," used to form the floor. Jointed by post-tensioned cables, these pieces formed a three-dimensional grid of 1,4 meters high. Villanueva explained the advantages of this thick, yet semi-hollow structure considering not just weight reduction, but the space left for installations, lighting fixtures and fittings, etc., which could easily pass through the whole structure.<sup>27</sup>

The Beaux-Arts poché tradition might have had formal, even decorous motivations, but it was also objective and pragmatical. The many ways in which the poché was employed and reinvented over the years shows the persistence of a disciplinary wisdom, for the sake of modern architecture.

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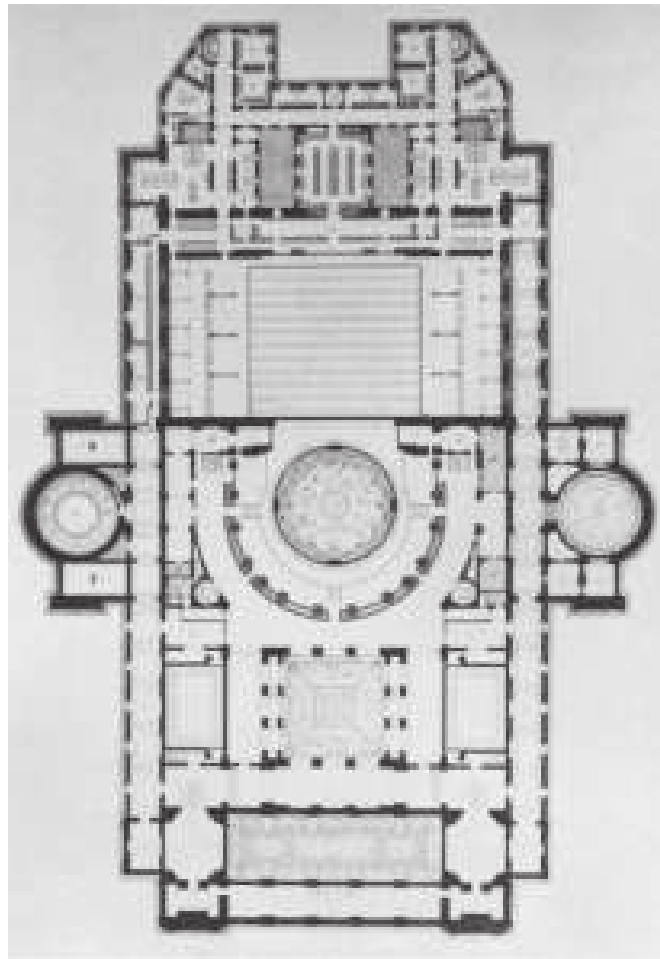


Fig. 1. Charles Garnier, Opéra, Paris, 1878-1880. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

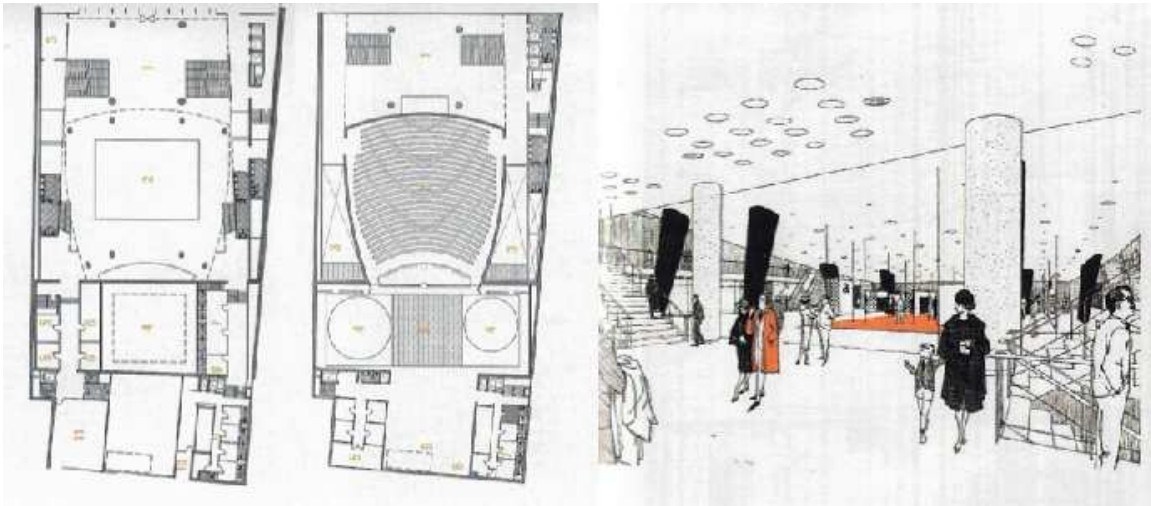


Fig. 2. Mario Roberto Alvarez and Macedonio Oscar Ruiz, Theater General San Martín, Buenos Aires, 1953-1960. Source: Miguel Jurado, comp., Mario Roberto Alvarez (Buenos Aires: Arte Gráfico Argentino S.A., 2007).

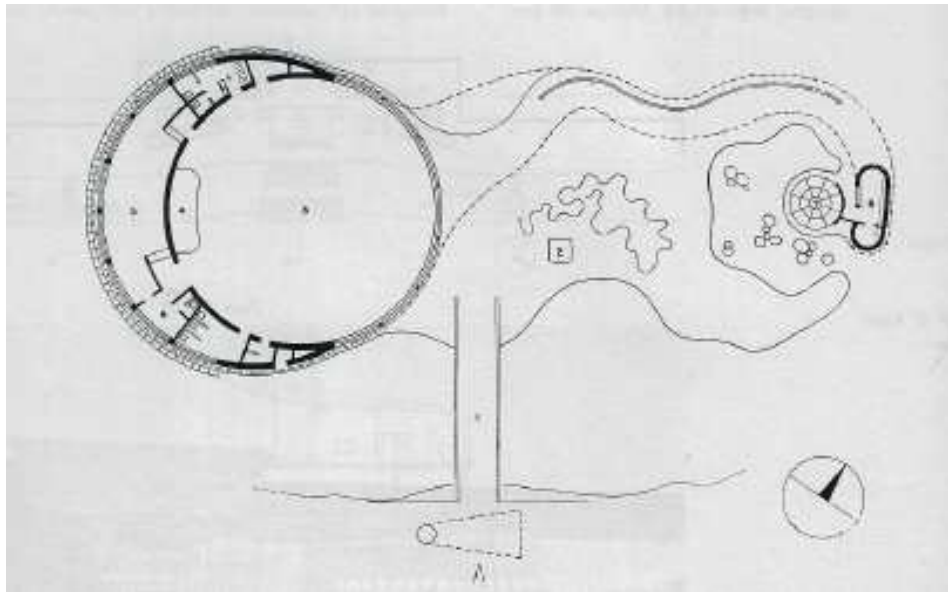


Fig. 3. Oscar Niemeyer, Casa do Baile, Pampulha, 1942. Source: Henrique Mindlin, *Modern Architecture in Brazil* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Co., 1956).

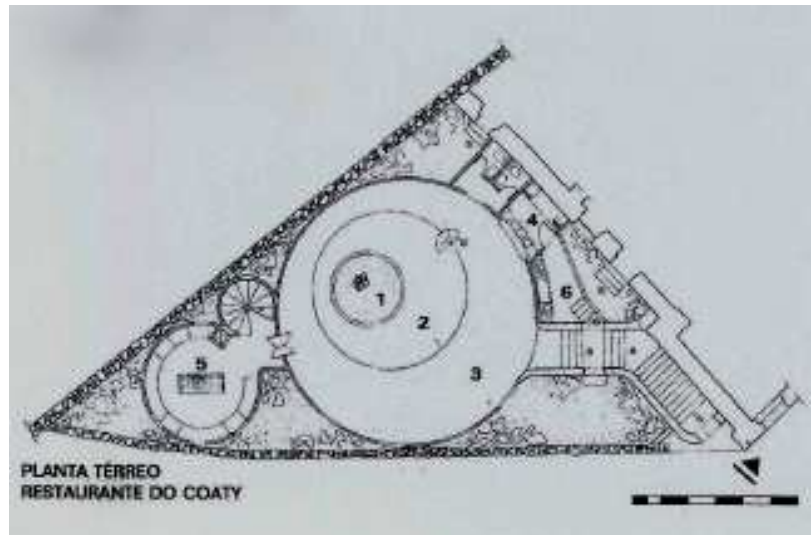


Fig. 4. Lina Bo Bardi, Restaurant Coaty, Salvador, 1986. Source: Marcelo Ferraz, ed. Lina Bo Bardi (São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo e P.M. Bardi, Empresa das Artes, 1993).

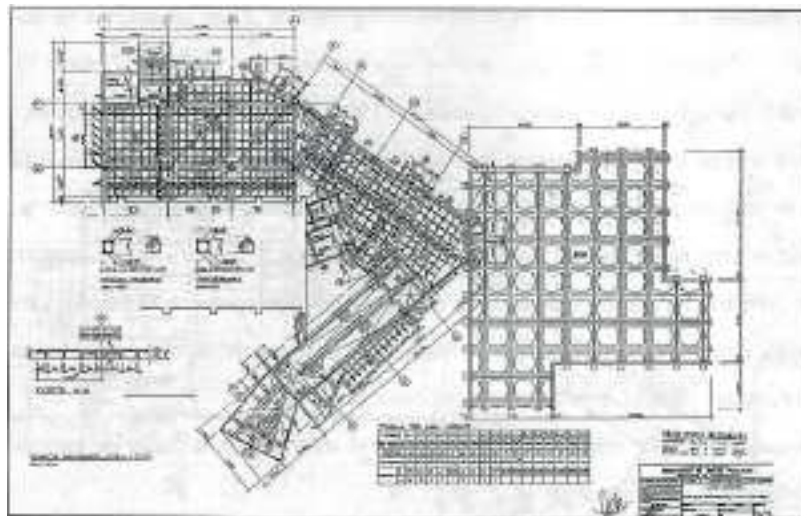


Fig. 5. Carlos Raúl Villanueva, Museum of Bellas Artes, second expansion, Caracas, 1966-1976. Source: Carlos Eduardo Binato de Castro, “Paredes modernas, o Museu de Belas Artes de Caracas e o SESC Pompéia” (Master Dissertation, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 2018).

# PHOTOGRAPHY AS CRITICISM: GABRIELE BASILICO AND THE PROJECT OF A “SMALL UTOPIA”

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## Abstract

The camera has been used as a tool of architectural representation since the mid-19th century. But can photography be rightly considered a form of criticism? Affirmative answers are suggested by the works of several architects who have embraced this medium to explore the built environment and reflect upon its material and social conditions. The writer and photographer Eric De Maré went as far as pronouncing that the photographer was possibly the best architectural critic. In the late-20th century, a key role was played by Gabriele Basilico, who set out to depict the mutation of urban landscapes under the effects of deindustrialisation. Working for magazines as well as for public institutions, the late Italian photographer developed an analytical method that allowed him to probe the complexity of cities as human habitats. The paper revisits Basilico's early work and discusses its relevance to architectural criticism. With reference to a series of photographic journeys that span from the 1970s to the 1990s, it argues that his landscape vision was integral to a wider rethinking of the built environment. Driven by a relentless pursuit of harmony, Basilico sought out an intimate relation with places while eschewing the eulogistic rhetoric of architectural representation. His contemplative images contain the seeds of what he called a “small utopia”: a personal quest nourished by critical dialogues with writers, journalists and architects.



The opening citation, attributed to Eric de Maré, is taken from the last paragraph of *Building with Light*, the international history of architectural photography published by Robert Elwall in 2004. As a curator of photographs at the British Architectural Library (RIBA), Elwall advocated the critical role of a profession which, especially in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, had largely been devoted to the artistic representation of buildings and to their celebration in the architectural press. “A little more protest,” he concluded with English understatement, “might not come amiss”.<sup>1</sup>

De Maré himself had trained as an architect in the interwar period before he took up photography, a conduit between the two disciplines he shared with prominent colleagues of his generation such as George E. Kidder Smith and Ezra Stoller (all three were born in the 1910s). Among them, de Maré was perhaps the one who wore the critic’s hat more comfortably: committed to fostering a modern visual education, he worked as an editor at the *Architects’ Journal* and published a number of photobooks along with essays on architectural photography and on photography, tout court. As a contributor to *The Architectural Review*, in the post-war period he spearheaded the study of early industrial buildings.<sup>2</sup> Elwall found de Maré’s work so congenial as to borrow his succinct definition of photography – “building with light” – for the title of his own book. Through its pages one can also find mentions of a photographer of the following generation, Gabriele Basilico (1944–2013), who exerted a significant impact on architectural culture in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Born in Milan during World War II, around the time De Maré published his first book, Basilico often reminisced about playing among the ruins of the bombed city during his childhood. He went on to study architecture at the Politecnico, forging his political consciousness during the socio-cultural upheaval of the late 1960s. Meanwhile he had developed a passion for the camera and, as soon as he graduated, set up shop as a photographer in 1973. That was the period when leading Italian architects such as Aldo Rossi, Carlo Aymonino and Giorgio Grassi promoted a neo-rationalist approach that came to be known as *Tendenza*. Rossi, who taught at Milan’s Polytechnic when Basilico was a student, set out to challenge the orthodoxy of modern functionalism by investigating the “permanences” underlying the evolution of European cities.<sup>3</sup> These ideas would have a crucial impact on Basilico’s photographic practice. From the early projects, he regarded

the urban landscape as expression of a complex set of formal and spatial values which could not be reduced to isolated functions; as Rossi theorised, the city had to be read in its totality.

During his prolific career Basilico took up commissions in many parts of the world and gained especial acclaim in Italy and France; yet his work was comparatively less known in the English-speaking world until the turn of the century. Elwall himself noted how the photographer's predilection for urban landscapes, typically shot in overcast light and devoid of people, was aligned with the time-honoured documentary tradition but eschewed the emphasis on individual buildings that was prevalent within architectural culture: "Usually empty foregrounds, devoid of photographic devices for drawing the viewer's eye into the picture, intensify the mood of alienation, while the normal concentration by architectural photographers on significant buildings yields to an analysis of urban space in which all structures are deemed equal, whatever their architectural pedigree".<sup>4</sup>

This "levelling tendency" was indebted not only to the work of interwar documentarians (Walker Evans above all), but also to the typological studies of Bernd and Hilla Becher, whose teaching at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, from 1976 onwards, laid the foundation for the so-called Dusseldorf School of Photography. Harking back to the 1920s' aesthetic of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the Bechers set about recording industrial structures as the "anonymous sculptures" of a civilization on the wane. While recognising this major influence, Elwall related the eerie atmospheres of Basilico's photographs to other cultural references as well, including Michelangelo Antonioni's films: "Basilico's desolate, monochrome cityscapes represent a kind of 'neutron bomb' photography, in which all structures remain intact but the inhabitants have chillingly vanished".<sup>5</sup>

This passage, which sums up a recurring trope in writing about Basilico, seems however to overlook a critical aspect of his work. If taken at face value, his work might be associated with the *New Topographics* aesthetic that emerged in the mid-1970s, prompted by a seminal exhibition that showcased work by American photographers such as Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz and Stephen Shore, as well as by the Bechers.<sup>6</sup> Yet, as Eugenie Shinkle argues, Basilico's work differed in fundamental ways from their deadpan style insofar as it was animated by a concern with the relational nature of space.<sup>7</sup> While Adams and others drained the landscapes of any emotional charge in an attempt to expose the traces of post-industrial

capitalism, Basilico approached his subjects with an altogether more engaging attitude: one that was driven by a humanistic belief in the agency of the photographer as an observer who inhabits the urban environment and seeks to decipher its visible signs.<sup>8</sup>

With reflective hindsight, he articulated this idea in the final years of his life: “The photographer’s task is to work with distance, to take measures, to re-arrange space, to find an equilibrium between here and there, and ultimately to seek out the impossible meanings of a place”.<sup>9</sup> This approach recalls the British work of De Maré, who sought to recover the beauty of anonymous industrial buildings and canals that constituted a neglected “functional tradition”.<sup>10</sup> While De Maré’s visual language was integral to his work of criticism (writing and images being complementary to one another), Basilico invested photography with a revelatory power that was tinged with mysticism. In his dogged quest for harmony, the labour of memory percolated through his observation of every subject.

The pursuit of a constant relation between the places he visited and those of his memory defined, for Basilico, “the project of a small utopia”.<sup>11</sup> This expression offers a precious insight into his practice and the circumstances in which it evolved. In 1973, when Basilico started his photographic career, is also the year in which Manfredo Tafuri published *Progetto e utopia*, which put forward a critique of architectural ideology and its embedded role in the structures of modern capitalism.<sup>12</sup> While the radical claims of the avant-garde were subjected to a thorough revision, at the same time the utopian function of narrative was revived by the philosopher Louis Marin, whose *Utopiques: jeux d’espaces* was issued the same year.<sup>13</sup> Sparked off by the student movement of 1968, this semiotic deconstruction of Thomas More’s *Utopia* explored the discursive space in which text and image conjure up an alternate reality. To some extent, Basilico’s inclination towards the photobook as a self-enclosed space of representation calls to mind Marin’s pronouncement that utopias, if intended as spatial configurations, are mostly depicted in books.

Basilico’s intimate relation with cities was born out of his desire to comprehend how urban landscapes bore the signs of social mutations. His habit of setting up the camera in the early hours of the day, before traffic and activities filled the streets, was not intended to convey a de-humanised view of buildings, nor to reproduce the idealised representation that is typical of architectural photography;

on the contrary, the absence of people in the frame allowed him to foreground the qualities of space itself, which are easily reduced to mere background whenever the viewer's attention is drawn to the fleeting presence of passers-by. What at first sight appears to be empty space is in fact the main protagonist of his photographs: "a void that fills itself up and therefore becomes the subject of the image".<sup>14</sup>

If Basilico's photographs may seem to depict a post-human world, they are in fact the result of a restless process that led him to identify the most eloquent point of view in every place. He compared this technique to the wanderings of a water diviner searching for a well ("*la tecnica del rabdomante*"); in similar fashion, the photographer scouted every site for the right place on which to set his tripod. The mornings allowed him to capture his urban subjects in a state of suspension between dream world and humdrum reality. As he explained, "I photograph empty space as the main subject with all its lyrical force and its humanising ability to communicate, because the void is an integral, even structural, part of architecture".<sup>15</sup> This purpose marked a departure from conventional architectural photography and informed a way of seeing, of framing places and reflecting on them, that was more akin to a work of criticism.

Seeking to record space itself on camera, Basilico adopted what might be called a long depth of field: not only with regard to the optical technique that retains objects in focus across the distance, but to his studied attempt to decipher the layers of time inscribed in an urban scene. The expansiveness we feel while beholding his photographs derives from a conscious effort to evoke the complexity of human landscapes. Reversing the "decisive moment" approach that informed his beginnings as a reporter, Basilico looked for connections between past and present while also instigating reflections on possible futures. This mode of engagement with cities revealed a critical awareness of temporality that is seldom present in architectural photography.<sup>16</sup>

Basilico immersed himself in every city until he had established an intimate relation with it ("vibration" is a word he often used). This method announced itself in his first major project, *Ritratti di fabbriche*, a documentation of factories in the periphery of Milan carried out between 1978 and 1980. The term "portraits" alluded to an individual characterisation of buildings that, indebted though it was to the Bechers' typological studies, sowed the seeds for an alternative outlook.<sup>17</sup>

By capturing the decline of the manufacturing industry, this campaign allowed the photographer to articulate his empathy for human labour and its visible manifestations. It was also his first use of the photobook format, which would remain the favourite means of expression throughout his life.

In the 1980s Basilico's vision was sharpened by the DATAR campaign, which allowed him to develop a "slow gaze" by travelling along the northern coast of France.<sup>18</sup> By the end of the decade, he completed his major survey of European port cities, published in the photobook *Porti di mare*. The revelatory force of those photographs was admired by Rossi himself who found in them a "new beauty".<sup>19</sup> At a time when architectural critics were still reeling from Tafuri's dictum, "there is no criticism, only history" (a pronouncement aimed at architects who filled the columns of professional magazines), Basilico pursued a patient and systematic project that excavated the traces of a civilisation undergoing a profound change.<sup>20</sup> His crisp photographs realised with a large-format camera often appeared in *Domus* and other magazines. Whether he depicted the abiding structures of Le Havre's harbour or the ruinscapes of war-ravaged Beirut, he observed cities *as* landscapes rather than focusing on isolated buildings.

Subsequently, his attention shifted to the urban peripheries. Working with the architect Stefano Boeri, he applied his analytical method to six "analogous portions of territory" across the Italian peninsula for a survey that was exhibited at the 1996 Venice Biennale. The resulting photobook, *Italy: Cross Sections of a Country*, confirmed his propensity for travel and for collaboration: two distinguishing traits of his practice. While photographic missions required spending long periods of time out on the field, his research was nourished by critical dialogues with writers and editors as well as architects ranging from Álvaro Siza to Luigi Snozzi.

An avowed predilection for the narrative form informed the production of Basilico's photobooks, which were meticulously laid out by his wife and photo editor Giovanna Calvenzi. The format allowed them to "construct urban stories" through a careful editorial process.<sup>21</sup> Somehow this process allowed the photographer to transcend the static nature of the photograph and to set images in motion, as it were: once composed in a sequence they came to "represent a journey".<sup>22</sup> Far more than a hackneyed metaphor, travel was an integral component of Basilico's practice, one that was inextricably bound up with his utopian project.

Basilico developed his vision at a time when the so-called “Italian landscape school” emerged. The manifesto of this movement was the collective book *Viaggio in Italia*, curated by Luigi Ghirri in 1984.<sup>23</sup> Its intent was to break away from the canon of landscape photography that, for a whole century, had been fixed by the vedute of the Alinari brothers and fellow documentarists. Along with photographers like Olivo Barbieri, Guido Guidi and Giovanni Chiaramonte, Basilico contributed to rediscover the long-neglected signs of ordinary landscapes up and down the country. This endeavour reasserted the dignity of the everyday over the exoticism of travel photography.

Basilico never yielded to the pretence to objectify human landscapes but claimed the heuristic role of his own experience. Although his work contains an unmistakably critical kernel, as noted by Roberta Valtorta, this was never wielded as a programmatic intention but remained intrinsic to his practice.<sup>24</sup> Every subject was approached with a deep aesthetic curiosity. In a published conversation with Valtorta, Basilico declared: “Mystery and energy are integral to contemplation, and so too is criticism. It is not possible to rationally construct a critique, as this would take away all the magic of contemplation”.<sup>25</sup> If his images have a *critical* potential, that is the result of a set of subjective and often instinctual decisions mediated by his camera’s eye. Thereby the photographer asserted the autonomy of a visual practice which allows the gaze to wander freely, detecting unpredictable relations across times as well as spaces.

This contemplative attitude, which set Basilico’s photography apart from the Bechers’ quasi-scientific approach, has left a significant impression on architectural culture. The aim of his research was neither to praise nor to protest but rather to understand the mutation of built environments as complex socio-spatial formations. Without ever claiming his photographs would have a direct influence on design or planning, he believed instead they might offer a tool for interpreting the world.<sup>26</sup> This impulse to cultivate a new sensibility towards the built environment is arguably one of his main legacies: one that may contribute to establish an alternative ground for architectural criticism.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, Basilico’s empathic approach resonates with Michael Sorkin’s suggestion that, “the focus of criticism must be moved from the territory of authenticating procedures to the terrain of desirable effects”.<sup>28</sup> If Sorkin argued that criticism should rediscover its vocation as a “service profession” committed to

progressive social values, Basilico's project might be revisited in a similar light. At a time when architectural photography found new spaces (and new markets) in the world of museums and galleries, his lifelong project was nourished by a labour of patient observation but also by critical dialogues and collaborations. While Basilico rejected the mantle of "critic", his way of framing architecture *as* landscape suggests that photography might have the capacity to revive the function of criticism by visual means. Rather than considering this faculty in clear-cut terms of praise and protest, his meditative gaze provokes us to situate architecture within a complex social world – an intimation that is bound to become ever more relevant in our urban age.

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# ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURAL MEMETICS

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## Abstract

A new genre in architectural criticism is born: architectural memetics. Active on Twitter and Instagram, accounts such as @blank\_gehry, @dank.lloyd.wright, and @form\_follows\_memes, among others, are practicing architectural memetics as an aggressive and incisive form of commentary over architecture and its contemporary political economy.

These accounts operate as collective agents of enunciation to propagate radically anti-capitalist content: campaigns to decommodify housing, report of exploitation and precarity in design offices, surrealist provocations (“nationalize Autodesk”), and direct attacks ridiculing architects with neoliberal agendas and cultural institutions considered responsible of reinforcing privileges and established power relations.

Despite its immediate agency, memetics is also an initiatory practice, which requires solid previous knowledge to be interpreted or produced. Memes recombine a wide range of information which is recursively encapsulated and transformed in each iteration, presenting their content in stratified formations. Understanding and making architectural memes requires a deep understanding not only of the art of memetics with its forms of expression, but also a knowledge of architecture, its history, and its languages. For this reason, memetics is not only a tool for architectural criticism, but it might also become an instrument of architectural pedagogy.

On the plane of expression, memes are based on ready-made, collage and détournement, going beyond the purified aesthetics of established architectural imaging and publishing. In this sense, architectural memetics is the digital heir of the aesthetic guerrilla performed by the historical avantgarde and by the neoavantgarde of the 1960s and 1970s.

This article will sketch some preliminary notes towards a history and a theory of architectural memetics, proposing its languages and techniques as a form of architectural criticism for the 21st century.

## Keywords

Internet Memes, Architecture design, Architecture criticism, Politics

In November 2021 an article titled “We Could All Be Less Complicit” appeared on the well-established curatorial and publishing platform *e-flux*. The article deals with a well-known topic, which is nevertheless rarely spoken about in the public architectural discourse: the conditions of labour in architecture. The article presents several anonymous stories of young practitioners witnessing daily exploitation, harassment and blackmailing within some of the most famous and politically-progressive architectural firms in New York City.<sup>1</sup>

The article is signed with the cryptic name of Dank Lloyd Wright. The biographical notes states that “Dank Lloyd Wright is an emerging theorist. They are currently Director of the Centre for Ants”. The name might not be very well-known within the readers of the academic and professional architectural press. On the contrary, students and architects active on social media are already very well acquainted with the name. Established in 2020, with its 59,000 followers and more than 9,000 posts, [@dank.lloyd.wright](#) is Instagram’s most followed account publishing memes on architecture.

Defining itself an “emerging theorist” and a “practicing critic”, the account does not limit itself to produce funny content to be liked and reposted within social media, but it presents itself as platform for architectural criticism.<sup>2</sup> Besides producing content defined by nonsense and surreal humour which is difficult to grasp to an audience not acquainted with the accounts’ own internal logic—as in the case of its “Centre for Ants” memes series, ridiculing the ingenuous simplicity of pre-internet (and pre-DLW) humour on architecture<sup>3</sup>—it has gained visibility also because its aggressive shitposting towards architecture institutions, offices, schools, museums and architects who are supposed to perpetrate privileges, labour exploitation, and established ideologies.

The case of Dank Lloyd Wright and other architectural memes accounts such as [@blank\\_gehry](#), and [@form\\_follows\\_memes](#), among others, offers a still neglected vantage point to explore the relation between architecture and the digital realm, in particular, offering not only an example of a new media for the communication of architectural content, but showing a way in which architectural discourse can be produced, affecting the political economy of architectural production, consumption and circulation.

## Architecture and Memetics

To analyse once again what an internet meme is and to explain again the origin of the term is beyond the scope of this contribution. Instead, we would like to ask: what is an architectural meme? Is that different from memes concerning with other topics? Or does it have a peculiar specificity? Of course, one can say that architectural memes are just internet memes on the topic of architecture. Architectural memes employ templates that are not specific to architecture, which are used by other memes dealing with other topics. This makes them part of a collective practice of enunciation shared among a larger online community. This also allows architectural aesthetic to change, to get contaminated with other languages. Architectural imagery becomes dirty, almost pornographic, losing architecture's sanitized and purified aesthetic, contaminating itself with other aesthetic practices and languages.<sup>4</sup>

Following Richard Dawkins' pre-internet and pre-social media original definition of a meme—an element of culture whose replication, diffusion and eventual dismissal can be described in analogy with genetic material through an evolutionary model—a certain literature has started a new field of studies called architectural memetics. This is the case of the writings of mathematician Nikos Angelos Salingaros, who applied Darwinian models to explain the success of modernism, seen as a specific “style” of architecture.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Chris Abel has employed meme theory to go beyond a simple Darwinian and evolutionary model for the transmission of architectural forms, towards the definition of an “extended self” exploring the relation between human bodies, culture, and technology. In this sense, meme theory, beyond the original definition proposed by Dawkins, becomes an occasion not only to see how images, patterns or types replicate, but also how they are communicated, assimilated and located in human bodies, addressing also the biological and social dimension of cultural transmission.<sup>6</sup>

Architecture is beyond doubt a discipline based on imitation (as Dawkins explained, meme is a shorthand for *mimeme*). Architecture is an inherently memetic discipline. Whereas only recently the idea of meme was introduced into the study of replication of architectural forms, concepts of *style*, *type*, *motif*, or *pattern*, among others, were used to highlight the role of imitative practices into architecture. Art historian Andrea Pinotti has showed that in fact the idea of replication

and evolution in cultural artifacts had been already proposed way before Dawkins' canonical text. In particular, Pinotti refers to the theory of *Mneme*, which was elaborated in 1904 by biologist Richard Semon, as an unconscious collective and social memory which is based on the capacity of transmitting lived experiences among individuals and generations. Art historian Aby Warburg was influenced by the theory of *Mneme* in his elaboration of an art history based on tracing the permanence, transmission and re-appearance of images and “pathos formulas”—specific expressive configuration of human bodies—across history.<sup>7</sup> The plate drawn by Rudolf Wittkower on the patterns of the plans of Palladian Villas, and Colin Rowe's comparison between the plans of Palladio's Villa Malcontenta and Le Corbusier's Villa Stein, are two famous examples which employed Warburg's methodology in the study of architectural form.

If the replication of architectural motifs follows a memetic logic, also architectural images seem to follow similar patterns of transmission. Mario Carpo's research shows how the development of the printing press allowed architectural images to be reproduced and to circulate across the world, ready to be copied and transformed and to be copied once again, stimulating the knowledge of Greek and Roman examples and the rise of Renaissance architecture.<sup>8</sup> The introduction of digital technologies in architecture seemed to end the idea an architecture based on imitation. In fact, the introduction of parametric and algorithmic architecture allowed architectural forms to be generated by abstract procedures and set of instructions, and not by a direct imitation of previously existing forms.<sup>9</sup> However, digital tools, in particular the use of Adobe Photoshop, combined with the wide availability of images thanks to online blogs and pinboards (Tumblr and Pinterest, for instance), stimulated the resurgence of the avant-garde art form of the collage to produce a new kind of imagery. The so-called “post-digital” collage and montage are definitely imitative practices, able to produce a new aesthetic of abstraction for architectural drawings contrary to the hyper-realism of the early digital architectural renderings.<sup>10</sup> Architectural drawing becomes a memetic practice based on more or less conscious references and citations, taken from a digital collective repository of architectural images.<sup>11</sup>

If architectural images can be seen as memes, the development of architectural internet-memes was stimulated by social media such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, even if the first architectural memes pre-date the Web 2.0 and social

media. One of the first documented architectural internet memes, “You know you are an architecture student when”, does not even have a visual form, as it was circulated as a text through email.<sup>12</sup> The text is a list of paradoxical yet typical situation which architectural students are confronted—sleepless nights, lack of social contact, alienation. This meme already shows that the Internet has been the privileged medium to share the existential and affective issues related to architectural education among students, in a time in which the architectural press cancelled the issues related to architectural labour and production, concealing them under the ideology of individual genius and creativity.

Yet, the use of memes to share personal experiences at school or in the workplace does not directly imply the possibility of turning them into tools that are able to change the way in which architecture is communicated, produced, and taught. It was “emerging theorist” and content producer Ryan Scavnicky who, through his Instagram account (@sssscavvvv) and a column on Archinect, pioneered the idea of architecture memes as a new form of criticism, education and discourse production.<sup>13</sup> According to Scavnicky, however, if we look at architecture internet memes from the point of view of the *postdigital* realm—when the digital is no longer considered as a “turn”, but as a fact that is already inherent in our everyday reality—internet memes are not just a new medium for architecture, but simply a symptom of the acceleration of what architecture has always been: an series of “acts of mutation”, upon previous architectural acts, in which authorship dissolves in a network of personal and human-machine interactions.<sup>14</sup> Architectural memes, therefore, are not just a new means of communication for architectural ideas, they are the by-product of the late-capitalistic assemblage of architectural production made by ideas, technologies, languages, images, protocols, narrations, but also living and working bodies.

## **Memes and the Politics of Architecture**

In this way architecture internet memes can serve as an epiphany, as an instrument to stimulate collective awareness on the inner mechanism of architectural production in late capitalism, and eventually become a tool for the organisation of architectural workers. However, sad passions such as loneliness, anxiety, and depression, do not always turn in to joyful expressions when they are socialized, especially on the Internet. Media theorists Geert Lovink pointed out that memes

are a good example of how culture and media become one thing. Memes exemplify the way in which machines and bodies are today totally interconnected as a cybernetic unity. However, he adds, memes do not only express such a link, but also the anxieties that come along with it. Memes spread in the milieu of networked neo-liberalism—the need for the affirmation of the self through the anxiety of connection and social affirmation spread by digital means. Memes are the privileged container for the “egomania, hedonism, depression, and nihilism rampant in the millennial meme culture”,<sup>15</sup> and they often radicalize towards right-wing forms of collective resentment.

There is plenty of literature about the right-wing political use of memes, emerged in particular in 2016, after the role played by social media in the election of Donald Trump and the rise of alt-right movements. However, there is a problematic lack of research about how leftist political subjectivation occurs on social media and through the memetic imaginary. Is it true, as the right-wing meme goes, that “the left can’t meme”, or is it that the left has been too much concerned about other’s political groups’ agendas, in the attempt of stopping or containing them, instead of focusing on how to actively produce new narratives and new affective spaces? Responding to this literature gap, artist Joshua Citarella explored the radicalization of teenagers in the so-called “Politigram”, an Instagram political community. In this community, left-wing users—mostly male and white teenagers—express radically individualistic ideas, which encompass a variety of ideologies identified through a creative use of adjectives: gender-nihilists, ultra-left Marxists, anarcho-futurism, eco-extremism. Left-wing Politigram users share with their right-wing peers anti-state, and anti-civilization sentiments. All users in the Politigram community are bound by a common affective of isolation, nihilism, no-future, anti-sociality, and depression, which translates in a desire for an individualistic and egoistic politics.<sup>16</sup> Given these ideological premises, users in the Politigram community seem not interested in political organisation and recomposition outside the boundaries of social media. However, Citarella’s research is limited to an analysis of a few accounts linked to the Politigram community and does not give any account of other more collectivist tendencies within leftist political meme communities, such as the “fully-automated luxury communists” and the Italian xeno-left.

Architectural memes seem to proliferate within the alienation and nihilism of students and young professionals sharing experiences of exploitation at school and

in the workplace. In particular, memes seem to refuse of the “boomer” ideology of labour: hard work is no longer perceived as a form of social and economic affirmation, a present effort that will be rewarded in the future.<sup>17</sup> Dank Lloyd Wright encourages students and architects to speak up, socialise and to organise at school and in the workplace. The memetic space expands from the closed environment of the users’ social bubble, to spread to other institutions, to encourage interaction in other spaces, online and offline.<sup>18</sup>

Philosopher Mark Fisher significantly titled one of his late political writings “Abandon Hope (Summer is Coming)”. In the article, originally published in his blog in the aftermath of the electoral victory of the Tories in 2016, Fisher sketched the lineaments of a strategy on how use of social media in a pro-active and not in a reactive way, in order to counter the sense that capitalism is natural and no alternative to it is possible. According to Fisher social media are a tool to collectively elaborate depression, besides being a powerful instrument to produce counter-information. However, social media are not a useful instrument for debate, as they generate more frustration and isolation in their users. Social media, instead, should be used to “generate new figures in loathing in our propaganda.”<sup>19</sup> If capitalist realism is based on the construction of the “lazy feckless scrounger” as its enemy, the left should use social media to collectively target new enemies. “We must float a new figure of the parasite: landlords milking the state through housing benefit, ‘entrepreneurs’ exploring cheap labour, etc”.<sup>20</sup> Finally, social media action should be coupled with hub struggles happening offline—“[w]e might not be able to identify in advance what these struggles are, but we must be ready to swarm in and intensify them when they do occur”.<sup>21</sup>

It seems that the tactical use of memes that Dank Lloyd Wright is proposing follows similar lines. Perhaps first started from the desire to share frustration among architectural students and young practitioners, it soon turned to identify new enemies and parasites through targeted campaigns of shitposting—privileged targets being Bjarke Ingels,<sup>22</sup> Peter Eisenman,<sup>23</sup> and the New York-based office SHoP. The latter, in particular, was not only under attack for several months, but it was at the centre of an investigation carried on through several posts, exposing the financial scheme employed by the company to be run. Supposedly marketed as a progressive, “design-forward”, “employee owned company”, SHoP is actually an ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan), a form of organisation



in which employees are meant to transfer asset from their pension plan to fund the company's operations, without the possibility to influence the company's management decisions.<sup>24</sup> Dank Lloyd Wright's campaign against SHoP was able to amplify SHoP's employees struggle to unionize against the office's management.<sup>25</sup>

Most importantly, Dank Lloyd Wright and other architecture meme pages are constructing a new narrative and a new political imaginary in design and architecture. This is visible also in their less politically-charged contents. Art historian and curator Valentina Tanni showed how internet memes democratise the use of the techniques of collage, montage, automatic writing typical of the historical avant-gardes, in particular, Dada and the surrealist movements, and their postwar heirs. These techniques are no longer tools used by avantgardes artists, but they become part of our everyday production and consumption of images. Memes make art history become a constant present, a ready-to-use repository of images at our disposal, de-sacralising the world of art and the figure of the artist. Tanni shows the subversive power of ugliness and nonsense.<sup>26</sup> Architecture memes deliberately use ugly imagery. To make a meme, an architect has to operate a conscious de-skilling of their image-making capacities.<sup>27</sup> Ugliness destroys the ideology of the architect as the depository of good taste, even that of the abstract and rarefied aesthetic of the post-digital collage. Nonsense has also a liberating capacity. In a discipline dominated by rationality, memes are able to unveil the uncanniness of architectural objects through scatological references and sexuality, through the exploration of the illogical and the irrational.

In this sense, it would be tempting to read Dank Lloyd Wright and its memetic action as part of the political genealogy proposed by Edmund Berger (even if DLW's preferences seem to lie more in the experiences of the Vkhutemas—in particular with El Lissitzky and Moisei Ginzburg<sup>28</sup>). Berger proposed a reading of artistic avantgarde movements in the 20th century as political movement who were instrumentalizing aesthetic practices as anti-capitalist tools. As part of this genealogy, Berger analyses the work of Dada, the Situationist International, the Lettrists, Steward Home and Luther Blissett. Like the latter, Dank Lloyd Wright compares themselves to a trickster, a folk hero, who is able to hit the centres of powers in architecture through an anonymous and tentacular organisation.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, Dank Lloyd Wright is a counter-hegemonic project—its purpose is not to destroy the institutions in which architectural power is exercised today, but to

infiltrate and to gain control of them (see, for instance, DLW's meme campaigns directed against AECOM,<sup>30</sup> Log,<sup>31</sup> the MoMa,<sup>32</sup> the Pritzker Prize,<sup>33</sup> etc.) Everyone can be a DLW agent—they could be making memes right now in your office or in your architectural department.<sup>34</sup>

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# HERITAGE AND PERIPHERY: FLASHES OF EVERYDAY LIFE THROUGH SCENES OF MADRID

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## Abstract

The idea of everyday heritage has gained a strong presence in the last decades, echoing the notion of everyday landscape advocated by the European Landscape Convention. Both concepts flight from the most exceptional cultural manifestations to focus on what supports the identity of local communities in their everyday life. At the same time, both direct our attention toward intangible cultural values tied to the creation, transformation, and post-occupation of places. That is, toward qualitative issues related to the emotional ties that allow a community to take hold of the built environment. Framed in such a recent interest in the everyday, representation has become a powerful ally for critical heritage studies, since photography, literature, or film, among others, often provide evidences of everyday life that reveal bidirectional links between built space and social attachment.

This contribution explains and provides some results of the research project LabPA-CM (H2019/HUM-5692), which addresses theoretical, methodological and applied research for improving knowledge and preservation of Madrid's landscape. One of the project's lines of work focus on representation as a lens to approach, analyze and understand the multiplicity of "everydays" occurring in Madrid as a metropolis. In this contribution, a series of scenes that were shot in its outskirts will be discussed (from films such as *El pisito*, *Mi tío Jacinto*, *Colegas*, or *Nadie hablará de nosotras cuando hayamos muerto*, to mention just a few), in order to reveal aspects associated with the everyday nature of the spaces represented. Such scenes, as both documentary registers and pieces of art, help understand cinematography's double nature: to depict current phenomena and to condition future behaviors. The aim is, therefore, twofold: to reflect on how these scenes have used Madrid's periphery as a scenery, and to discuss whether they could enable a deeper understanding of patterns of inhabitation, of the immaterial components of the urban environment, and of its sense of place.

## Keywords

Everyday landscape, cinematography, critical heritage studies.

## Introduction

Since it was opened for signatures in 2000 within the Council of Europe's campaign "Europe, a Common Heritage", the European Landscape Convention sets the guidelines regarding landscape issues for the signatory countries.<sup>1</sup> It is a short document for regulating landscape as a European heritage property through general measures and other actions in relation both to its own landscapes and to collaboration between countries. Its well-known definition will serve as a starting point here: "landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors".<sup>2</sup> Cleverly, the Convention avoids the hackneyed confrontation between "cultural landscape" and "natural landscape". Instead, it distinguishes the manifestations of the individual-territory relationship, and applies "to the entire territory of the Parties and covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas [...] land, inland water and marine areas".<sup>3</sup> Such a comprehensive approach also includes "landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday landscapes".<sup>4</sup>

By not valuing one landscape above another, the Convention brings to the conversation what John Pendlebury has called "the other" heritage: places which exist as part of the urban terrain of everyday life.<sup>5</sup> The Convention successfully addresses this "other heritage", taking into account that most urban landscapes are not designated and scheduled ancient monument, but a living part of the historical fabric and ensemble that people are attached to as places that create their own symbols and meanings apart from their historical value.<sup>6</sup> In this way, the Convention not only put the idea of *everyday landscape* on the table, but also gave those landscapes a heritage potential equivalent to that of other landscapes to be conserved. This vision, innovative in the field of heritage, made it possible to extend landscape conservation –and the very idea of landscape heritage– to everyday dynamics, that is, to what is common and is present in people's lives. At the same time, the recent expansion of the categories of tangible heritage led to including some landscapes as properties to be protected.<sup>7</sup> So much so that since the 1990s, several landscapes are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.<sup>8</sup>

The implementation of the European Landscape Convention in Spain takes place through the Spanish Plan for Cultural Landscapes, approved in 2012. Like the European Convention, the Spanish Plan claims a necessary "characterization

of the territorial domain under consideration, the identification of the values that define its character and society's desire to integrate it into its daily life and perpetuate it for future generations".<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it aligns with the European Convention in its consideration of the heritage value of the everyday in landscapes, in the following terms:

*Understanding landscape as the visible part of a living and mutable system over time, the result of multiple interactions between man and his medium, the challenge of protecting and conserving its essential values, for which society decides to invest efforts, the continuous evolution of the system evidenced in the daily cycle, in the succession of seasons and in the repercussion on the natural mechanisms and on human activities must be considered as basic features.*<sup>10</sup>

Landscape is not thus regarded just as a spatially defined area, but rather as a concept defined by custom and culture over time.<sup>11</sup> In this way, academics, institutions, professionals, and stakeholders must take on one of the challenges pointed out by these normative documents: to apply principles of identification, characterization, and conservation to new heritage properties that would not have been the object of study a few decades ago.

Therefore, when studying everyday landscapes, or rather, the everyday in landscapes, it will be imperative to recognize a heritage value in the relationships between individuals, their communities, and their built spaces, overcoming traditional approaches for which what was valuable –and, therefore, to be preserved– was the object or the place itself.<sup>12</sup> As Tim Edensor has noted, alternative versions of heritage become apparent and should be discussed, as the case of unreflexive habits: “how we address one another and share common routines and points of intersection. The things we eat, drink, how we relax and dance, celebrate, discuss, romance, gossip, laugh and tell jokes, our linguistic inflexions and phrases, all passed down and continuously adapted”.<sup>13</sup> Thus, interpretive approaches to heritage that take into account the way we *dwell*, our gestures, and essentially how we relate physically to each other and to the built space, are revealing ideas that are being now unfolded by critical heritage studies.<sup>14</sup> If, as Edensor also noted, “heritage is everywhere”, art and its inextricably condition of representation can foster, transform, consolidate, or reify the links and meanings of a community with its heritage, in this case with its everyday heritage.

Exploring how representation, and especially cinematography, can contribute both to add and reveal heritage values in the urban landscape is one of the aims



of the research project LabPA-CM: Criteria, methods and contemporary techniques for landscape knowledge and conservation, a pilot cross-cultural study of landscapes within the Madrid Region. To do so, the project is implementing a method for gathering, locating, analyzing, and disseminating different images and scenes from cinematography, painting, photography, and literature, captured during the 20th Century. The intention behind this material is twofold: to reflect on how it used Madrid's periphery as a scenery, and to discuss whether they could enable a deeper understanding of patterns of inhabitation, of post-occupancy, of the immaterial components of the urban environment, and of its sense of place. How did these scenes depict Madrid's periphery? Which aesthetic message did they convey and attach to the filmed places? Could they be the vehicle for a deeper understanding of patterns of inhabitation, of immaterial components of the urban environment, and of a certain sense of place? Would those depicted everyday realities of the periphery be useful to understand contemporary situations of the peripheries of our cities?

To provide some answers to such questions, a first stage of the project created a mapped inventory of more than 500 images of Madrid taken from different fields of artistic production, that are used as a base for the further study. Then, a branch of the project analyzes some specific places through these representations –when there are several images of a specific place–, focusing on its history, its diachronic dynamics, and its post-occupation character as a space fully charged of signification. Other branch of the project uses some of these mapped images for reflecting on the ideas of heritage and landscape, as this contribution does through cinematography in the case of Madrid's periphery. In this case, the sum of cinematic scenes deal with everyday situations, elevating what occurs often to an aesthetic category present in those physical spaces. Therefore, one innovative contribution of the LabPA-CM project is approaching the idea of heritage from cinematography, resulting in critical inquiries that challenge traditional methods of studying heritage, landscape, and the everyday.<sup>15</sup>

### **Flashes of the everyday**

Two scenes from Spanish films show everyday life around the Barrio de la Concepción, built between 1958 and 1965 and representative of Madrid's periphery for its long, compact buildings, popularly known as *colmenas* [beehives].<sup>16</sup> Shot barely two

years apart, *Colegas* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1982) and *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1984) set some of their scenes in this enclave on the outskirts of Madrid at the time. The first scene shows a conversation between a child and his grandmother, when they find a lizard in the surroundings of the building and it follows them (Fig. 1). Then, a comical dialogue ensues about whether to adopt it or not:

*Grandmother:* *What shall we name it?*

*Grandson:* *“Lizard”.*

*Grandmother:* *No, there are many lizards.*

*Grandson:* *Call it something you like.*

*Grandmother:* *I like cupcakes, the cemetery, plastic bags, money....*

*Grandson:* *Then we’ll call it “Money”.*

*Grandmother:* *Why?*

*Grandson:* *Because it’s green, like the talegos [1,000 peseta bills].*

The second scene, filmed from the inner side of the M-30 ring road, shows three young people sitting on a bench, chatting, with the same building in the background (Fig. 2). A boy and the girl are brothers, and the third is the girl’s boyfriend. They talk about problems with the police, juvenile delinquency, and use of illegal substances. Furthermore, the couple is expecting an unwanted child, something that introduces the only glimmer of optimism in the scene. After speculating, in a positive way, about the future of the baby away from this harmful environment, they leave the bench to return to their homes, also located in these buildings. Indeed, an earlier scene in this film shows this same building framed similarly to the aforementioned lizard scene (Fig. 3). However, in the case of *Colegas*, that frame is the consequence of a fight between the two boys who would later appear in the bench, when the girl’s brother found out that she was pregnant by his friend. Same period, same framing, same building, but different meanings that pour over the neighborhood a layer of its

cultural significance: the one added by representation, in this case cinematographic.

They contributed to conform a *sense of place* within the neighborhood through scenes of its everyday life.<sup>17</sup> Projecting onto the screen the experience of life lived there, these scenes played an important role for inserting it in the imagery of the outskirts of the city, yet fully participating in its dynamics. They put images to an everyday life that, adopting Henri Lefebvre's thesis, did not consist of repetitive and monotonous events, but rather of what remains when action is removed from all the time and effort dedicated to specialization, to alienated work, to organized time.<sup>18</sup> Or, in other words, that filmed everyday life in the Barrio de la Concepción not only dealt with those actions carried out by people over and over again, but rather with the experience of ordinary people, albeit it often in extraordinary times.<sup>19</sup>

These scenes present a condition of everyday life of the periphery that is also evident in other scenes, from other films and other times. Scenes in which not only the idea of periphery but also the periphery itself were different, since the significant expansion of Madrid after 1940 caused the city to grow at an unbridled speed until today.<sup>20</sup> In *El pisito* (Marco Ferreri, Isidoro M. Ferry, 1958), Petrita and Rodolfo acquire, not without difficulties, a house in the San Blas-Canillejas neighborhood. In one of its scenes, the camera is fixed and everyday life happens in front of it (Fig. 4). Children running, passers-by going about their daily chores, mothers with their children, and other characters cross the public spaces between the buildings of the Grupo de Viviendas Francisco Franco, inaugurated in 1955.<sup>21</sup> Another scene from the same film shows Petrita getting off the bus on her way to her new house, with a wide fixed view full of people in the neighborhood, recording how her figure gets lost among the people (Fig. 5). In an aesthetic that echoes the coetaneous Italian neorealism and its idea of *cronaca* of the everyday, the scene depicts a landscape of normality in a new neighborhood, which only seems so because of the small size of its trees.

Young Gloria also gets off a bus, after a series of unfortunate situations, when she is deported to Madrid from Mexico in *Nadie hablará de nosotras cuando hayamos muerto* (Agustín Díaz Yanes, 1995). At that moment, she looks with a certain strangement at the buildings located on Calle Ramón Pérez de Ayala, in Madrid's Numancia district, while the camera takes a brief moving photograph of life in the neighborhood (Fig. 6). About two kilometers to the north, with the Almudena cemetery in the

background, four young people plan a drug-related crime in *Navajeros* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980), from the calm of someone who feels that built environment as his own (Fig. 7). This configuration is repeated in other scenes, with the characters in the foreground and the suburbs not yet built in the background (Fig. 8), even reaching the buildings where this inquiry began: the *colmenas* of the Barrio de la Concepción (Fig. 9).

An earlier state of that undefined periphery, almost untraceable, and quickly engulfed by the city, is also present in the ignominious places inhabited by Jacinto and Pepote in *Mi tío Jacinto* (Ladislao Vajda, 1956). Among its scenes, one of them is especially significant, shot in the surroundings of the current Calle Cidamón. In it, some children laugh at Pepote playing at bullfighting, while in the background the city is observed, almost as something inaccessible for Pepote, as an unattainable phase of progress for him, who lives among mud and shacks (Fig. 10). Informal spaces in the 50s that, already urbanized and consolidated, in the 80s continued to be the core of similar shots. As one of the scenes in *Deprisa, deprisa* (Carlos Saura, 1981) shows, these views of the city inevitably places the city center in a position of *otherness* (Fig. 11).

Finding a lizard, chatting with two friends, watching life in the neighborhood, getting off a bus, heading for home, playing with other children, or simply looking around with the camera are just a few flashes of the everyday that could well be more: the boys watching the cars pass the highway from the bridge in *Barrio* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 1998); the criminal life of Marcos in his humble isolated house while around the high blocks of Calle Arturo Soria at its intersection with Calle de la Dalia in *La semana del asesino* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972); or José Luis's amusing tricks in the streets of Carabanchel in *El Verdugo* (Luis García Berlanga, 1963), to mention just a few more.

### Everyday landscape as heritage

These and other scenes chose the landscape of Madrid's periphery as a scenery to represent the dynamics of everyday life in those places. The moving image inherently associated scene and place as part of a shared imagery. However, the scenes, far from functioning as a documentary record of what happens there, do not lose their potential as *objects d'art*. That is, the phenomenon is certainly complex: the scenes depict a feasible situation through its everydayness and provide *other* reality

of those places. Or, in other words, as art, they help *constitute* those places from their aesthetic condition. For this reason, the choice of the outskirts of Madrid to provide the built environment with images charged with meaning allows us to reflect on the dialectic between physical space and filmic space, on the everyday landscape, on the imagery of certain places, and even on the ideas of heritage and landscape, inseparable in the 21st century. To what extent an everyday landscape of Madrid's periphery was reflected in those scenes? How plausible were those images of the Barrio de la Concepción? If those people, according to the very idea of *heritage*, sense a linkage or a belonging with their everyday landscape, how cinema has contributed to that feeling? And, when it comes to conservation, how those values represented by cinema can be preserved, in case they should be?

Through the analysis of these and other scenes, cinematography reveals itself as a remarkable repository not only of places and built elements, but also of modes of use and post-occupation, and as a lens to look through and analyze how the practices of everyday life in a specific place are, were, or have changed over time. Holding at their core significant evidence of everyday life, films may offer the potential to reveal everyday practices that lead to an idea of common heritage of a place, either on a local, national or international level. In this sense, the study of certain scenes in which the built space is signified by the moving image implies accepting the aforementioned challenge in the field of heritage on a landscape scale: asking questions not only about the landscape spatial organization but also about conceptual organization of landscape.<sup>22</sup> That is, it sheds light on how these scenes are making visible, if not creating and, even more, fixing in memory, an amalgam of meanings associated with the built space and the community that inhabits and visits it. Those previously described scenes unequivocally tie the experience of the landscape of the periphery of Madrid with the built environment itself through a *medium*, cinematography, which functions from its double condition: *documentary thought* and *visual lyricism*.<sup>23</sup>

Beyond its entertainment function, cinema makes visible phenomena between the individual and the built environment that are not perceptible to the naked eye.<sup>24</sup> According to Giuliana Bruno, with the different projective representations of the city, an imagery of the city emerges, in a process that makes the urban landscape visible and perceptible.<sup>25</sup> In this way, the image of the city is “creatively generated in the arts, and the city itself is compelled, in the end, to closely interact

with these visual representations, becoming to some extent the product of an artistic panorama”.<sup>26</sup> When thinking about the city, it becomes inseparable from its own image, understood as an imagery and not only as an icon: that is, it is *loaded* with images and in turn it is also imagined.<sup>27</sup>

This amalgam of projections forms an imaginary, in a process that enhances or dilutes, translates or encrypts, reveals or hides and, in short, mediates the qualities of space through an associated significance. In other words, it is a process in which representation generates associations of physical space with certain meanings and qualities that it did not previously have. In this sense, Richard Koeck has demonstrated that, whether as a mental or physical construct, the moving image “can provide a meaningful context and frame of reference for spatial phenomena found in contemporary architecture and urban spaces”.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, he concluded that “we engage with spaces and places in our daily life in ways that are essentially cinematic”,<sup>29</sup> recognizing the everyday as an object of study and, thus, opening new horizons to advance in our knowledge of the landscapes we inhabit.

Since the upcoming challenge is, therefore, to characterize such landscapes, it must be explored which values they contain, since values come from meaning. As Michael J. Evans, Alexa Roberts, and Peggy Nelson noted:

*If we want to discover the meaning of landscapes for people, it is best to think of them not as collections of material objects placed in geographical space, but as social and cultural constructions of the people who use them. In this sense, landscapes are ‘symbolic environments’ that people create to give meaning and definition to their physical environment.*<sup>30</sup>

Then, heritage values are present in landscapes in tangible and intangible forms, and whilst tangible elements are easily seen, intangible elements might be difficult to grasp or even invisible to landscape readers, as they are deeply related to individuals’ feelings or communities’ sense of place. J. B. Jackson has connected this idea with everyday actions:

*What brings us together with people is not that we live near each other, but that we share the same timetable: the same work hours, the same religious observances, the same habits and customs. That is why we are more and more aware of time, and of the rhythm of the community. It is our sense of time, our sense of ritual, which in the long run creates our sense of place, and of community.*<sup>31</sup>

That is, an everyday heritage approach recognizes the local contemporary spatial, temporal and social rhythms, and patterns based on the values, needs, and interests of the society within the thick layers of landscape.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, if, as Maggie Roe noted in relation to the European Landscape Convention, the creation of new cultural landscapes is dependent on personal experience, imagery and meaning,<sup>33</sup> then these and other images should be part of the conversation about the everyday heritage of Madrid's landscape, in terms of identification, designation, characterization, and conservation. Therefore, some flashes of the everyday represented through scenes of Madrid's periphery –not only cinematic but also artistic– may have a significant potential for both heritage studies and decision-making on such places. In the words of Tim Edensor, “memories are selected and interpreted on the basis of culturally located knowledge and consolidated in the ‘common sense’ of the everyday”.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, one cannot ignore that those everyday realities of the outskirts of Madrid presented through images may be useful today. They could help understand both ancient and contemporary realities of the peripheries of our cities and reinforce population's impulses that are expressed through associations, blogs, social networks, and other public forums where people share their photographs, documents, memories, and anecdotes of life lived in these landscapes: their particular imagery, which becomes collective when it is shared. Furthermore, these scenes of Madrid's periphery may be a strong support for those who inhabit those landscapes in terms of identity, social engagement, and belonging, as a deep link between them and as evidences of a shared everyday life. Revealing such links between communities, the space they inhabit, and its imagery, these cinematic scenes can thus be seen as a remarkable constituent of its memory and, therefore, of its heritage.

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## Figures



Fig. 1 – Still from *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1984)



Fig. 2 – Still from *Colegas* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1982)



Fig. 3 – Still from *Colegas* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1982)



Fig. 4 – Still from *El pisito* (Marco Ferreri, Isidoro M. Ferry, 1958)



Fig. 5 – Still from *El pisito* (Marco Ferreri, Isidoro M. Ferry, 1958)



Fig. 6 – Still from *Nadie hablará de nosotras cuando estemos muertas* (Agustín Díaz Yanes, 1995).



Fig. 7 – Still from Navajeros (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980)



Fig. 8 - Stills from Navajeros (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980)



Fig. 9 - Stills from Navajeros (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980)



Fig. 10 – Still from *Mi tío Jacinto* (Ladislao Vajda, 1956)



Fig. 11 – Still from *Deprisa, deprisa* (Carlos Saura, 1981)

# **BUILDING SUPRANATIONAL POWER: THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK**

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## **Abstract**

Twenty years after the launch of the competition for the headquarters of the European Central Bank, this paper sets out to retrace and discuss the complex process that led to housing such unique form of supranational power in Frankfurt am Main. Although both the bankers and the architects framed this effort in functional terms, understating or simply misjudging its political significance, the competition opened the door for a series of difficult questions concerning the representation of European power and its effects on the city. While approaching this type of building as a symbol or embodiment of political forces had become taboo, issues of meaning and image reentered through the back door, as architects struggled to navigate their role within the European project.

## **Keywords**

Architecture, Power, European Integration, European Central Bank, Frankfurt am Main.

## From Maastricht to Frankfurt

In November 2002, the European Central Bank (ECB) launched a major competition for the “planning and design” of its new premises in Frankfurt am Main.<sup>1</sup> Although the process of European integration had started some fifty years earlier and multiple institutions had been built during that time, the ECB project came in a period of profound transformations and opened the door for a reframing of the relation between architecture and supranational power. The watershed moment was the signing of the Maastricht treaty in 1992, which inaugurated “a new stage” in the integration process, merging the previous European communities into the European Union and laying the groundwork for the introduction of a common currency.<sup>2</sup> One of the reforms coming out of Maastricht concerned the rules of engagement with architecture and the city. Up to that point, no definitive decision had been taken regarding the location of the European institutions, which therefore did not have the power to design, build and own their premises.<sup>3</sup>

Right after Maastricht, the Heads of State and Government of the European Union decided that the ECB was to have its permanent seat in Frankfurt, the financial centre of the continent. This allowed the new institution to actively address, from the onset, the question of its physical presence in the city. Although it initially rented an existing high-rise in the financial district (what came to be known as the Eurotower), the plan was to build a new home, specifically designed for its purposes.

Following a “feasibility study” that considered and evaluated thirty-five local sites, the ECB eventually purchased the site of the Grossmarkthalle, the old market hall in the Ostend district, from the city of Frankfurt.<sup>4</sup> The acquisition was preceded by the so-called “headquarters agreement” between the ECB and the German federal government, which underlined the “independence” of the institution and the “inviolability” of its premises.<sup>5</sup> As the first euro banknotes and coins had just started circulating at the beginning of 2002, everything was ready for an architectural competition.

In addition to having the power to drive this architectural project—a power that the Commission and the other European institutions did not have at the time of their initial placement—the ECB is particularly relevant because it oversees the area in which the process of supranationalization has gone furthest: the area

of monetary integration. As noted by Heisenberg and Richmond, the creation of the euro represents the most significant “deepening” of the European community since its inception.<sup>6</sup> Howarth and Loedel went as far as to argue that “the ECB has become the most important institutional creation in Europe since the institutionalization of the nation state in the seventeenth century: it is the ECB that perhaps best defines the relinquishing of state sovereignty to an institution with powerful supranational mechanisms of decision-making and enforcement.”<sup>7</sup>

The importance of monetary policy made it so that the power and influence of the ECB quickly extended from maintaining price stability in the Eurozone to supporting its general economic policies to becoming a key actor in its political governance. During the debt crisis of 2008-09, precisely as construction of its new headquarters in Frankfurt got under way, one could argue that the ECB became the *de facto* government of the EU.<sup>8</sup> Designing its headquarters during those turbulent times was therefore a unique opportunity to help shape the institution that, more than any other, had come to exert power in the complex space of the supranational.

## Hyperbolic Form

As the competition started to unfold, both the institution and the architects found themselves navigating in uncharted waters. OMA noted that “conceiving a building for the European Central Bank is like flying blind, venturing into a domain with no clear references.”<sup>9</sup> Jakob & MacFarlane, one of the other seventy participating firms, framed the challenge in these terms: “how could the Central Bank of Europe be represented architecturally?”<sup>10</sup> The competition brief, however, steered away from this type of reflections. Other than generically acknowledging that the design proposals would constitute “inspiring contributions to the building of a unified Europe,” the organizers of the competition did not highlight any of the political dynamics behind this endeavor.<sup>11</sup>

According to the brief, one of the most important objectives was the integration and preservation of the Grossmarkthalle. This effort went as far as to remove, clean and reposition the bricks of the historic building. The other major requirement centered on “sustainability and energy efficiency.”<sup>12</sup> Coop Himmelb(l)au’s winning project focused heavily on this issue, proposing a new type of envelope, called “shield hybrid façade” which, through a variety of advanced technologies, promised a high degree of climate-control in the office space.<sup>13</sup>



In addition to underlining this technological apparatus, Coop Himmelb(l)au argued that the project revolved around a key formal gesture: “The design concept of the ECB is to vertically divide a monolithic block through a hyperboloid cut, wedge it apart, twist it and fill the newly created intermediary space with a glass atrium.”<sup>14</sup> The result was a “twisted double tower” that, from the architect’s perspective, responded to the ECB’s “request to create a unique, iconic building as a symbol for the European Union.” Ironically, six years later, a very similar concept was submitted to the competition for the new headquarters of the Central Bank of Azerbaijan, which Coop Himmelb(l)au also won.

### **Apolitical Materialism**

In 2008, as the financial crisis was exploding and the ECB project was getting off the ground, Alejandro Zaera-Polo published *The Politics of the Envelope*, which gave voice to a changing understanding of the relationship between architecture and politics: “Architects’ traditional role as visionaries (and ideologists) has become redundant as the sheer speed of change overtakes their capacity to represent politics ideologically; within this context it is vital to produce an updated politics of architecture, in which the discipline is not merely reduced to a representation of ideal political concepts, but conceived as an effective tool to produce change.”<sup>15</sup> His proposal was to “mobilize the political in the vertical envelope as an expression of technical efficiencies,” which was very much the approach of the ECB project.<sup>16</sup> Architecture’s engagement with politics was being moved towards the technical sphere of the envelope, which in turn was invested with the ability to produce iconographic performance, expression and even affect.

On the other hand, what was presented as a new form of political materialism tended to align with the architectural outlook of most large organizations across the globe, as the go-to model for the generic, corporate high-rise at the turn of the millennium. In Frankfurt, the silhouette of the financial district, a couple of kilometers westward along the Main river, constitutes an inescapable term of comparison for the ECB headquarters. Foster’s Commerzbank project and the renovation of Deutsche Bank unfolded in this very period. Kees Christiaanse, one of the renowned architects leading the jury of the ECB competition, told me that “there was no wish to look like anything in the financial district.”<sup>17</sup> The result of the competition, however, was a building that, to quote architectural historian

Hauke Horn, aligned with the “international iconography of financial high-rises” and did not show much of its “political purpose.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Brutal Understatements**

Although the material architecture of the ECB drew close to that of commercial banks, its institutional architecture had a very different model, which was also based in Frankfurt: the Deutsche Bundesbank.<sup>19</sup> In light of what had happened in the first half of the century, this was the first central bank to be given full independence from government. Since the early 1970s, the Bundesbank has been housed in a brutalist structure in the Nordend district, which set out to “radiate a strong sense of objectivity and functionality.”<sup>20</sup> According to Wolfgang Voigt, after the experience of the Nazi regime and its Reichsbank, “any notion of the architecture being used as a statement of power was avoided at all costs.”<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, in the design of the ECB, the goal was not to stand out, but to blend in. Like post-war German institutions, European institutions are very careful not to project their power, because they fear that, given the complex and fragile nature of a supranational democracy, this power may be perceived as illegitimate. According to Christiansee, the jury that selected Coop Himmelb(l)au’s proposal saw the ECB as a “service institution” and, therefore, was not looking for “great monumentality” or “extreme formal expression.”<sup>22</sup> For example, the jury commended the design concept by Johann Eisele, who was awarded the third prize in the competition, noting that “it refrained from creating a unique and distinctive landmark for the ECB” but was “efficient, technically and economically feasible and commendable.”<sup>23</sup>

For Francis Gross, one of the ECB executives who oversaw this endeavor from the inside and served as the secretary of the jury, the emphasis on the functional and technical aspects of the building, rather than its unique status as a supranational institution, spoke to the culture of the ECB: “we can actually see that an institution’s approach to architecture reflects its approach to its mission, which can raise some concern.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Image and Identity**

In spite of the constant attempt to stress the functional over the symbolic, another important question kept presenting itself throughout the competition: the

question of the bank's image. Of the seventy-one proposals, twenty-four were rejected for this reason: "the jury found that the outline concept would not reflect the values for which the ECB stands and would not convey the appropriate image."<sup>25</sup> The ECB provided a list of values, which included transparency, communication, efficiency and stability. As for the question of its image, however, there was never any explanation as to why an image was deemed appropriate or inappropriate.

A similar issue had been addressed a couple of years earlier, when the ECB had to define the iconography of the new common currency. In that instance, after a painstaking process, the issue was solved by elaborating a set of architectural images designed to appear as "neutral" as possible, in order to be accepted by all member states.<sup>26</sup> While being realistic and somehow recognizable as Europeans, the images featured on the euro notes did not represent any existing building.

Interestingly, ten years after the introduction of the euro, as the ECB tower was under way, Dutch artist Robin Stam carried out an experimental project in the town of Spijkenisse, near Rotterdam, where he was able to build the "fictional" bridges depicted on the banknotes.<sup>27</sup> This form of iconographic transfer from the bidimensional realm of the banknote to the tridimensional realm of the building manifested itself on multiple occasions in the case of ECB as well. For example, even before construction started, motives taken from banknotes were projected onto the façade of the Grossmarkhalle. Historically, this dynamic used to go the opposite way: banknotes tended to depict images of important public buildings, representing the authority in charge of that currency. In the case of the euro, on the contrary, the banknote came before the building. One of the clearest examples of such dynamic can be observed in the bank's council room, the inner sanctum of Coop Himmelb(l)au's building. As noted in an ECB brochure, "the ceiling of the council room is unique: the architects call it the Europe ceiling – the aluminum elements depict a map of Europe, as shown on the euro banknotes, in an abstract way."<sup>28</sup>

In the absence of a clear political project, the euro was invested with the monumental task of generating a common identity, including the difficult effort of elaborating a set of images that could fill the EU's iconographic vacuum and fuel future building projects. At the ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone of the ECB building, in the Spring of 2010, the president of the bank, Jean-Clau-

de Trichet, along with the architect and the mayor of Frankfurt, solemnly placed a set of euro banknotes in the stone. While it was not unusual to put money in foundation stones, this case was particularly significant. The “house of the euro,” as it was often called, was conceptually as well as physically built on a banknote.<sup>29</sup>

## **Rituals and Riots**

Even though the ECB project, much like the EU itself, was framed in functional, economic terms, certain political dynamics were still able to infiltrate the site, sometimes in unexpected ways, especially as the institution took on an increasingly central political role during the financial crisis. After the laying of the foundation stone, an even more theatrical ritual marked the topping-out of the building’s structure, two years later. In line with a tradition that spans across most of northern Europe, the builders raised a topping-out wreath and placed it atop the tower. The governors of the national central bank, one by one, hung the flag of their country onto the wreath, which had already been adorned by a multitude of ribbons carrying the EU flag. While the foundation stone was meant to be buried forever, this was a temporary, highly visible display. Made of pine branches and clad in flags, the wreath was shaped like a building – a little pavilion that embodied the process of supranationalization behind the ECB. Even if only for a few hours, a purely symbolic, temporary pavilion designed to express the uniqueness of this institution, as well as the political dynamics behind it, was placed on top of the actual structure.

When the project was finally completed, in March 2015, another ceremony was performed in the new building, as all the local and European authorities came together to celebrate the inauguration. Meanwhile, outside of the building, a different set of political forces had started to mobilize and, as the ribbon was being cut, a major riot exploded in the neighborhood. Activists from all over Europe had assembled in front of this new architectural landmark to protest the austerity measures carried out by the ECB during and after the financial crisis. They did not see the ECB as a neutral service-institution, making technical decisions: they saw it as a political actor. Although the goal of the institution was to understate its political dimension, the new building was immediately turned into a site of political engagement by EU citizens. Since then, it has been attracting countless rallies and demonstrations.

## Overstating Architecture

In her recent book *Five Ways to Make Architecture Political*, Albena Yaneva argues that buildings should no longer be seen as “political symbols or embodiments of big political forces.”<sup>30</sup> Like Zaera-Polo, she separates architecture from traditional, overshadowing theories of power—related to ideology, state, nation, government or activism—and makes the case that the political can be generated and explored at the “myopic, microscopic level of the practice.” The inner-workings of architecture in practice are therefore attributed a great deal of political agency. The ECB competition is one of those cases that call for a significant scaling down of most assumptions regarding both what architects are allowed to do, and what architects are capable of doing.

The development of the Holocaust memorial is a good example of the degree to which the ECB endeavored to keep architects away from the space of the political. In order to commemorate the darkest chapter in the history of the Grossmarkthalle, when its basement was used as a gathering place for the deportation of Jewish families, the ECB decided to include a memorial in its new premises. The design of the most symbolic space in the new headquarters, however, was divorced from the architectural competition. A separate competition was organized only for the memorial, in collaboration with the City of Frankfurt and the local Jewish community.<sup>31</sup> The two processes, the building and the memorial, ran in parallel and were both completed in 2015, but did not interact with each other. This was the clearest possible opportunity to reflect on the history of European integration and remind everybody how and why institutions like the ECB had been established. None of the 2002 competition proposals could seize this opportunity, as this loaded topic had been taken off the architect’s table.

On the other hand, this case also highlights a set of limitations that do not depend on external forces. The outcome of the ECB competition was not only determined by the institution’s unwillingness to expose itself and make a political statement through architecture, but also by the difficulty, on the part of many architects, to fully grasp the political stakes of this endeavor. Of the seventy-one architectural practices that took part in the competition, how many actually knew how European integration worked or how a supranational institution differed from other institutions?

Examining the short “concept outlines” that each participant had to submit, the reader will find that only one proposal alluded to the uniqueness of EU power and used the term “supranational.”<sup>32</sup> The second closest attempt was a proposal that described the ECB as a “supraregional” institution. Other proposals reveal a misunderstanding of the logic behind the institution. For example, Miralles and Tagliabue addressed the site of the ECB as “the base/landscape for the different/individual pavilions/countries.” Rather than a place where national powers could merge into a supranational entity, the ECB was treated as an international fair, where each country had its own pavilion, *à la* Biennale. But the most common move was to sprinkle some symbolism in the landscaping *around* the new building: the list of practices that proposed to create some form of garden, with trees or flowers representing all EU member states includes SOM, NHT, BRT, KHR, United Architects / UN Studio.

Even though the ECB competition did not give much leeway to experiment and push (beyond) the envelope, twenty years later, this case provides valuable insights for a conversation about architecture’s engagement with the European project.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps there may be a middle ground between utopian visions, representational performativity and a form of engagement centered on hyperbolic, super-efficient envelopes. Going forward in this effort to think about the relation between architecture and power, in its increasingly complex forms, it may be useful to keep in mind Hannah Arendt’s warning that “utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness.”<sup>34</sup>

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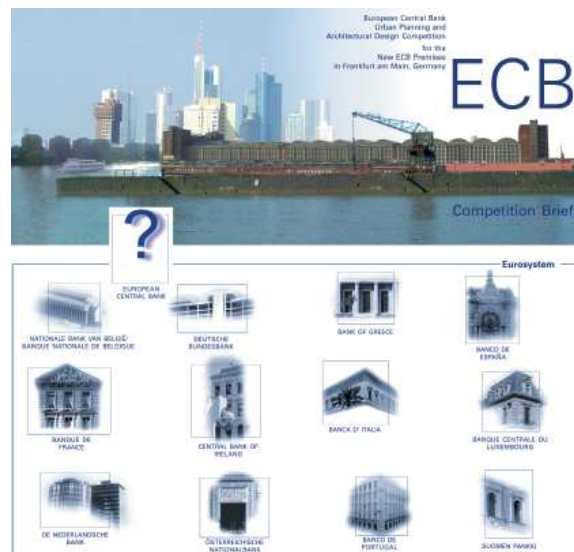


Figure 1. Cover of the ECB competition brief, November 2002. © European Central Bank

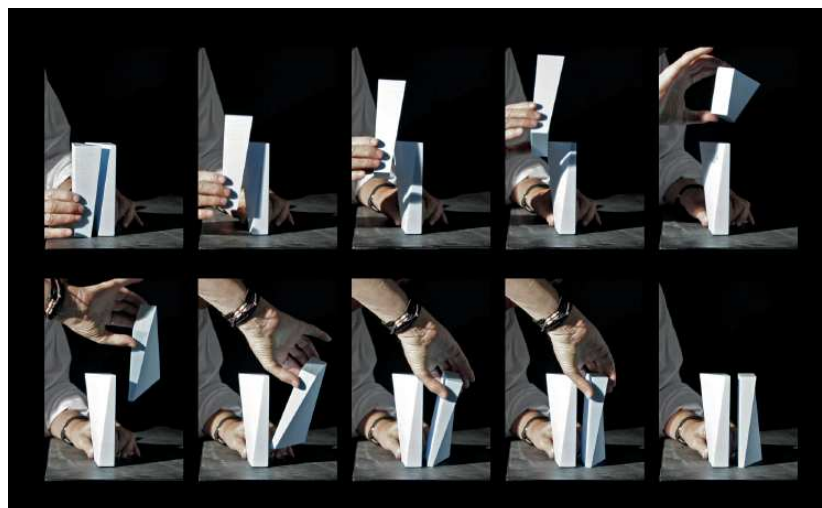


Figure 2. Coop Himmelb(l)au illustrates the “hyperboloid cut” of the ECB project, 2004. © Coop Himmelb(l)au





Figure 3. President Trichet places a set of euro banknotes into the foundation stone of the ECB building, 19 May 2010. © European Central Bank / Robert Metsch



Figure 4. Topping-out ceremony at the ECB building, 20 September 2012. © European Central Bank / Klaus Helbig



Figure 5. ECB council room, featuring the so-called “Europe ceiling” at the end of construction, 21 October 2014. © European Central Bank / Jens Meyer

# BETWEEN LOCAL AND GLOBAL, CIVIL ARCHITECTURE IN PALERMO AND THE SURROUNDING AREA AT THE TIME OF CHARLES V

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## Abstract

During his triumphal tour through Sicily, following victory in the battle of Tunis in 1535 Charles V, when arrived in Palermo, was hosted in Palazzo Aiutamicristo, an imposing building commissioned by a banker in the last decade of the fifteenth century and considered at that time to be the most beautiful and suitable location for housing the emperor and his entourage. It was immediately after this event that new trends in the field of civil architecture can be found in the island's capital city and its surroundings. New or renovated buildings testify to the "complex genesis" of modern palaces in Sicily at the time of Charles V; it is true also for the suburban residences. "All'antica" models started to replace previous linguistic, technic and spatial solutions, conceived in the wake of Mediterranean Gothic, but also conditioned by other external inputs, that were linked to the visual culture of a multifaceted group of clients.

Although many palaces and villas built at that time have been demolished or heavily transformed, the scholars can count on a significant number of elements or "fragments" of previous configurations, as well as written sources. The focus has been placed on some themes, important for assessing new trends in civil architecture, or the persistence of established solutions linked to local examples. These are: the design of portals and windows on the façades; the positioning of the stairs and their relation with courtyards and loggias; the introduction of loggias in suburban residences; the design of gardens surrounding villas. Ultimately, this contribution aims to investigate how far the new dimension of Charles V's empire affected the Sicilian context in the field of civil architecture, one that is very sensitive to changes in social and cultural perspectives.

## Keywords

Charles V, Civil Architecture, Palermo

## Introduction

The passage through Sicily of emperor Charles V in 1535 has been considered by historiography as a kind of threshold for architectural debate in the island, stimulating interventions on different scales inspired by classicist models. Two years later, the printing of the *Quarto libro* by Sebastiano Serlio and its immediate reception in Sicily gave a new and effective input to the spread of Renaissance architectural language.<sup>1</sup> However, these circumstances didn't create a sudden, global change in architectural production. On the contrary, a varied panorama is noted until almost the mid sixteenth century, where on the one hand "all'antica" elements and decorative motifs appear in the context of buildings conceived and constructed according to Mediterranean Gothic models, and on the other hand, elements or coatings relating to the latter are included in spatial or typological solutions inspired by Renaissance examples. Moreover, other inputs come from local history as well as from the experiences and the visual culture of a multifaceted group of clients.

The field of civil architecture appears to be a particularly fertile field of investigation for observing the various coexisting cultural components and the trends taking place in the city of Palermo between the third decade and the middle of the sixteenth century and to reveal its dynamics.

## The urban palaces

The choice of the Palazzo Aiutamicristo - an imposing building dating back to the end of the fifteenth century and linked to Mediterranean Gothic architectural culture - to host emperor Charles V when he arrived in Palermo on his triumphal tour through Sicily, following victory in Tunis in 1535, testifies to the relevance still attributed to that building in the 1530s. Even if it seems likely that some alterations to the main façade were made for that very occasion, intending to update its appearance and to adapt it to the ceremonial needs of its illustrious guest,<sup>2</sup> it is clear that the palace was still appreciated and considered suitable for housing the emperor and his entourage. Moreover, the same palace was also the temporary residence of the viceroy Ferrante Gonzaga, around 1540, during the second campaign of works in his palace in the fortress of the Castello a Mare.<sup>3</sup> This could be interpreted as evidence of some stalling in the sector of palace construction, after

the grandiose buildings at the end of fifteenth century and before the celebrated achievements of the second half of the sixteenth century, in particular related to the rectification and extension of the main road axis then called Via Toledo.<sup>4</sup> The reality that emerges from the fragmentary evidence is different and dotted with a number of initiatives that show an ongoing reworking of the models already present in the city and the appearance of new ones. The greatest problem in reconstructing the “difficult genesis of the modern palace in the age of Charles V in Palermo”<sup>5</sup> lies precisely in the fragmentary information available, as well as in the total disappearance or substantial reconfiguration of most of the buildings constructed in this era. Some significant episodes, however, can provide us with important elements of knowledge.

Between 1538 and 1546, during two different work campaigns, the viceroy Ferrante Gonzaga started the reconfiguration of the viceroy’s residence in the fortified complex of Castello a Mare. We have information about this building, totally demolished in 1922, from seventeenth century iconography and coeval archival documents. It was a relatively small palace, but which introduced some significant new elements, that may have had a certain resonance in the city, also due to the prestigious role played by the client. These elements include: the loggia that opened onto the maritime landscape; the twin portals, on the opposite side, facing the fortress courtyard, inspired by Serlio’s models;<sup>6</sup> the clear division between the apartments of the viceroy and those of his consort; the *stufa* (a small thermal bath) and large fireplaces with devices for the release of smoke “a la usanza di Italia”. The innovative elements, however, were to be flanked by others that were in continuity with fifteenth-century palatial architecture, such as the spiral staircase and the marble columns for the mullioned windows in the viceroy’s rooms cited in the documents.<sup>7</sup>

From the same documents we know that in 1542 a new “beautiful and comfortable” staircase was built inside the palace, to connect the entrance hall with the main floor, again unlike the model that became popular in fifteenth century Sicilian palaces, namely the *escalera descubierta* placed in the courtyard.

The location of the staircase in relation to the inner courtyard and the connotation of the latter are themes where we can observe a tendency to change and update the preferred solutions. A significant example is that of the palace of Berlinghieri Requesens, a member of an aristocratic Catalan family and general

of the galleys of the Sicilian fleet during Charles V's endeavours in Tunis.<sup>8</sup> The central trapezoidal courtyard, accessible from a square entrance hall, refers to the sixteenth-century configuration of the building (Fig. 1). It has a double loggia on one side only - in front of the entrance - showing a classicist reinterpretation of the model offered by the palaces in the late fifteenth-century Palermo, such as Palazzo Aiutamicristo.

Ionic columns are repeated with different proportions on the two levels, connected by round arches on the lower floor and lowered polycentric arches on the upper. The general use of pavilion vaults on lunettes is also in line with a phenomenon of progressive prevalence of models from the Italian peninsula, also in the construction field, as well as the decorative expedient of profile portraits of the patrons on the pedestals of two columns in the upper loggia. The staircase here is built into an open case accessible from the portico on the ground floor and the landing at the loggia level.

"All'antica" profiles, together with engraved mottos, also appear in the large classical aedicula windows, difficult to date, of the Palazzo Scavuzzo (Fig. 2), that is located on Piazza della Fieravecchia on the corner with Via Porta di Termini, onto which also overlooks Palazzo Aiutamicristo.

Although the inconsistencies that can be found in the façade, in particular in the grafting of the modillions of the window in correspondence with the portal, configured - according to Mediterranean late Gothic models - with long radial ashlar and moulded cornice, have cast doubt on the contextual dating of portal and windows, it is probable that their construction on the whole falls within the middle decade of sixteenth century. The male face in the central window of the main façade would seem to refer to the image of Caesar, probably alluding to that of Charles V, therefore to be interpreted as a tribute to the emperor.<sup>9</sup>

Even the inner courtyard presents hybrids that are difficult to interpret, with wide lowered arches supported by polygonal pillars to form a portico vaulted on lunettes; the space of the courtyard is again freed from the encumbrance of the staircase, accessible from the portico through a small portal.

A similar location of the staircase also seems to suggest a document relating to the disappeared palace belonging to Benedetto Ram, a rich member of a family of Catalan origin. In 1541, a contract assigned the task of decorating the loggia of the building in correspondence of the staircase landing and the entrance to

the main hall, with “istoria seu ystorias” established by the client, to the painter and stucco plasticator Orazio d’Alfano from Perugia.<sup>10</sup> This adds testimony to an aspect that today is no longer observable in existing casuistry, but probably not limited to Palazzo Ram and certainly not secondary to framing the taste and the requests of clients in search of affirmation within the urban patriciate.

Some fragmentary and sometimes episodic testimonies, in the context of deeply transformed buildings, which enrich the casuistry of hybridizations and diversified models. Among these, an example of the alternatives put in place in particular for the definition of façades is that of the palace belonging to the jurist of Pisan origin Giovanni Luigi Settimo in Via Lungarini. Under the plaster layer of the eighteenth-century reconfiguration of the façade, restoration work has brought to light a decoration that was probably made by 1525 using the graffiti technique, which simulates a covering with ashlar in the shape of diamond points divided by a *cornice marcapiano*, conceived as a continuous frieze with *grotesche* (Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> This is the only existing example traced to date, but from a seventeenth-century manuscript we know that the painter Jacopo Vigneri, a pupil of the more famous Polidoro da Caravaggio, created several graffiti façades in Messina in the sixteenth century (after 1528).<sup>12</sup>

### Suburban residences and villas

The construction of residences in the country-side for aristocrats and eminent figures among the island’s political and economic élite is not at all a novelty of the 1530s. However, they were usually linked to a production activity and located at a distance from the city and, even when an aesthetical intention can be detected from the construction documents, they had a fortified aspect and were built in the shape of a tower. Authorizations to build similar tower-palaces with crenellations (*licentiae mergulandi ac turrim construendi*) are still quite frequent among the acts issued by the viceroy during the first half of sixteenth century, demonstrating the strategical values of such buildings as well as the meaning attributed to those architectural features as a status symbol. What really stands out from the medieval inheritance at the time of Charles V was the appearance of a different way to conceive a suburban residence, as a place for pleasure to be enjoyed in more comfortable and open buildings, surrounded by gardens that were carefully designed and enriched with fountains, sculptures and porticoes. We can therefore

infer that this was the very moment when the first attempts to create “all’antica” villas can be recorded, that were inspired by a fascination for models, linked to the humanistic culture, coming from the Italian peninsula.

However, we cannot overlook the existence of an illustrious precedent in local history, namely the *sollacia regia* of the Norman kings. It is surely no coincidence that two of the most relevant examples known of this new type of suburban residences were built right in the proximity of those *sollacia*. These are: the Villa Ventimiglia (today Villa Napoli) located not far from the Cuba, incorporating the Norman *torre Alfaina* (or Cuba Soprana) and including a pavilion called “Cubula” (small Cuba) in its garden; Villa delle “Quattro Camere” belonging to the powerful Aragona family, built near Zisa.

After all, recent studies have shown that neo-Norman themes can clearly be found in sixteenth-century Sicilian architecture, both in the technical and formal solutions, sometimes revealing the aspiration of aristocratic patrons to accredit themselves as descendants of the Norman lineage that came in the wake of the conquistadors.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it seems that the reference to Renaissance models was added to this aura of myth, which clearly also transpires from the pages written by the erudite Tommaso Fazello in his narration of Sicilian history<sup>14</sup> and that had already manifested itself a century earlier in the request by Panormita for the concession of Zisa by King Alfonso I.<sup>15</sup>

In the first example cited, Villa Ventimiglia, the incorporation of the remains of a building dating back to Norman times, as well as the respective positions of the main building and the Cubula pavilion, as the backdrop of a straight pathway that crosses the garden from the northern side of the villa, left no doubt about the importance attributed to those structures as elements that enhanced the prestige of the new building. Even though partially transformed, the villa maintained the original overall configuration: a C plan, with two symmetrical advanced wings creating a half-court in front of the main façade (Fig. 4). The residential rooms were on the second floor of the building, lying on a first floor opened on the two wings by big round arches and crossed by a central passage-way, directly connecting the entrance in front of the villa with the garden behind it. The change from the fortified residences to a type of building in a close relationship with its external environment is completed here, as the presence of loggias on three sides on the second floor of the wings demonstrates. The only archival sources known up

to now that relate to this villa, the purchase of the site by Giovanni Ventimiglia in 1505 and the assignments given to the sculptor Giacomo Gagini for the realization of statues for two fountains between 1539 and 1542, suggest a date of construction between the second and the fourth decades of the sixteenth century.<sup>16</sup> The extraneousness of the villa's plan and general layout to the local and regional context could indicate the involvement of a "foreign" designer. Moreover, the overall conformation of the villa has similarities with the Villa Chigi in Rome. Postponing the hypothesized date of construction to the early 1540s, this could be explained by a design by the architect Domenico Giunti.

Recalled to Sicily in 1540 by the viceroy Ferrante Gonzaga, he came from Rome where he had completed his training as a perspective painter, demonstrating, in particular, familiarity with the modes of representation used by Baldassarre Peruzzi. Of course, he wasn't the only architect coming from the Italian peninsula who was aware of the Renaissance models of villas and who came to Sicily in those decades. For instance, we know that in 1537 the viceroy summoned from Naples the architect Giovan Battista Peloro, pupil of Baldassarre Peruzzi, from Naples, to do a drawing of Messina with its fortifications.<sup>17</sup> No other information is known about his stay in Sicily, but we cannot exclude other assignments by Sicilian clients.

What was certainly designed by Domenico Giunti is the villa belonging to the viceroy Ferrante Gonzaga, built between 1540 and 1546 in the suburban area north of the city.<sup>18</sup> Thoroughly transformed in the seventeenth century, the main façade has only been slightly altered in, characterized by the central loggia and square windows with modillions on the two sides (Fig. 5). It is probable that the main residential space of the villa, a wide rectangular hall, higher than the other rooms on the two sides, was positioned behind the loggia. Part of these rooms still shows the original pavilion type vaults on lunettes, a technical and formal solution imported in Sicily from the Italian peninsula in the late fifteenth century but that became popular in that period. This villa is single storey, but located in an elevated position, connected with the lowest level of the original access road by a double *cordinata* ramp. This rather scenographic solution together with the permeability of the wide three arches of the front loggia clearly testify to the main novelty of this residences, namely the strong connection between the building itself and the garden.



The attention paid by the viceroy Gonzaga to the garden has been recorded by the correspondence exchange with his architect Giunti.<sup>19</sup> In addition to vineyards and cultivated areas, it included pleasure gardens and at least one fountain, a fishpond and a rabbit hutch, close to which a porticoed structure had been set up to watch the hunting shows. The importance of the garden is also testified by references to the villa in coeval documents such as the garden house (*la casa del giardino*) or the viceroy's *viridarium*. However, the documented use of Villa Gonzaga, when it had passed to the Cifuentes family, as a place for hosting the new viceroys, suggests that it must have been a comfortable and elegant residence, long considered up to that function, as part of a precise ceremonial procedure that included the subsequent accompaniment of the Island's governor with a procession to the royal palace.<sup>20</sup>

The design of a rich and articulated garden exemplified by the models offered by the Medici villas and other "delights" of the Italian Renaissance courts seems to reach its acme with the last example we are dealing with, the lost villa of the Aragona family, better known as the Villa delle "Quattro Camere". The date of construction is still uncertain, but it seems likely that it started in the 1540s, emulating the viceroy Gonzaga, and considering the familiarity of Giovanni Aragona with the latter.<sup>21</sup> The information on this complex mainly derives from the description written by the local erudite Vincenzo Di Giovanni around 1620, focused on the garden.<sup>22</sup> In the sequence described by Di Giovanni, after the entrance there were spacious courtyards, then a labyrinth of myrtles with a square in the middle, with a mountain and a cave with water games. Then you passed to a first square section of the garden, divided in turn into square flowerbeds - planted with fruit trees - by paths bordered by myrtles and orange trees, with a large sculptural fountain and, at the end of the path in a straight line, an artificial cave, richly decorated and with water games. Three steps on you came to a second square crossed by covered paths and with a vaulted pavilion covering a fountain, decorated with sculptures. Shortly after, you finally reached the house, which was given only a brief description: a central wide loggia and four rooms, two on each side, all of them covered by vaults with a rich decoration (gilded stucco statues in the loggia; paintings in the four rooms, depicting scenes and *grottesche*). The description is not very clear on the following part, where it refers to another loggia accessible from a big gate and connecting with a grove of hazelnuts and wild plants, crossed by

wider pathways and with another scenography fountain.

From this description, we can deduce that the garden was the real protagonist of the overall project; but the quality of the finishes in the rooms of the villa also bears witness to the client's interest in the representativeness of the same villa, also offering some clues of hybridization of models. On the one hand the techniques and the subjects of decorations are undoubtedly linked to Renaissance models, so much that Houel, visiting the villa in the 1770s, believed that it was the work of artists from the Raphael school.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the use of Valencian tiles to cover walls up to a certain height and to pave the loggia and the rooms is reminiscent of residences linked to the Mediterranean Gothic and also common in Sicily from the fifteenth century.

Other examples have been cited by scholars and some still remain (probably dating to the 1540s-1550s), showing more traditional solutions with limited concessions to that search for greater permeability of the interior spaces, already commented on, and namely the introduction of loggias. This is the case, for example, of Villa Belvedere at Altarello di Baida owned by the merchant Sigismondo Rustici from Lucca in 1555.

In this combination of long-lasting or recent traditions and new inputs, that was spreading on a global scale, we cannot forget an element rooted in Islamic building culture, which we find in the villas around Palermo in the sixteenth century, i. e. the "camera dello scirocco", included for example in the complex of Villa delle "Quattro Camere". It was an underground space served by cold water, used as a refuge from the heat during the summer.

## Conclusions

The framework of knowledge on civil architecture in the first half of the sixteenth century in Palermo is certainly still very fragmentary and largely incomplete, and this should lead to necessary caution in drawing conclusions. However, from the casuistry known to date, and in particular from the examples briefly commented on in this contribution, we can observe a context that is anything but static and unproductive. On the contrary, the Palermo area appears characterized by a lively building activity and by architectural research that moves between the opposite poles of traditions - more or less ancient - linked to the local context, and the phenomena of diffusion of models on a large scale, which have in the

Italian peninsula the new privileged horizon of reference. Languages, technical solutions and housing models, new and linked to established uses, are compared and frequently hybridized, not only due to clients' aspirations, but also due to the frequent arrival in the island of artists from different contexts in peninsular Italy. However, the relationships with the Iberian Peninsula, other contacts and paths of men and models are also not to be ignore, especially in the network of relations that revolved around the charismatic figure of Charles V.

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# AMBIGUOUS AND MUDDY: THE ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE OF REIKO TOMITA AND HER GROUP ATELIER ZŌ DURING THE BUBBLE ERA

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## Abstract

When Japan was dazzled by the frenzy of economic growth, a group of young architects chose to get down in the mud and talk about collaboration. Environmental concerns and participation-driven projects are commonplace today; however, when skyscrapers were endlessly sprouting from Japanese soil, Atelier Zō (Elephant Group) was already taking a groundbreaking stand. Reiko Tomita (1938-), the first woman architect to graduate from the prestigious University of Tokyo, was one of its founders. After studying at Kenzo Tange Laboratory, she worked with Takamasa Yoshizaka. At his office, she met Hiroyasu Higuchi (1939-) and Koichi Otake (1938-1983) and resolved to go independently as a team in 1971. Vastly differing from the typical postmodern scene, Tomita approaches architecture using onomatopoeic words to communicate properties such as surface or proportions, seeking intimate relationships between people and things.

In 1993, one year after the bubble burst, the magazine *Kenchiku Bunka* published a special issue dedicated to Atelier Zō entitled *Amaimoko* (ambiguous). Along with their projects, they presented a manifesto of “seven principles” and “twelve givens” for thinking architecture. The sensory world, cosmology, diversity, and indeterminacy were fundamental notions of their practice. In contrast to heroic buildings, their alternative designs were intimately rooted in place. Landforms and vegetation permeate their proposals, ranging from houses, care facilities, schools, or landscape interventions. With a palette of earth, wood, clay, tiles, pebbles, or bricks; colorful and playful materials, Atelier Zō’s architecture radiates a sense of timelessness that historians such as Riichi Miyake associate with the Jomon culture of prehistoric Japan. Nevertheless, its environmental consciousness and involvement with the local community are genuinely contemporary. Taking as study material different publications and an interview with Tomita, this article proposes to review the work of Atelier Zō as a revolutionary practice that laid the foundations of ecological design in Japanese architecture.

## Keywords

Japanese Architecture, Reiko Tomita, Atelier Zō, Alternative Practice, Ecological Design

## Emerging in turbulent times

Atelier Zō began its practice in 1971, a historical moment immediately following the social upheaval of student revolts and left-wing movements that characterized the global political climate. In Japan, the period between 1966-1971 is often referred to as the “season of politics” (*seiji no kisetsu*), whose best-known protests include opposition to Anpo (the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty that endorsed military presence in Japanese territory), the Vietnam War or the construction of Narita International Airport.<sup>1</sup> These popular dissents integrated diverse demographic groups, yet the main visible leaders were Tokyo students.

In fact, incendiary sparks were struck at universities with the *Zenkyōtō* (All-Campus Joint Struggle Councils). The founders of Atelier Zō were young graduates of Waseda and the University of Tokyo when the baby boom generation started outbreaks of activism on these same campuses. Coinciding with the famous Parisian year of civil strikes, 1968 is best recalled for the Japanese uprisings, overlapping with the Shinjuku Station riots. From the standpoint of individual self-liberation, student groups acted from a non-hierarchical idealism, organizing against the educational systems linked to imperialism and the state.<sup>2</sup> But we should bear in mind, that universities began to admit women in their lists only after the postwar Basic Education Law of 1947. Women representation remained scarce and gender stereotypes highlighted discriminations still implicit in this revolution.<sup>3</sup> The female youth expressed their discontent through various publications and actions that would cement the Woman Liberation Movement in Japan (*ūman ribu*).<sup>4</sup>

Reiko Tomita (1938-), co-founder of Zō, was the first woman to graduate from the new co-educational environment at the Department of Architecture, University of Tokyo in 1963. Until then, prolific architects such as Miho Hamaguchi or Masako Hayashi, had only institutional access to gendered curriculums, strongly based on Home Economics.<sup>5</sup> An interesting coincidence is that Hamaguchi was an old classmate of Tomita’s mother, Nobuko Takahashi, who in her position as ambassador contributed significantly to the advancement of working women’s rights. Tomita was able to witness Hamaguchi in action in the renovation of her own house, becoming a decisive role model in her career choice. Orphaned by her doctor father during the war, who also dreamed of being an architect, Tomita kept her desire to become one alive.<sup>6</sup>

Going to a coeducational public university was an unconventional choice in the 1960s, distinct from the common path for upper class girls, who pursued an architectural education focused on domestic design at a women's college.<sup>7</sup> Tomita completed her architectural degree in a group internationally acclaimed for their bold urban planning and striking government buildings, Kenzo Tange Laboratory, the birthplace of the Metabolist movement.<sup>8</sup> Their proposals sprout from a tabula rasa condition and a strong belief in progress, deploying new models of the production-centered city from a positivist stance towards technology. With no concern for care infrastructures, the protagonist of these scenarios was always the wage-earner (*salaryman*). At CIAM 59, Tange made remarks rejecting the existing order, decorativism, and regionalism: "Vitalism is always destructive to our reality, but it is constructive for the future."<sup>9</sup>

### **Discontinuous Unity, seeking collaboration**

Tomita was among the Tange Lab students who designed the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Stadium, one of the masterpieces of postwar modern Japanese architecture. Gently, she humorously recalls the male-dominated pedagogical context in which she was immersed - there were not even women restrooms in the architecture building.<sup>10</sup> Her clay model for the Stadium, with its dinosaur-like appearance and animal-patterned interiors, drew a skeptical criticism among her peers.<sup>11</sup> She needed to change places in order to continue feeding her rebellious imagination; Metabolist discourse had become commonplace and she sought to innovate through alternative paths. She was craving to explore new collaborations on architecture and town planning entangled with environmental concerns, beyond the rhetoric of growth. On the suggestion of Mario Sasaki, an Argentinian colleague, she decided to visit Atelier U, the office that Waseda professor Takamasa Yosizaka (1917-1980) founded after studying *Jukyogaku* (Dwelling Studies) under Wajiro Kon and training abroad with Le Corbusier.<sup>12</sup> This was the germinating seed of Atelier Zō (Elephant).

Learning from Yosizaka the "Discontinuous Unity" philosophy was essential for Tomita. It was not only a formal methodology, but also a question of organizational capacity. A design ethos to create collectively. Joining Atelier U entailed the conceptual metamorphosis of rejecting pyramidal structures among workers in architecture. Through discussions with numerous drawings and models, which were



usually made of clay, they seek to nurture the diversity of *keishi* (forms) without losing the sense of unity.<sup>13</sup> Takamasa encouraged approaching projects through the environment, exploring the sites with an immersive attitude and without prejudices. Investigating and understanding by walking, as an *arukitekuto-ākitekuto* (a phonetic play with the Japanese verb *arukimasu*, to walk, and the English word architect).<sup>14</sup>

Tomita learned the relationships between people and things, following not merely the will of a hero-architect, but the wisdom of the townspeople through *machizukuri* (community planning). In this collaborative atmosphere Tomita met her fellow colleagues and founding members of Atelier Zō, Hiroyasu Higuchi (1939-) and Koichi Otake (1938-1983). Keiko Arimura (1942-2020) and Tsutomu Shigemura (1946-), also formed part of the team until 1978, when they became independent as Atelier Iruka (Dolphin). Other young architects who had trained with them, started their own independent offices but keeping the cooperative relationship. With very peculiar names and trademarks inspired in the animal realm, they formed Team Zoo, an architectural network never seen before in Japan. Among them are: Atelier Gaii (Bull), Atelier Wani (Crocodile), Atelier Todo (Sea Lion), Atelier Kuma (Bear), Atelier Mobile (Running Bird) or Atelier Kujira (Whale).

### **Practicing in the era of consumerism**

After the turmoil of the 1960s, the culmination of metabolist visions came at the 1970 Osaka World Exposition.<sup>15</sup> The following two decades, when Atelier Zō consolidated its architectural practice, citizen concerns abandoned activism to everyday demands in diffuse community networks.<sup>16</sup> Although the 1973 oil crisis marked the end of the rapid economic acceleration that followed World War II, the Japanese maintained high levels of wealth. Advanced capitalism and business culture fostered the mainstream spirit. Japan was now a global power. The “Economic Miracle” led to bourgeois philosophies as “My-homism” (*mai-hōmushugi*), consolidating an affluent middle class. Branding a conformist and consumerist attitude, success was labeled by the three ks of car (*kā*), refrigerator (*kūrā*) and color television (*karā terebi*).<sup>17</sup>

This consumer euphoria catalyzed a different stage in the Japanese architectural stream, full of mannerist languages and formalistic rhetoric. Postmodernism came to fruition with the seminal book of Charles Jencks, “The Language of

Post-Modern Architecture” (1977).<sup>18</sup> Japanese architects, keeping pace with the world scene, took this movement to its full potential during the 1980s, in the wake of the bubble economy.<sup>19</sup> In fact, “bubble heritage” often refers to flamboyant buildings characteristic of this period.<sup>20</sup> Postmodernist tendencies emerged against orthodox modernism, attempting to subvert homogeneity, while falling into the trap of being a new globalized trend.<sup>21</sup> Information technology came to replace the archetypal functionalism, often subject to the representation of obscure intellectual concepts, alien to the social.

Atelier Zō was far from this dominant tendency enamored with skyscrapers, metal cladding, and extruded aluminum. Although they showed appreciation for the symbology tied to cultural landscapes, their buildings were not absorbed by a purpose of neoclassical resurgence. As learned with Takamasa, they valued shared knowledge and collective intelligence transmitted over time, rooted in place. Their palette was colorful, playful, and muddy.<sup>22</sup> Earth, wood, clay, tiles, pebbles, or bricks were used by Atelier Zō for a panoply of architecture and urbanism projects including houses, schools, nurseries, community centers, care facilities, public buildings, art museums, hot springs, promenades, or parks. Their architectures radiate a sense of timelessness that historians such as Riichi Miyake associate with the Jomon culture of prehistoric Japan.<sup>23</sup> The idiosyncrasy of each place – climate, traditions, and local wishes – was brought to the scenography and tectonic properties of their projects, where the corporeal was more crucial than the visual. For Zō, the architectural process, from material choice to formal creation was an environmental statement. Architecture was “love with locus”.<sup>24</sup>

### **Counterculture beyond Critical Regionalism**

Nature, for Atelier Zō, differs substantially from the insights of their contemporaries. The dominant architectural narrative lapsed into stereotypes of oriental romanticism. Natural elements were there to convey just abstract visions and metaphoric references, rather than enhancing ecological capabilities. Nature was generally used to extol the poetic qualities of a building. Perhaps the easiest example to illustrate this interpretation of environment is Tadao Ando. He used elements such as light or wind to emphasize geometry. With his exceptionally smooth monochrome concrete, authorship was assured, alien to the place and sometimes contrary to its own materiality. Nature was out there to be framed. Ironically, after

his statement against generic solutions and “placelessness” in architecture, Kenneth Frampton crowned Ando as the ultimate Japanese representative of Critical Regionalism.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, the architecture of Atelier Zō commits to locality from a humanist architecture, always presenting an ambiguity that is difficult to categorize with a clear tag.

In his 1988 documentary, “Japan: Three Generations of Avant-Garde” Frampton shows a selection of “the new golden age of Japanese design”.<sup>26</sup> These were Tadao Ando (1941-), Toyo Ito (1941-), Itsuko Hasegawa (1941-), Arata Isozaki (1931-), Fumihiko Maki (1928-), and Kazuo Shinohara (1925-2006), who could be a better representative of the mediation between the language of modern architecture and the Japanese geographical context, especially in his first phase of re-interpretation of tradition.<sup>27</sup> Hasegawa stands out from the rest with her frankness speaking up the challenges of being a woman in architecture. She is the only architect who, after winning the Shonandai Center competition, considers citizen participation and user perspective, in opposition to the “great public monuments of the 1960s in Japan, the town halls built by Tange and others, which she sees primarily for the glorification of local politicians and a representation of power.” Reiko Tomita and her group would have belonged to the younger generations but did not pass the selection for the documentary. Perhaps their way of practicing collectively, and adaptable to multiple regional contexts, their material affinities with ecological concerns and their unabashed use of signs, meant resistance to resistance. Atelier Zō were the counterculture of the avant-garde.

### *Amaimoko*, an Ecological Manifesto

A decade earlier Atelier Zō, within the supra-collective Team Zoo, were selected together with other nine offices for the itinerant exhibition “New Wave of Japanese Architecture” in U.S.<sup>28</sup> Their contribution, entitled “*What we are thinking of...*”, consisted of nine panels combining photographs and plans of their recent work with an alphabet of 27 ideas. Only the letter N refers to form and from a completely dissimilar angle to that of their colleagues: “*form should not seek after Novelty*”.<sup>29</sup> This inventory inaugurated conceptual lines that they would later develop in their work. The special edition of Atelier Zō in *Kenchiku Bunka* magazine of October 1993, just one year after the economic bubble of Japan burst, crystallized their theories, exemplified by more than twenty years of practice.<sup>30</sup>

They presented a kind of manifesto structured in two groups: *Seven Principles*, guiding values when designing; and *Twelve Givens*, those instruments, elements, or methodologies to articulate the principles. The document has a didactic vocation, aiming to be accessible to both professionals and citizens. It is written in an unconventional tone for a manifesto, rather than confronting previous positions or theories to build their arguments, it is envisioned in a positive and propositional light. They indicate that not all the *principles*, nor all the *givens* are found in their totality in each project. The scope of action they suggest spans beyond architecture. Their aim is to discover the latent potential in every exterior or interior landscape by promoting a highly participatory method that brings them the childlike pleasure of building together.

Four out of the *Seven Principles* refer to the work process of the Atelier, not to the results they intend to achieve. For example, the notion of *aimaimoko* that gives the monograph its title, a Japanese term that they define as “the state of being unlimited and ambiguous”, renders an inclusive approach that we can recognize in contemporary discourses and terminologies such as non-binary. In the golden age of individual expression through consumption, *Amaimoko* emerges as a statement against isolated gurus, stylistic norms, and reductive theories. In *Expression of Place*, they address the need for rigorous fieldwork in each new project, carrying studies in a trans-scalar manner. *What is a house?* is the question they ask to emphasize the need for collaboration with the future inhabitants, whether an individual client or a community, to meet their needs and desires, while also challenging the notions embedded in obsolete architectural typologies. Their philosophy of *Ex-ertive Building* is the sense of responsibility the group experienced in every project. Zō gets involved at all stages of the construction process, even to the point of actually building with their own hands.

The remaining three principles focus on design applications and display a closer relationship to the following *Twelve Givens*. Influenced by Takamasa’s *Discontinuous Unity*, they advocate spatial *Diversity* through form, scale, and materiality. Zō seeks to provide a wide range of environments to accommodate a great complexity of situations with the goal of recognizing social diversity, resonating with up-to-date discourses around care. Furthermore, their principle *Enhancing and Enjoying Nature*, point to theories on the anthropocene or more-than-human, from an ecological perspective. Finally, attending to texture and materiality, they pursue a

*Sensory World* of emotional responses in the inhabitants, emphasizing a phenomenological standpoint of the environment, not centered on visual aspects.

The *Twelve Givens* refer to architectural elements and their relational consequences. They work in section by making *Landforms*, linking to air on the rooftops and to water in the subsoil. Also they generate centripetal places, *Basins*, where spatial gravity is concentrated, behaving as places for congregation. They suggest to surround these basins with *Inside - Outside* transition spaces that stimulate interaction between building and community, *Forests of Columns* for achieving spatial diversity, and dissimilar *Roofs* to host the activities that occur beneath them. *Jiku*, meaning axis, is palpable on their drawings, where lines representing directional relationships appear at different spatial-temporal scales. These environmental structural lines orient their architectures in reference to views, urban landmarks, or celestial bodies. Zō works with time as a constructive material through the introduction of *Lightwells* and by *Planting Trees*, which allow architecture to reflect the passing of the day as well as the seasons.

Another set of these givens is linked to the sensorial experience. They employ inexpensive *Soft Materials* such as earth, wood, or ceramics, that in addition to their environmental capabilities are catalysts for their creativity, contrasting with the industrial preferences of their contemporaries. Zō strives for intimate associations between bodies and the built environment by finishing those materials with expressive textures, which they refer to with onomatopoeias such as *Giza-Giza DanDan*. Decorative elements named *Wonders* symbolize animals or plants, adding a layer of humor away from convoluted postmodern rhetoric. Lastly, they use *Colors* with the aim of generating emotional responses. The combination of all these elements with different intensities and combinations ultimately creates what Reiko Tomita entitled “Architecture that loves people”.

Atelier Zō also deviates from the general trend in the graphic representation of their work. Browsing through architecture publications, the photographs of their buildings stand out for being crowded with people. In an era of fascination with technology, at the early stages of computer-aided design, Zō kept working by hand. Their drawings are in color, composed of thick and brightly painted strokes. Engraving techniques, in large perspectives where elements of the immediate environment are related to the cosmos, and where architecture shares the

same importance as animals, stars or local characters. Tomita referred to drawing as a means of generating knowledge and dialogue: “We drew, drew and drew. And if someone had a different opinion, they must show their objection by drawing. That was the rule.”<sup>31</sup>

Almost three decades after the publication of this monographic issue, the dissemination of their work is still rare, especially outside Japanese borders. However, a review of their practice from a current perspective renders them as groundbreakers in terms of collaborative practices, participatory processes, and ecological design. Reiko Tomita, an essential core member, stands out as the first woman to graduate from the University of Tokyo. She decided found an innovative collaborative structure in which authorship is diluted to democratize knowledge, include the voices of unrecognized actors, and diversify possibilities in the field of architecture. Atelier Zō’s wondrous imaginary is as powerful yet playful, as revolutionary yet forgotten, as rooted yet magical, as its office signature: a flying elephant.

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# ADVOCACY AND ACTION: LOCAL NEWSPAPERS AND ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE

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## Abstract

Architecture criticism is at its foundation a local practice, based in writing about a building that is rooted in place. How we understand the audience for architecture criticism, as a local audience with immediate access and interest in how the building relates to their everyday lives or as an audience distant and removed from more immediate interactions, shapes how we understand the purpose and meaning of that criticism. This paper proposes looking intentionally at criticism in local newspapers as a particular kind of architectural discourse focused on immediate policy and decision-making opportunities with impact on the local built environment. While Ada Louise Huxtable is celebrated as the doyenne of this particular kind of local advocacy, her work has also transcended the New York audience she wrote for. By looking at two very different writers and places, Phoebe Stanton in Baltimore in the 1960s and 1970s and David Dillon in Dallas in the 1980s and 1990s, we can assemble a set of techniques and strategies that represent this hyperlocalized approach to architectural criticism.

Stanton, better known as a leading academic authority on Pugin and the Gothic Revival and a professor at Johns Hopkins, also wrote acerbic criticism for her local newspaper, the *Baltimore Sun*. Dillon, by contrast, was a full-time columnist for the *Dallas Morning News*, where he wrote articles about architecture, but also real estate and art. Each approached their writing for the local newspaper through a lens that focused on public education, as distinguished from writing in architecture periodicals that may focus more on professional audiences. Both authors had distinct voices, but share a focus on discernible and easily apprehensible outcomes rather than more abstract theoretical or aesthetic discourse. Recovering the voices of these local critics and understanding their roles in shaping architectural production is critical for the formation of a history of architectural criticism.

## Keywords

Architecture criticism, Historic preservation, Urban renewal, Postmodernism, Aesthetics



Recalling the impact of the writing of architectural historian and local architecture critic Phoebe Stanton for the *Baltimore Sun*, the writer and critic Ed Gunts (who followed her as architecture critic at the *Sun*) stated bluntly “she was the Ada Louise Huxtable of Baltimore.”<sup>1</sup> It is a short and sweet statement that carries a direct punch, implying that Stanton was impactful, forceful, and took on powerful forces to shape the way the architecture, urban design, and historic preservation decisions worked in Baltimore during the 1970s when she wrote. She covered a variety of topics, from her first piece, a review of an Arcosanti exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC in 1970, to in-depth explorations of the impact of the massive Charles Center urban renewal project on central Baltimore. Her articles were long, deeply researched, and often involved the work of her students at Johns Hopkins University, where she was a tenured professor of art history.

Stanton is, of course, much better known in the circles of architectural history as a student of Nikolaus Pevsner, for her work as a biographer of Pugin, and as a scholar of the Gothic Revival than for her column on architecture written for the Sunday edition of the *Sun*. She wrote the short Pugin monograph published by Viking Press in 1972, a masterful history of the Gothic Revival in American Church Architecture, published in 1968, and worked on an unpublished multi-volume biography of Pugin until her death in 2003.<sup>2</sup> Hearing her described as the “Ada Louise Huxtable” of Baltimore reframed her work as a historian and critic in new ways.

Huxtable sets the gold standard, not for scholarly writing, but for critical writing intended to persuade and influence decision-making about specific architectural and urban development projects occurring in real time. As the first full-time critic for the *New York Times*, she wrote for the public, targeting architects, real estate developers, and public officials who held the power to make New York a better, or worse, place. Her critical writing, though, transcended her local audience and her articles, essays, and books are consumed by an international readership, for whom she is still a model critic, widely understood to be the originator of architectural criticism in its contemporary form. Paul Goldberger, another local critic who has transcended his New York audience wrote that “she is the one who has made the path, laid out the road, determined the direction, and set us all going.”<sup>3</sup>

The question I would like to think about today reflects on the Huxtable model as it existed in local newspapers in the U.S. between the 1960s and the 1990s, after

Huxtable, but before the well-acknowledged decline of newspaper criticism since the decimation of the local newspaper industry in the early 2000s. What is the value of the Huxtable model - is it the very real local impact of persuasive criticism, or is it the fact that the writing transcended its local audience? And how do we understand the value of other local critics whose work does NOT transcend their local audience? Is their work less valuable because it is rooted in places that are less celebrated or influential than a place like New York City? No matter how we answer these questions, the work of local critics is essential to a full historiography of architecture criticism, and understanding its role, function, and mechanisms better is key to any analysis of criticism as a form of architectural practice and writing.

To explore this further, today I'll discuss Stanton but also the work of David Dillon, architecture critic for the Dallas Morning News, who wrote for that paper full time between 1981 and 2006. Stanton and Dillon are very different writers working in different markets, but the shared themes of their work suggest that we should pay more attention to local newspapers as both agents of architectural change and mirrors to the limitations of criticism. There are many other critics writing for U.S. newspapers during this time period, less known than Huxtable, but better known than Stanton and Dillon, including Alan Temko (1961-93, San Francisco Chronicle, followed by John King) and Paul Gapp (Chicago Tribune, 1974, Pulitzer 1979 followed by Blair Kamin in 1992 – Pulitzer 1999) writing in San Francisco and Chicago. Looking at lesser known critics in cities less known for their design culture widens the net and refocuses our attention how platforms for local architecture criticism were created and used,

### **Creating a position for a local architecture critic**

Both Stanton and Dillon were the first architecture critics for the respective papers. Stanton began writing for the Sun in 1970.<sup>4</sup> In addition to her tenured position at Johns Hopkins, she was a member of Baltimore's Design Advisory Panel for 33 years, a public entity that had review power over urban development. Her first articles were sporadic, and positioned her more as a culture writer, reviewing exhibits and sharing travel writing ("Leningrad: Beautiful Window Into a Treasury of Russian Art," August 30, 1970). She was profiled in 1971 as the co-teacher of a course called "Baltimore: A Study in City Growth and Change" (April 11, 1971)

and by 1972, Stanton was writing a column about Baltimore architecture that appeared in the Sunday edition of the Sun across the next five years. The first of these new essays was “Architecture: The students criticize Charles Center” (January 16, 1972).

Stanton’s growth into an occasional recurring column on architecture drew on her long-standing position as a teacher and activist in the Baltimore architectural community and her existing relationship with members of the urban development community. Her supporters and allies included Robert C. Embry, Jr. who was at the time Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Community Development for Baltimore City. She was therefore not at all an outsider to local power structures and was a well-known voice with an established track record in issues brought before the Design Review Board before she began to write for the paper.

The keys to her new position seems to have been the rising star of Ada Louise Huxtable, who won the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism in 1970, exactly the time Stanton began writing – and the Baltimore Sun’s desire to be taken seriously amongst the leading titles in the U.S., including the New York Times and its neighbor the Washington Post. Establishing a recurring position for an architecture critic gave the paper status and established its reputation for publishing serious writing.

A decade later, The Dallas Morning News hired Dillon to write full-time about architecture in 1981. He had been a tenure-track professor in the English department at SMU after receiving his PhD in literature from Harvard. After leaving his teaching position he began to write freelance and wrote a 1980 cover story for a local Dallas magazine titled “Why Is Dallas Architecture So Bad?” The article criticized local developers for their low standards and poor taste and suggested that cities like Houston and Minneapolis, and developers like Gerald Hines were all doing a better job. That article got the attention of the paper and he was hired within a year. Over the next 25 years, he wrote more than 1,000 articles for the paper – a radically different position than Stanton’s.

The Dallas Morning News, as I outline in *The Open-Ended City*, a collection of Dillon’s articles that I edited and published in 2019,<sup>5</sup> established Dillon’s position to strengthen its stable of culture writers and appeal to a potential subscriber base that it described as sophisticated and urbane, seeking the kind of cultural amenities associated with more mature cities like New York. When they hired Dillon

they used him (and other culture writers) as an advertising draw for subscribers, touting their cultural content as something that could not be found elsewhere. This was a strategy to increase revenue, and also to drive their local competitor, the Dallas Herald, out of business. The strategy, combined with a number of other initiatives, worked and the Herald lost subscribers and closed its doors in 1991.

In both cases, the role of the newspapers' management and editorial board in shaping a business plan were key to the creation of a position for an architecture. Local criticism, for management, provided a means of cultural validation – that could establish their paper as a first-tier competitor on par with art and culture metropolises like New York. As long as architectural criticism remained a vital and attention-grabbing part of the business model of the “paper of record” it provided a model for other papers to follow, whether through envy, emulation, or shrewd marketing. The critical point here is that the audience for architecture criticism in local newspapers was subscribers, largely white, upper- and middle-class city educated dwellers – the “public” referred to over and over by critics and newspaper management alike represented only a small portion of the population impacted by architecture and urban development.

### **The critics' view of their roles**

This commodification of criticism for an audience with market power was not, however, how the critics saw their own roles. Both saw themselves as educators and as activists with specific local audiences in mind that included both their general readers in the paper and, perhaps more importantly, the developers and policy makers who controlled decision-making in Baltimore and Dallas. Hot button issues, as for Huxtable, included historic preservation, and large scale urban redevelopment – but at their core, both writers believed in the fundamentals of taste and aesthetics and wrote to educate broadly.<sup>6</sup>

Stanton, in a 1972 article lamenting the coming demolition of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic Revival church to be replaced by what she described as Corbusian concrete Expressionism explicitly called for strengthening the city's Historical and Architectural Preservation Commission and adding additional staff to allow proactive survey and documentation of the city's historic assets. Dillon, writing in 1988 about the controversy surrounding the campaign to preserve the home of Civil Rights leader Juanita Craft, was less direct, more

circumspect about the tendentious role of historic preservation in shaping city policy.

At the larger scale of the city, Stanton set her sights on the state of Maryland as a poor planner in its conception of the Baltimore campus of the University of Maryland. After praising city, county, and port of Baltimore for their planning of the Charles Center and Harbor projects, she stated pointedly that “All institutions controlling sections of the inner city must join and contribute to the planning mosaic, must maintain similarly high standards of design, if the whole is not to disintegrate into a series of separate compounds, uneven in the quality of their plans and architectural designs.”<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Stanton praised Kenzo Tange’s master plan for housing redevelopment in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor and urged more attention to the ways that architecture could address social inequities in columns that dissected the design and process that created Dunbar elementary school, a school that served Baltimore’s disadvantaged Black children as a new “town center.”<sup>8</sup> Her influence varied – Baltimore urban renewal left a disjointed downtown, Tange’s housing was never built, and Baltimore’s track record on equity in provision of public education has a poor track record.

Dillon, writing in a city where private development money had more influence than state or city planning, directed criticism (and praise) toward individual players like Trammell Crow, who runs the largest real estate development corporation in the U.S., based in Dallas. Crow owned several blocks in downtown Dallas and controlled development in a part of the city that public planning agencies had hoped to develop into an Arts District, with space for both institutions like museums and opera houses, and artist incubators and residences. Crow usurped those plans by building office space, his own private museum of Asian art and Dillon at turns criticized and flattered Crow in the paper as a means to bring the Arts District to fruition. The most tangible outcome of this writing is his relationship with the developer Raymond Nasher, who turned to Dillon as a semi-consultant in his pursuit of an architect to design the Nasher Sculpture Center in the arts district, which culminated in Renzo Piano and Peter Walker’s Nasher Sculpture Center.

Both writers were eloquent in their exegesis of what made contemporary architecture beautiful, appealing, and worthwhile. Stanton’s appreciation of the W. R. Grace Building by Philadelphia architects Bower and Fradley, suggested three categories for assessing a successful skyscraper: “its shape, the texture and pattern

of its facades, and its suitability as part of the cityscape.”<sup>9</sup> She provides a wealth of detail about color and materials, from the gray mortar made with sand from the Delaware River to the proportions of headers and stretcher in the bricks. Ultimately, her article invites readers to learn the correct way of reading buildings and their quality.

Dillon, writing at the height of postmodernism in 1984, created a tongue-in-cheek guide called “How to Read the New Buildings,” as part of a review of postmodern skyscrapers built across the past five years in Dallas called “Bye Bye Boring Buildings.” The visual checklist asked readers to look for, and identify, decorative elements including piano curves, dormer windows, and pediments and columns as additive “frills” – describing the building at left here as “an office tower in top hat and snappy suspenders.”<sup>10</sup> While he had fun with this survey, his point was serious – to ask which buildings were good and invite his readers, and Stanton had done, to learn the standards he used.

### **Impact and Resonance of Local Criticism**

The impact of local criticism is assumed but hard to assess – neither Stanton’s nor Dillon’s articles seem to have a one-to-one win or lose ratio. The mechanisms for the success of their criticism come through more complex networks of power and association that require extensive local knowledge to interpret. Newspaper owners and managers judged the role of critics through the marketability of their writing and its audience. Critics viewed themselves as educators and standard-bearers, wielding considerable influence on decision-making processes and public opinion. The 1960s to the 1990s may be better thought of as a brief moment in the history of architectural criticism when the idea of a local architecture critic writing explicitly for the public, rather than for the profession, (e.g., the Huxtable model) found brief purchase in daily newspapers. A further excavation of the history of local criticism can shed much needed light on this little understood vector for architectural knowledge and debate. Delving into the minutiae of a local critic’s navigation of their cities’ development challenges is rewarding on its own terms, but understanding the mechanisms by which we can judge the role and efficacy of commodified local criticism is essential for expanding the historiography of architecture criticism and its reach.

## Endnotes

1. Interview with author, February 5, 2022.
2. The Sun's obituary catalogs her brief career there and states that she wrote 54 articles between 1971 and 1976. She wrote many more letters to the editor and opinion pieces. Jacques Kelly, "Phoebe B. Stanton, 88, advised city for decades on design issues," *Baltimore Sun*, September 25, 2003. See also the obituary by Timothy Brittain-Catlin "The Legacy of Phoebe Stanton," *True Principles* (2004) and Kathryn E. Holliday, "Beginnings and Endings: Phoebe Stanton on Pugin's Contrasts." *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-) 66, no. 1 (2012): 128–37. Her books include *Pugin* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), *The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture: An Episode in Taste, 1840-1856* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968).
3. Paul Goldberger, "Tribute to Ada Louise Huxtable," address delivered at the Museum of the City of New York, March 25, 1996, as transcribed at <https://www.paulgoldberger.com/lectures/tribute-to-ada-louise-huxtable/>
4. Her first article was "Arcologies: Tomorrow's Cities," *Baltimore Sun*, April 5, 1970, D1.
5. On Dillon see Kathryn Holliday, ed., *The Open-Ended City: David Dillon on Texas Architecture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019), which collects collects more than 60 articles from the *Dallas Morning News* and provides commentary.
6. For comparison, Alexandra Lange catalogs types of critical writing about architecture as formal, experiential, historical, and activist – the discussion here certainly borrows from the categorization even as it mixes those categories in terms of the priorities for the critics across their body of writing. Lange, *Writing About Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012), 10-11.
7. Stanton, "U. of M.'s hodge-podge city projects," *Baltimore Sun*, May 14, 1972, D1.
8. Stanton, "Dunbar: A Dream that Came 99% True," *Baltimore Sun*, April 28, 1974, D1.
9. Stanton, "W. R. Grace Building – handsome and elegant," *Baltimore Sun*, March 19, 1972, D1.
10. David Dillon, "Bye Bye Boring Buildings," *Dallas Morning News*, September 30, 1984.

# THE TECTONICS OF HOUSING A CITY: A CLOSE READING OF THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL'S POST-WAR DETAILS

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## Abstract

Although typification is often associated with repetitive mass production, in reality it is a messier process of creating a generic language out of seemingly heterogeneous fragments. While the term “generic” is often used derisively, it does not necessarily mean without qualities, but rather suggests some sort of commonality. This paper considers the London County Council (LCC) Architect's Department in the post-war period (1949-1965) and its struggles to find a common architectural language. The largest architectural bureau in the world at the time, the LCC was tasked with building over one hundred thousand dwellings – a problem that was aesthetic as well as economic or social. Similar architectural details emerged on many architects' drawing boards, not because of top-down standardisation per se, but because they represented the collective goals of the bureau and of the profession. This paper takes a deep dive into the details of many projects across the period to reveal how this language, like any language, was imbued with many meanings. Tectonics revealed many combinatorial imperatives: they were a function of the LCC's planning objectives to unite a fragmented metropolis and were a trace of political ideologies. As details often articulated the architects' conceptual modules instead of actual building components, they were even a way to assert architects' authority as social (and not just technical) engineers.

## Keywords

Mass-production, standardisation, aesthetics, family unit, brutalism



## A Peculiar Ornament

There is a peculiar ornament that one can find on hundreds of Post-war housing blocks across London: a simple brick pilaster in slight relief from the facade. It is peculiar, not in the sense of unique or eye-catching, but peculiar in that its purpose is not so obvious. On first glance one understands them as the ends of “cross walls”, load bearing internal walls perpendicular to the facade. But in most cases, the exposed brick is actually separated from the structure to prevent moisture penetration: it is suspended on the facade, a rusticated curtain wall one brick wide (Fig. 1-2).

Did its architects conceive this seemingly mundane, yet rather complicated detail in order to register the presence of the structure behind? If so, one would expect that the design trope would appear consistently. It tends to appear in terraces and blocks of maisonettes (two storey dwellings within multi-storey blocks), where the load bearing walls are also the parti walls between dwellings. But the pilaster ornament is decidedly absent from blocks of flats, where the interior partitions within dwellings also carry loads. Likewise, the floors between maisonettes registers as thick slabs stacked on top of the brick, while the intermediate floors within each unit are thin, suspended line. It therefore seems that this ornament is an *articulation* of the dwelling unit. Articulation in this sense is both the tectonic formation of joints, as well as what Roland Barthes calls the “cutting-out of shapes” from noise: the production of meaning through a language of signs.<sup>1</sup>

As I will explore, many other details by the same architects follow a similar line of thought, which all suggest that the architects’ combinatorial imperative was defined not by a material logic *per se*, but by a social one: the family dwelling was the unit of measurement with which to understand and to adapt the existing city. The principal designer of this aesthetic language was Architects’ Department of the London County Council (LCC), a municipal bureau that was the largest architectural practice in the world at the time, building over 114,000 dwellings from 1945 to 1965. Histories of mass housing have tended to focus on its economic, technical and social aspects, yet there has been less focus on appearance, no doubt because it has often been wrongly assumed that a building’s appearance was just the result of industrial processes. But tectonics reveal many “combinatorial imperatives”: the layering and joining of materials

was a language expressing how buildings were *conceived*, not just how they were materially constructed.

Despite the ubiquity of such details, they were not the product of a single mind, nor were they dictated by rigid bureaucratic protocols. The LCC was a massive organisation responsible for around 3.4 million inhabitants in inner London, yet it famously nurtured an environment of creative freedom.<sup>2</sup> The Architect's Department, which employed 350 architects and over 1,500 total staff, received its mandates from democratically elected council committees, and allocated projects to small, quasi-autonomous teams of approximately 16 staff architects and assistants.<sup>3</sup> Talented and ambitious employees, many of whom went on to develop successful careers in practice, were fairly free to experiment and design. Their rallying around a unified architectural language was therefore a collective process – after all, language is always a social construction.<sup>4</sup>

And just as words carry many meanings, this language carried many overlapping ideas. In the following three episodes, I will consider some of the forces at work within this collective language. It was first part of a planning objective to unite a fragmented metropolis: the LCC had a mandate to plan and build all over London for diverse populations, though the language would come to only represent the working-class family. Secondly, the language reflected the profession's evolving aesthetic preferences in the post-war period. And finally, it was used to express the architectural discipline's agency as social engineers.

## Typifying the Metropolis

The Bentham Road Estate in Hackney features two 11-storey slab blocks built in 1955, which articulates each dwelling behind a grill façade of deep, double-height balconies. Designed by a team that included Colin St. John Wilson, Alan Colquhoun and other young LCC architects, it was heavily indebted to Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* currently under construction in Marseilles, with a concrete structure elevated above the ground on *pilotis*. But a simultaneous reference was the traditional London terrace: maisonettes, intended for small families and couples, were generally favoured by inhabitants over flats as they mimicked the domestic divisions of the vernacular two-storey house.<sup>5</sup> Wilson and his team even tested the deep, narrow-frontage maisonette in a full-scale prototype before beginning construction, establishing a building block that could be repeated horizontally and vertically (Fig. 3).

At a debate held by the LCC Housing Division, Philip Powell argued that “the principle of the deep slice plan is... traditional to the Victorian terrace-house and can be arranged, as in the *Unite*, to give good light in any flat.”<sup>6</sup> Commentators later praised how the new blocks at Bentham Road made a deliberate, though abstract, reference to the surrounding Victorian neighbourhood of “terraced houses where the size and scale of the individual dwelling unit is easily definable.”<sup>7</sup>

The two-storey dwelling, either as houses or maisonettes, was considered the building block for redevelopment. The LCC’s 1943 *County of London Plan* saw it as “the most suitable type for central London... There seems to be no reason why housing of this character should not recapture some of the best qualities of 18<sup>th</sup> century London.”<sup>8</sup> This plan, which would guide reconstruction, problematised London’s “lack of coherent architectural development”, and sought to remedy it through both passive and active means: by curtailing laissez faire development and by actively building.<sup>9</sup> It identified other historic models that could be replicated with modern construction techniques. After all, London was not a *tabula rasa*, but a fragmented landscape of existing buildings and voids left by the German *Luftwaffe*, which would require some sensitivity when filled. The plan noted that London had once been a network of independent towns and villages, and it suggested resurrecting this structure through the identification of “communities” and “neighbourhood units”.

As Folke Nyberg notes, *standardisation* and *typification*, while often conflated in the English language, are quite different design processes. One is concerned with finding commonality between distinct entities, the other is concerned with setting definitive norms, often based on scientific positivism.<sup>10</sup> The LCC retroactively typified existing patterns of houses, squares and neighbourhoods to create an ontology of the city, which would then be put to work by creating standardised solutions to infill bomb-destroyed and slum-ridden areas, ensuring a balance of density and social provision. It was essential to abstractly relate to existing patterns, all while celebrating technical progress and avoiding overt historic references. Even the existing materials of the city were typified. “London Stock Brick”, a golden-brown colour of brick local to the soils of Southeast England, was preferred by the LCC because it helped to “maintain a link with the past”, and its widespread use would assure some degree of consistency.<sup>11</sup>

The emerging Welfare State sought to eradicate the inequalities between “east ends and west ends” (poor and rich) by balancing development and populations.<sup>12</sup> In 1949 the Labour-controlled Government removed stipulations that determined who could be the recipients of social housing: councils like the LCC would no longer produce isolated working-class dwellings but could serve the “general needs” of the population, akin to the British health service.<sup>13</sup> A *generic* grammar would serve this egalitarian aim. The term generic is often used disparagingly, but it does not necessarily mean something without qualities: it refers to a higher-level genus or family, a commonality out of distinct parts.<sup>14</sup> Generic architectural patterns were part of an active attempt to develop a collective image for the entire London County.

However, there was disagreement about who should be the recipient of social housing: in 1956 the successive Conservative Government rolled back “general needs” housing, granting subsidies to the working classes alone.<sup>15</sup> The LCC on the other hand was always controlled by Labour, and it continued in spirit by designing “mixed estates” with houses, flats, bungalows and maisonettes for families, singles, childless couples and older residents. But these groups were unavoidably united by their socioeconomic class, as outlined by national subsidies. The LCC could only perpetuate a 19<sup>th</sup> century practice of using architectural language to articulate social class, contributing to a stigmatisation of social housing.

In both blocks of maisonettes and terrace houses, the collective form was less important than the individual building block. A common trope on mixed estates was to stagger houses in plan, emphasising the division between each house and framing each garden. The approach was a departure from the LCC’s interwar strategy of stressing collective form with wrapped plaster facades and hipped roofs. It was even a departure from 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century terraces that, while clearly structured for anisotropic repeatability, still held a strong group form.<sup>16</sup>

But the LCC’s dependence on historic models implied, to some degree, a reliance on conservative ideas that understood the family as the “germ from which the existence and order of society spring.”<sup>17</sup> Even if social housing was conceived as part of a process of community building through shared social provisions, the autonomous family dwelling remained its indivisible element. After all, the welfare state envisaged a property-owning democracy, for which the family dwelling would produce modern subjects by introducing the working classes to the virtues of privacy and propriety.<sup>18</sup>

The highly atomised facades of LCC projects even anticipated the privatisation of social housing that would later occur under Thatcher's "Right to Buy" policy in the 1980s. Already explicating property boundaries through exposed parti walls, staggered plans and garden walls, it is quite easy for buyers to adapt each house without much consequence to the collective form – since it was not a strong form to begin with.

### **Aesthetics and Ethics**

The acolytes of Le Corbusier within the LCC were often at odds with their peers, a group of "New Humanist" architects who were more attracted to either the aesthetics of contemporary Sweden or the USSR. The Alton Estate in Wandsworth represents this clash: the first phase (Alton East) was designed in 1953 by so-called "soft" modernists while the latter phase (Alton West) was designed by "hard" modernists and resembled Bentham Road. Alton East features 11-storey point blocks, conceived as stereotomic brick volumes punctured by small square windows at a quant human scale (Fig. 4). Its designers included Rosemary Stjernstedt, who had indeed practiced in Sweden, and it referenced Swedish modernism and, by association, Swedish Democratic Socialism. But for Reyner Banham, these types of associations were poor attempts to impose an ideology through architecture.<sup>19</sup>

Banham instead sided with the "hard" modernists for their seemingly more value-neutral, technocratic position towards design. The term "Brutalism" entered into English parlance during the conflict at the LCC, as an insult hurled by the softs at the hards. Banham described brutalism not as an ideology nor style but as an "ethical stance", directly applying materials in an honest way, supposedly escaping politics.<sup>20</sup> "If a wall was made of brick, then it showed on both sides, no plaster, no paint."<sup>21</sup> However, as we have seen already in the case of the parti wall, the seemingly honest brick can tell lies.

And even an honest display of construction can become decorated with ideologies. As Adrian Forty argues, industrial aesthetics were used to communicate progress steered by the Welfare State. In a delicate balance between Labour and Capital, the State could not eliminate inequality nor poverty but had to rely on "statements of intent" such as illustrations of mass production. Forty Asks, "why should an architecture whose entire imagery was of assembled parts persuade

people that the reality of their social existence was not what it seemed?”<sup>22</sup> The tectonic, as an manifestation of technocracy, was never value neutral.

According to Banham, the style wars eventually fizzled out once the USSR shifted its architectural policy to serve mass production, and those soft modernists within the LCC promptly abandoned their sentimental preferences.<sup>23</sup> But there were also sentimentalities that were merging. In particular, there was a shared suspicion in Britain towards monumentality, especially given the recent war against fascism. As put by the critic Lionel Brett, “Domesticity we understand... and have traditional ways of expressing it. Monumentality, too, we respect at a distance. But can be domesticity be expressed in ten storeys, or should the Little Man have to live in a monument?”<sup>24</sup>

What the two phases of the Alton Estate have in common is this domestic scale. The point blocks of Alton East, while clad in monolithic brick, reveal the family unit as 1) exposed concrete slabs register each floor, and 2) a pinwheel plan with a staggered floorplate allows each small flat to read as a separate volume. In the slabs of Alton West, as with Bentham Road, concrete columns register each maisonette unit, but lie about their material purpose: while at first glance they appear to be structural, they are actually hanging from cantilevered balconies. In the end, both the “softs” and “hards” were less concerned with material truth, and more interested in reinforcing a politics that revolved around the family.

## **A Struggle for Standards**

In the early 1950s, as the pressure to increase housing production increased, the LCC sought ways to standardise design and production. For managers in the division, standards were a means to overcome the “ad-hoc”, self-organising methods of various teams; while for staff architects standards represented a potential threat to their creativity.<sup>25</sup> But what should be standardised would remain a question. The Elmington Estate in Southwark (1953-1955) exemplifies two different objectives related to the LCC’s policy at the time: a desire for modularity, but a practical reliance on standardised dwelling units.

The 11-storey maisonette slabs had similar floorplans to Alton West and Bentham Road. But the project was an experiment in rationalising housing delivery by limiting on-site wet processes, weaving precast concrete slabs, aluminium channels, double-height wooden infill panels and glass parapets (Fig. 5).<sup>26</sup> The choice

of many different materials shows some desire for modular coordination: standardising the dimensions of floor slabs, wall panels and interior fittings. Head designer Cleeve Barr was a strong advocate for modular coordination, seeking to follow the “CLASP” of modular school design.<sup>27</sup> Modular “open systems”, which allowed for different combinations of components, was an alternative to “closed systems” – off-the-shelf buildings on offer from construction firms. For the LCC, a bastion for elite architects, the kit of parts was a means to welcome mass production while protecting the architectural discipline’s legitimacy.<sup>28</sup>

But standardised components would be too difficult for one firm to tackle. Firstly, modularisation in Britain required the co-operation of so many material manufacturers, a task that other actors like the British Building Research Station and the “Modular Society” were struggling to achieve.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, it would be a massive undertaking even for the LCC to compile an extensive and definitive list of components, with all their potential applications, especially in the white heat of technological change. And thirdly, different loads and spans would always require specific engineering and dimensioning.<sup>30</sup> In the Elmington Estate, the serial façade conceals the truth that different walls and beams had different thicknesses, concrete mixtures and reinforcement.<sup>31</sup> It was a one-off experiment, a statement of intent.

In reality, the LCC had decided to standardise the living unit, rather than buildings or material components. Since the 1920s, the Department had used standardised plans, determined by abstract demographic groups (large families with children, childless couples, etc.) in order to expedite the design process.<sup>32</sup> This expedited the design process, as the basic dimensions and arrangements of rooms would be the same from project to project. For a brief amount of time in 1952 the LCC attempted to create a definitive, detailed set of “standardised working drawings,” but it soon found that no time was saved: there were too many exceptions due to structural issues and particulars of façade treatments. In the end, standardised “units” were only roughly defined at half-inch scale.<sup>33</sup> And the units went through rapid evolutions as the LCC introduced constant technical innovations, integrated feedback from tenants and made new iterations.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps counterintuitively, the standard dwelling proved more flexible than the “kit of parts” approach. The latter would require a totalising set of ingredients, coordinated and produced by manufacturers, and considering all

possible combinations. By contrast, the standard unit type was only on paper, and it changed almost every time it was redrawn.

The standardised floor plan allowed for some degree of freedom in façade expression, accommodating the concerns of architects who feared standards would dampen creativity.<sup>35</sup> Yet they consistently chose to emphasise the dwelling unit. It could have been a deliberate attempt by LCC architects to assert their authority as social (and not just technical) engineers of “mixed estates” and “neighbourhood units”. Since the living unit was a fixed element prescribed in LCC manuals, the architects’ creative process was restricted to how they aggregated—the delineation of their modules was an expression of their agency.

This all changed when the department, facing pressure to expediate production, employed a prefabricated “house of cards” system developed by the Danish construction firm Larsen-Nielsen. The system was licensed to the British firm Taylor Woodrow-Anglian, and the LCC would be heavily involved in the detailed design of the first project at the Morris Walk Estate (1962-1966).<sup>36</sup> There was a sea change in building expression as the architects sought to derive an aesthetic from industrial processes. The “module” was no longer the living unit but the material panel, its size dictated by weight and operability. The building volume was then a function of the number of panels that could be produced and delivered to the site in one day.<sup>37</sup>

The resulting expression is very mute: even floor flabs and load bearing parti walls were concealed behind a skin of pebbledash and square windows. In comparison to the animated filigrees and shadow lines of the other LCC projects mentioned, there is a calmness in the machine language which says so little. But in a telling turnaround, the head designer of the Morris Walk Martin Richardson soon regretted how “it didn’t express the house, but the production unit, which had no social meaning and therefore no visual meaning.”<sup>38</sup>

## **Towards Private Practice**

What Forty calls an “imagery of assembled parts” was one of assembling conceptual modules, more than steel and concrete. But it was also an assemblage of overlapping ideas: historic types, domesticity, modularity, architectural agency. As the Architect’s Department was not led by any singular aesthetic authority, the language coalesced onto the drawing boards of many different projects by



different architects. This ended when the LCC, facing staff shortages in the 1960s, outsourced work to private practices.

Sometimes the grammar was repeated: for example, the Smithsons' Robin Hood Gardens (planned in 1965) continued the LCC tradition of marking parti-walls on the façade. But for the most part, the motivation of private practice was to gain more commissions by attracting attention. Manfredo Tafuri would later criticize how post-war architecture attempted to “renew itself on a formal level, by delegating to marginal sectors of professional organizations the task of experimenting with and developing new models” of communication. Within a modernist tradition where materials were devoid of any inherent meaning, private practitioners who developed their own independent architectural languages could only be self-referential.<sup>39</sup> The attempt to find commonality was lost as it became more important to find difference.

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## Figures



Figure 1. Ornamental brick pilasters in the façade of four-storey block of maisonettes, LCC Lockesley Estate, 1954. Google Street View, 2020.

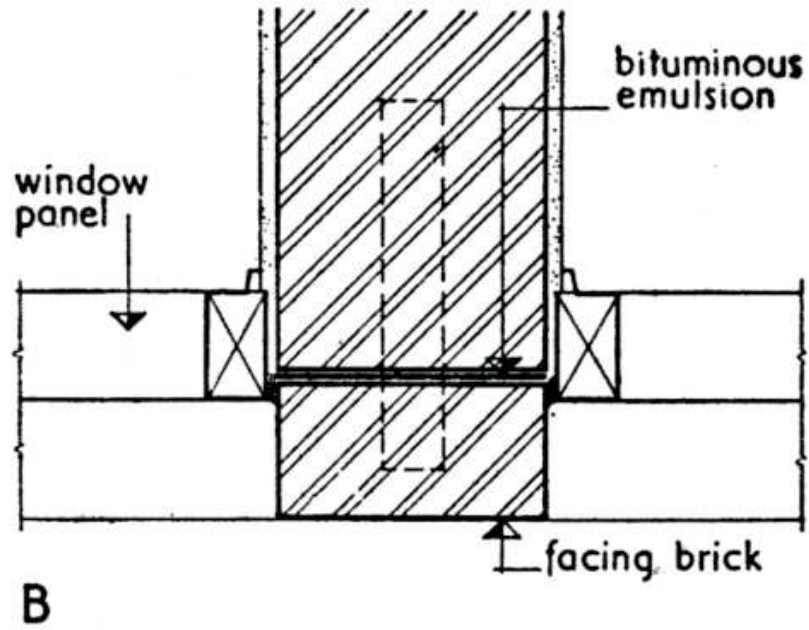


Figure 2. Typical LCC Cross-wall detail. Cleeve Barr, Public Authority Housing, 1958.



Figure 3. Maisonette mock-up for the LCC Bentham Road Estate. Architectural Design, September 1953.



Figure 4. Alton Estate East, LCC, 1952-1955. The Courtauld Institute of Art. CC-BY-NC.

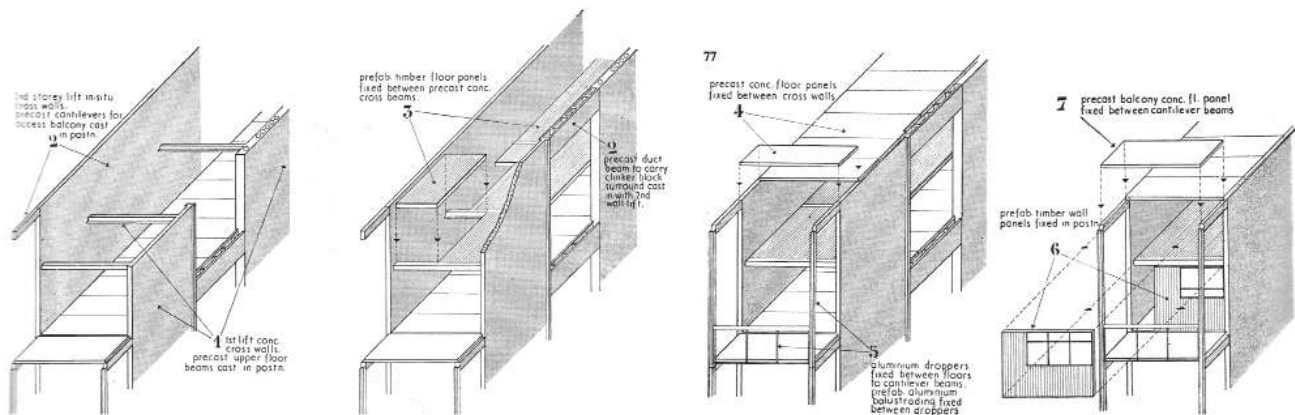


Figure 5. Prefabricated assembly, LCC Elmginton Estate slab blocks. Cleve Barr, Public Authority Housing, 1958.

# THE TROPICAL AND THE AFRICAN: SERT, ATEC, AND THE PLANNING OF HAVANA

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## Abstract

The modern concept of *cubanidad* (Cuban identity of transculturation) was the impetus behind the first generation of Cuban modernists' search for an architecture that could conceivably represent a national and regional idiom. The idea of the three "P"s—persianas (louvers), patios (courtyards), and portales (porticoes or arcades)—provided a clear direction for a modern architecture that would use tradition, history, and adaptation to climate to represent the modernizing national identity of the island. Nowhere was this idea more clearly expressed than in residential architecture, both houses and apartment buildings, as well as in civic structures. The essay explores the challenges that the architectural avant-garde faced to combine Cuban identity and traditions with the tenets of international modernism, in a country that was late to embrace modernity, increasingly under American influence, and on the verge of revolutionary changes. It highlights the role played by Catalan architect and urbanist José Luis from 1939 onwards and its influence on the major actors of Cuban architecture such as Eugenio Battista, the group ATEC, and other collaborators such as Mario Romañach. Summarizing the concepts of TPA's Plan Piloto of Havana (1955-1958), the essay argues that the plan was a major step forward in the morphological and typological revisions to the CIAM doctrine, even though it reflected the ideological involution of the modern movement, from its progressive beginnings in the 1920s to its international corporate style at the service of capitalist interests supported by the dictatorship. Overall, Sert's experiences in Latin America brought him to reconnect with his advocacy of the vernacular modernism, which he had committed to in the early 1930s in Catalonia. Cuba gave him further opportunities to promote his concept of regional modernism, and, at the heart of the Caribbean, the modernist values of the "tropical."

## Keywords

Cuban modernism, Cuban identity, Sert, vernacular, Latin American planning.

## Modernity and *Cubanidad*

In the late 1920s, Cuban periodicals such as *El Arquitecto* and *Arquitectura* started debating and publishing the works of modern architects. *El Arquitecto* generally favored conservative positions, whereas *Arquitectura*, published by the Colegio Nacional de Arquitectos de Cuba (National Institute of Cuban Architects), opened its columns to articles and projects discussing works by Bruno Taut, Adolf Loos, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and others. The regional expression of modernity—how to be modern and Cuban at the same time—also emerged in Cuban architectural circles during this time, and it was increasingly tested by issues of national identity, in particular Spanish and American influences, but also African roots. Simultaneously, European modernism began to impact Cuban architects in a more direct manner. Figures such as Josef Albers, Richard Neutra, and Walter Gropius visited the island in the 1930s, and lectured to students at the University of Havana School of Engineering and Architecture.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, *Arquitectura* began publishing essays on Cuban vernacular architecture, bringing to light the historical importance, design simplicity, and modest beauty of the many rustic buildings in small towns, villages, and landscapes throughout the island.<sup>2</sup> Yet, with the signature *portales* (arcades or porticoes) and thatched roofs that characterized the *casita criolla* (Creole house), these vernacular structures were both picturesque landmarks, and appalling places for their inhabitants and users. In addition to the articles, *Arquitectura* regularly featured cover illustrations of Cuba's colonial architecture, usually drawn by some of the island's most respected artists, including Carlos Ramírez Guerra and Eugenio Batista. Hence, the modern concept of *cubanidad* (Cuban identity of transculturation), which was already present in literary and artistic circles, became the impetus behind the first generation of Cuban modernists' search for an architecture that could conceivably represent a national and regional idiom.<sup>3</sup>

Eventually, it is Eugenio Batista who opened the way with the Falla Bonet house along the sea in Miramar in 1938. Built for the wealthy industrialist and philanthropist Eutimio Falla Bonet, the modern house was organized around a series of patios, lined with arcades and windows protected by wooden louvers. It is only in 1960 that he published his essay on the *casa cubana*, but Batista is known to have repeatedly advocated, particularly through his teaching at the University,

the use of the three “P”s as necessary components of a new Cuban architecture that would use tradition, history, and adaptation to climate to express the modernizing national identity of the island:

*“In making of their houses a defense against our torrid tropical sun, our ancestors found three splendid resources, a legacy that would be inconsiderate not to use today: patios (courtyards), portales (porticoes or arcades) and persianas (louvers), these being the three “P”s that constitute the “ABC”s of our tropical architecture.”<sup>4</sup>*

In the published essay, Batista pointed out the limited size of windows and the continuous use of translucent glass in color, known as *vitrales* (stained glass windows). He also acknowledged the changes produced by the automobile as well as the importance of new materials. Notwithstanding, he affirmed that the three “P”s should continue to model the new architecture in the material realm, while “rhythm, gaiety and cleanliness” would be needed to fulfil its “spiritual” future.<sup>5</sup> From there onwards, the Cuban architects produced scores of houses, apartment buildings, and civic structures that were not only unabashedly modern but genuinely Cuban in their typological organization and response to social and climatic conditions.<sup>6</sup>

### **José Luis Sert, ATEC, and the Charter of Havana**

Fleeing the Spanish Civil War, Sert moved to Paris in 1937. There, in collaboration with Luis Lacasa, he built the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*, at the heart of which was Picasso’s *Guernica*. In 1939, having received an invitation from Walter Gropius to join the faculty at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. Sert and his wife left Europe and spent a few months in Havana preparing for their immigration to the United States. There he established important and lasting contacts with the new generation of Cuban architects, particularly with Batista, and undoubtedly inspired them to actively promote modern architecture and widen the course of Cuban modernism by prioritizing housing and master planning the greater Havana.

In 1941, a group of young architects and engineers, associated with the *Congrès internationaux d’architecture moderne* (CIAM) formed the *Agrupación Tectónica de Expresión Contemporánea* (Tectonic Group of Contemporary Expression, or ATEC),



a “nucleus of young minds, inclined to the experimentation, the investigation, and the fight” and intent to study and resolve “the architectonic and urbanistic problems in Cuba, always in the present and toward the future.”<sup>7</sup> They embraced the principles of CIAM but quickly started to secure their own identity. In 1943, the *Patronato Pro-Urbanismo* (Pro-Urbanism Society) and the ATEC set up an innovative exhibit of colonial architecture titled *Trinidad, lo que fue, es y será* (Trinidad, what was, is, and will be). Held in Havana and curated by Emilio del Junco, Eduardo Montouliou and Miguel Gastón, the exhibition advocated that the urban and architectural qualities of Trinidad should be historically preserved, not as a “romantic” expression of Cuban culture and way of life, but rather as a vital and contemporary environment.<sup>8</sup> Nicolás Arroyo and the organizers concluded that colonial-era Trinidad should inform contemporary architecture and progressive urban design, while avoiding any temptation to a false historicism. As discussed later by Cuban-born furniture and interior designer Clara Porset, the exhibition was a continuation, at the urban and regional scale, of Batista’s thesis about the three “P”s and their connection to the climate:

*“ATEC is the group which has given us examples of how to organize space for living in Cuba... how to assimilate the vital elements of our architectural heritage... how to make concrete the universal principles that will fructify in giving them a Cuban expression.”*

In 1948, the architect, urbanist, and professor Pedro Martínez Inclán published the *Código de Urbanismo* (Urban Planning Code), subtitled *Carta de La Habana* (Charter of Havana), and presented it as the Cuban version of the Charter of Athens.<sup>10</sup> The document followed closely the structure of its source but added many concepts related to the civic importance of the city, the need for low-income housing, the concept of the neighborhood unit, and the necessity of a system of parks. Significantly, Martínez Inclán inserted two new sections. The first one, titled “Legislation,” outlined the administrative and political components of the systematic planning of the city and the region, thus asserting the requirements of the new Constitution of 1940.<sup>11</sup> The second one, “Urban Aesthetics,” emphasized the importance of the Cuban manifestations of Civic Art, such as the critical value of the plazas and historical ensembles of buildings, the importance of the streets and their continuity, as well as the adequate placement of monuments. Interestingly, it advocated also the integration of agriculture within the densest

urban areas, whether in the form of satellite cities or neighborhood units. In brief, it was a unique document that promoted *cubanidad* in the field of urbanism. In this postwar environment, Cuban architects and urbanists were moving away from the strict modernist orthodoxy. The relation of modernity that Cuban architects entertained with the vernacular was not only based on single objects of architecture but involved the urban milieu in its full complexity.

### **The Heart of the City**

During all those years, Eugenio Batista maintained an intense correspondence with Sert, who had become, with its firm Town Planning Associates (TPA) a major professional figure in the Americas. Their work became part of a deliberate strategy to reactivate the Good Neighbor Policy established by Roosevelt in the 1930s. The intent of this policy to keep Latin American countries away from Fascist tendencies was adapted later to counter Cold War fears of seeing the socio-economically troubled continent bend into the communist circles.

Sert got his first opportunity to return to Cuba in 1953, after having experimented with his new urban design ideas in Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela.<sup>12</sup> In the suburbs of Havana, TPA designed a prototype neighborhood for the Cuban National Housing Program, that consisted of about three hundred patio-based housing units loosely organized in two axial directions on both sides of a linear but free-form park. The park's primary function was to link the school and the neighborhood center, itself organized as a plaza faced by a market structure and a community center. The plan and the patio house typologies derived directly from the Chimbote masterplan (Peru, 1946–48), where Sert had put forth the revisionist concern with civic life and public spaces, emphasizing the necessity of a fifth function excluded from the Athens Charter. Interestingly, Sert and Wiener published a long article in *Architectural Forum* of August 1953, "Can Patios Make Cities?" which utilized the drawings of the Cuban project to advocate a new organization of the neighborhood unit for American cities.<sup>13</sup>

Sert's proposal of 1954 for the same site, Quinta Palatino, showed a revised strategy that eliminated the mat structure in favor of a more traditional grid of blocks. There were programmatic and economic reasons for such a change, but there was also, in Sert's mind, the theoretical elaboration of a new form of order based upon the *cuadra*, i.e., the traditional Latin American block as it has been

developing since the conquest along with the tenets of the Laws of the Indies. The masterplan incorporated the historic *quinta* (country house) and consisted of four residential quadrants. At their intersection, the architects placed the large civic center and plaza. Each quadrant was made up of a grid of mid-density square blocks (*cuadras*), containing patio-houses placed back-to-back along their four edges, and with a significant public patio in their center.<sup>14</sup>

### **Humanizing or Mutilating Havana?**

Commissioned by dictator Fulgencio Batista, the *Plan Piloto* for Havana (1955-1958) was TPA's culminating synthesis of the rapidly evolving, and thus at times contradictory ideas, pursued by Sert and his partners.<sup>15</sup> In an article of 1953, Sert had mused about the modern city and advocated that "cities be conceived organically, as the biological organisms that they are, where not only the strictly functional needs are solved, but the lyrical and poetic part is fulfilled, so that man does not have to flee from the current cities in search of the natural factors that the disordered use of the technique and the current civilization have eliminated."<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the Pilot Plan was thus an instrument to control the growth of the city and limit the ongoing destruction of its connections with nature both within and outside the block structure of the Latin American city. In TPA's ideal vision for Havana, each of the *repartos*, or city districts, had its own center and was connected to the adjacent ones by green spaces and environmentally conscious linear parks, and the system as a whole resulted "in a network or constellation of community centers, classified from small to large, one main center being the expression of the city or metropolis as a whole, the heart of the city."<sup>17</sup> Sert had initiated internationally the concept of *Corazón de la Ciudad* (Heart of the City) at CIAM VIII in Hoddesdon in 1951, and it was thus logical that he would attempt to develop it within the future metropolitan condition of the Cuban capital.

In spite of its inherent importance within the evolution of CIAM, the *Plan Piloto* was a merciless and developmentalist proposal that would have mutilated the built heritage of Havana. The proposals for Old Havana and the Malecón would have been eminently destructive, expensive, and ambiguously reflective of the importance of the mafia.<sup>18</sup> The business community and the bourgeoisie were bound to recuperate the historic center and expulse the poor social classes, and the tourist industry could monopolize the most beautiful views and landscapes.

Socially, even though the plan proposed solutions to low and middle-class super-blocks, there was no clearly expressed policy to resolve the ongoing housing crisis. In the words of historian Gabino Ponce Herrero, the *Plan Piloto* “proposed the conversion of an old, capacious and complex capitalist city into an efficient capitalist machine.”<sup>19</sup> Having advocated the process of master planning city and territory for more than a decade, the Cuban architectural community and the periodicals remained silent in front of the onslaught. In fact, two of the most important architects, Mario Romañach and Nicolás Arroyo co-signed the project with TPA. The progressist periodical *Espacio* stopped publication in 1955 and *Arquitectura* continued its editorial policy without any comments about the various masterplans in progress on the island.

The Pilot Plan was understandingly shelved by the Castro regime and its publication in 1959 marked the end of Sert’s intervention in the Latin American panorama. As Eric Mumford explained:

*“No longer engaged political participants in postwar Latin America, but outside “experts” linked to the economic and military power of the United States and the artistic prestige of Le Corbusier, Sert and his collaborators sought to make modernism more acceptable by appealing to local urban traditions, yet found their efforts to spur democratic development by providing spaces for public gathering lacked local government support.”*<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the failure of his Latin American plans, Sert’s encounter with Latin America’s authentic urban life and genuine public spaces allowing for social interaction across the society spectrum—what one could call the “Mediterranean” side of urban life in contrast to its commercialized Northern European or American counterpart—was a major turning point in the development of modern urban design and the progressive return to the basic principles of the street, the block, and the square. In his retirement speech of 1969, Walter Gropius remembered and eulogized Sert’s importance: “You have united the Mediterranean spirit with that of the New World, giving the age-old patio idea of the dwelling a new meaning.”<sup>21</sup>

## **The Tropical and the African**

Beyond the morphological and typological revisions to the CIAM doctrine, Sert’s experience in Latin America brought him to reconnect with his prewar advocacy

of the vernacular modernism in Catalonia. Cuba gave him renewed opportunities to develop his concept of regional modernism by emphasizing the modernist values of the “tropical”:

*“The architecture in Cuba is the architecture of the Caribbean, of the tropics, which responds to a certain climate and determined materials. Architecture cannot be defined as international or national but rather as regional and within its region, I find in Cuba the most notable examples.”*<sup>22</sup>

To be sure, Eugenio Batista and other Cuban architects had initiated the debate, but Sert opened the way to a more intense discussion and, ultimately, to a wider cultural interpretation of the concept, specifically from the colonial to the tropical. In 1955, Nicolás Arroyo argued that the traditional urban environments in Cuba were lessons in simplicity, sincerity, human scale, proportion, and economy: “... just as the square was the center of social life, the patio became the center of the domestic life, placing all the rooms and important services around it.”<sup>23</sup> For Arroyo, modernism was also transforming into “a new formula of eclecticism” that more often than not replaced the lessons of historic styles with simplistic modern clichés and formulas. In response, it was necessary to preserve and modernize the lessons of the colonial heritage to combat foreign influences, particularly those from Miami. Likewise, Ricardo Porro’s vision of architectural *cubanidad* reflected the works and teachings of Batista, but also the direct influence of Ernesto Nathan Rogers.<sup>24</sup> It is in the progressist and anti-American periodical *Nuestro Tiempo* that Porro published his influential essay *El sentido de la tradición* (The Meaning of Tradition) in 1957. Inspired by the work of Lam and other Cuban artists who were increasingly building on the multi-racial roots of Cuban culture, he argued for another vision of modern Cuban architecture:

*“We are the product of the Spaniard, above all the Spaniard of the southern part of the peninsula, and of the black African. From here comes forth our character. The mixture of the severe and intense Spaniard with the black African has produced, in our midst, warm and easy going, a man/ a woman of extreme sensuality.”*<sup>25</sup>

In early 1959, the architect Nicolás Quintana was arguing that the real roots of Cuban architecture emphasized space more than forms and that a full-fledged spatial analysis of past architecture—including proportions, scale, homogeneity,

continuity, contrast—was needed to create a genuine Cuban modern architecture.<sup>26</sup> Following the lessons of Sert, whom he had met at the 1953 CIAM conference in Aix-en-Provence, architecture and urbanism needed a spatial continuity, because “the exterior of the house is the interior of the town.”<sup>27</sup> For Quintana, almost two decades after the ATEC exhibition and a couple of months after the revolution, the supreme example remained the Cuban town of Trinidad, whose low-scale narrow streets, fully hospitable urban spaces, and patio-based fabric could be envisioned as a basic typology for a genuinely Cuban modern city.

## Endnotes

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# THE URBAN RENEWAL OF SESSA AURUNCA PROMOTED BY GOVERNOR LOPE DE HERRERA (1546-1560) FOR DUKE GONZALO II

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## Abstract

Between 1546 and 1560, Governor Lope de Herrera promoted a project of urban renewal of the city of Sessa Aurunca, in the Kingdom of Naples, on a scale comparable to that carried out in Naples by the Viceroy Pedro de Toledo. The urban renewal of Sessa Aurunca demonstrates the interaction between the celebration of the feudal lords and the civic identity of the families of local élite. In 1549, to underline the town's loyalty toward the Empire – then represented by Spain - the Governor placed in the Seggio the medieval statue of Jacopo del Gaudio, a citizen who had fought for the Swabian against the Anjou. In 1558, the city gate was remodelled, reusing an already existing statue - a trophy sculpted some decade before for celebrating the memory of “the Great Captain” Gonzalo de Cordoba, ancestor of Duke Gonzalo II. In the new position, the trophy evolved from celebrating a single man to glorifying his entire family and the city of Sessa through it.

## Keywords

Renaissance Architecture, Civic Identity, Reuse of Antiquities, Triumphal Gate.



Early modern Southern Italy has too often been regarded as a uniform kingdom, dominated by conflicts between the King and the feudal lords and which lacked any civic identity, in counter positions to the *free communities (comuni)* of Northern Italy. As remarked by Mario Del Treppo, the history of Southern Italy has generally been seen as that of a “missed-out North”.<sup>1</sup> However, the historical research of the last decades has shown that such representation is not fully reliable.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the urban renewal of Sessa Aurunca, promoted by its Governor Lope de Herrera between 1546 and 1560, is an interesting case study because it clearly shows the interaction between the family celebration of feudal lords of the towns of Southern Italy and the civic identity of the single towns. During the *Ancien Régime*, in the Kingdom of Naples, there were two kinds of towns: feudal towns, subjected to a local lord, and free towns, directly dependent on the King. The condition of Sessa Aurunca is peculiar because, starting from the Norman time until the end of XVIII, it was alternatively a fiefdom and a free town.<sup>3</sup>

Sessa is located in the northern part of Campania, the ancient Terra di Lavoro. Over the top of a hill, it dominates the lowlands and the river Garigliano. It was founded in 337 b.C., and the ruins of Roman monuments – such as the theatre or the great bridge called “Ponte Ronaco” – were still visible during medieval and early modern times and still exist today.<sup>4</sup>

The civic identity of Sessa can be traced through the modern signs of the different powers which governed the life of its inhabitants, leaving behind a strong presence of antiquities. Sessa’s castle is mentioned in 963 in the famous *placito sessa*, one of the first official documents written in Italian rather than in Latin. The castle was later rebuilt under the Normans and again under Frederick II, while Sessa’s cathedral was built between 1103 and 1113.<sup>5</sup> For centuries these monumental buildings were the expressions of the two leading powers, the political power and the religious one.

A change occurred in 1317 when King Robert of Anjou gave the town of Sessa the right to elect six citizens to the town’s administration. This act marked the birth of the *Universitas* of Sessa Aurunca, laying the basis for the entrance of the families of local élite into the political administration of the town. The population was divided into three social classes: the noblemen, the citizens – a middle class – and the people. Each of them met in an assembly called Seggio and appointed two deputies called Eletti.<sup>6</sup> Every Seggio had its own building:

the Seggio of the People, called Seggio dell'Apolita, was located just in front of the castle on the site now occupied by the Municipio, that of the citizen, called "seggitiello di Piazza", now disappeared, was in the central Piazza, and that of the Noblemen, the Seggio of San Matteo, the only one still existing, on the main street. The original structure of the Seggio of San Matteo could be dated to the beginning of the fifteenth, but the Seggio was later redecorated in the early Cinquecento and finally transformed in the nineteenth century when the open arch was closed by a wall.<sup>7</sup>

### **Sessa Aurunca in the fifteenth century**

For the first half of the fifteenth century, Sessa was ruled by the Marzano family, which controlled a vast territory that also extended to the near towns of Carinola, Toraldo, Piedimonte, Minturno, and Sinuessa. Sessa was the capital of the fiefdom. The power of its feudal lords and its good geographic position made it an essential town for organizing military expeditions in the Kingdom of Naples.<sup>8</sup>

Giovanni Antonio Marzano, Duke of Sessa from 1416 until 1453, was one of the first allies of Alfonso of Aragon during the fights against René d'Anjou for the conquest of the Kingdom. In the castle of Sessa, Alfonso of Aragon met the lords of the principal fiefdoms of Southern Italy to form an alliance. The heir of Giovanni Antonio Marzano, Marino Marzano, Duke of Sessa from 1453 until 1463, had an opposite politic: it belonged to the Angevin party and fought against the new King Ferrante of Aragon. On this occasion, the castle became the meeting point of the rebel barons and the Angevin claimant to the throne of Naples. Finally, the duke of Sessa was defeated by King Ferrante and Sessa became a royal town again. Soon after this event, the King granted new power to civic institutions by conceding a statute, issued in 1464, with later additions in 1469 and subsequent years.<sup>9</sup>

The statute's text is a valuable source to know the working of the civic institutions of Sessa Aurunca in the mid of the fifteenth century. There was a public school with two teachers paid for by the town, different kinds of law courts and two hospitals. The statute regulated town life, the task of its officers, the governance of its hospitals and many other matters. Among the many officers of the *Universitas*, there were the *Quadernieri*, *credenzieri* and the *Mastrodatti*, who had the task to write, copy and preserve the documents produced by the other

civic institutions. The importance attributed to written documents led to creating a civic archive. The need to preserve the memory of civic institutions reveals the complex relations among them. Each decision taken by the *Universitas* had to be written down, and then the document had to be signed with the town's seal. The seal was preserved in a box located in the cathedral's sacristy. The box was locked by three different keys, each owned by the deputy of a Seggio. Only if these three keys were together the box could be opened, the seal used, and the document produced by the *Universitas* of Sessa had legal value. The statute did not mention the bishop, who had no power on this matter. We may argue that the citizen of Sessa considered the cathedral as a public building belonging to the community of the town.

Every Seggio had its own hall, but there was no common city hall, as it was, for instance, in the *comuni* of central and northern Italy. In the second half of the fifteenth century, the *Universitas* of Sessa paid for the construction of the schools, a public clock, a new aqueduct, and three fountains, but these works did not change the aspect of the town. It was only in the mid-sixteenth century, while the city gradually lost its actual political power, that a comprehensive apparatus of civic self-representation based on the celebration of the heroes of the past was created.

### **Lope de Herrera, Governor of Sessa Aurunca (1546-1563)**

The general urban renewal of Sessa Aurunca was undertaken by Lope de Herrera (fig. 1), who was appointed Governor of the town in 1546 by duke Gonzalo II. The Governor started a program to give new legal and architectural order to the town of Sessa, balancing monarchical authoritarianism and respect towards the privileges of the Seggi and the Eletti.

As soon as Lope de Herrera arrived in Sessa, he prohibited entering the town bringing weapons and took care to defend the interest of Sessa against the nearby centre of Roccamonfina for the use of the common aqueduct. Concerning the architectural aspect of the town, he restored the church of San Domenico, ordered the demolition of all the wooden structures protruding from the shops located on the main Piazza and moved the slaughterhouse outside the city wall.

Two of the medieval doors of the town, already useless because they were enclosed in a more expansive urban wall, were pulled down to straighten the

view of the main street, and new buildings for the school and the law court were built.<sup>10</sup>

However, his program was not confined to arranging public infrastructures and included minor works connected with the self-representation of the civic power of the town. The two significant of these involved the Seggio of the Noblemen and that of the People.

### **The refurbishing of the Seggio di San Matteo (1549)**

In 1549 Lope de Herrera ordered to place at the entrance of the Seggio of San Matteo (fig. 2), upon a roman pedestal, a medieval statue whose original location was the church of the tiny village of Valogno<sup>11</sup>. It was a highly expressive choice, and though contemporary chronicles register that the statue was placed there by the Governor's order, this decision must have also been approved by members of the Seggio.

Since the fifteenth century, the noblemen of Sessa had collected outside the Seggio of San Matteo several ancient and modern inscriptions naming the importance of Sessa. Some of these are still in place, such as, for example, inscription *CIL X*, 4744 naming Matidia the Younger, that in the 1480s Fra Giocondo saw “Ante ecclesiam S. Matthaei apud Sessionem” and that 80 years later Antonio Augustín – the Spanish bishop of Alife – described “nel seggio grande”.<sup>12</sup> Matidia was a Roman woman married into the imperial family who restored the theatres of Minturno and Sessa Aurunca.

In front of the same Seggio, we can also find another inscription (*CIL X*, 4756) described by Giocondo and Augustín.<sup>13</sup> The ancient text names the “viam suessanis municipibus”, and therefore it would have proved the antiquity of the town of Sessa Aurunca and its privileged status of *municipium* under the Roman Empire. At the same time, the inscription makes an explicit genealogical reference to Emperor Hadrian, creating a connection with the other imperial inscription naming his sister-in-law Matidia.

In 1537, when Emperor Charles V had made his triumphal entry in Sessa, two new inscriptions composed by the local humanist Agostino Nifo to celebrate the event were located side by side with the ancient ones.<sup>14</sup> In the Seggio of San Matteo, the imperial character of Sessa Aurunca was celebrated. The statue of Giacomo Capece del Gaudio (fig. 3) enriched the broad symbolic meanings of this collection.

The transfer of the statue in 1549 is described in the contemporary chronicle of Gasparo Fuscolillo.<sup>15</sup> Today it is preserved in the museum of the cathedral,<sup>16</sup> However, the pedestal with the new inscription carved in 1549 had gone lost. It read: IACOBVS DE GAUDIO MILES / BARO CALENI / SVESSAE CIVIS / AD HONOREM SANCTAE CRVCIS / POSVIT / ANNO D. MCCLXXII,<sup>17</sup> which could be translated as “Jacopo del Gaudio, knight, baron of Carinola, and citizen of Sessa, erected this statue in honour of the holy cross in 1272”.

To understand the meaning attributed to this old-fashioned statue in the mid-sixteenth century, when Lope de Herrera decided to place it at the entrance of the Seggio of the noblemen of Sessa Aurunca, we have to point out who was the men represented. Giacomo Capece del Gaudio belonged to a family connected with the imperial family of Hohenstaufen; his grandfather was the valet of Frederick II, and when Charles of Anjou conquered the Kingdom, his father and his two uncles fought against the Angevins and were executed. In 1282, during the war of the Sicilian Vespers, Giacomo continued the familiar policy and supported Pedro of Aragon against the Angevins.<sup>18</sup> Therefore he could have been considered by the Spanish Governor of Sessa an excellent example of a loyal man who, by his behaviour, legitimized the King of Spain as heir of the Emperor. Besides this, it must be noted that in the inscription, the three attributes of Giacomo del Gaudio were “knight”, “baron of Carinola”, and “citizen of Sessa”. Therefore we can imagine that the members of the Seggio must have been proud that, even for a feudal lord, being a “cives” of Sessa had the same importance as being the absolute lord of Carinola. Ancient, medieval, and modern works of art and inscriptions made the connection between past and present in stating the city’s ancient and contemporary importance and its loyalty to Spain.

### **The Porta del Trionfo (1558)**

The second intervention made by Lope de Herrera in the same field was the refurbishing of the city gate adjoining the Seggio of the People that he undertook in 1558. Also, in this case, Lope de Herrera decided to reuse existing elements and combine them to express a new political message. The gate was transformed into a triumphal entrance in which the leading role was played by the fragments of a monument realized in 1548 by Giovanni da Nola and Annibale Caccavello for Duke Gonzalo II.<sup>19</sup>

The monument had been built by the duke for celebrating the memory of

his ancestor Gonzalo I, called “the Great Captain”, and is located in the ancient roman bath of Sinuessa, a town in the territory controlled by Sessa, in the very place where the Great Captain had won the battle which assured him the control of the Kingdom of Naples. The monument was composed of a trophy (fig. 4), a lower basement framed by a Doric frieze and hosting the inscription and two shields, and an upper basement decorated by a relief. The text of the inscription, composed by the learned historiographer Paolo Giovio, reads:

CONSALVVS FERD. LVDOVICI FIL[ius] CORDVBA / SVSSAE  
 PRINCEPS / QVVM SINVESSANAS AQVAS ANTIQVAE CELEBRITATIS  
 / COLLAPSO AEDIFICIO, ET OBLIMATA SCATVRIGINE PEREVNTES /  
 PVBLICAE COMMODITATI RESTITVERET / LOCIGENIO ADMONITVS  
 / QVOD MAGNVS CONSALVVS MATERNVS AVVS / GALLOS AD  
 LYRIM INSIGNI PARTA VICTORIA / DEBELLARIT. / MARMOREVM  
 TROPHAEVM AVITAE VIRTUTIS / MEMORIAE.<sup>20</sup>

The Doric frieze with arms into the *metopes* probably derives from the ancient one reused in the basement of the Albertini palace in Nola, the town where one of the two artists was born.<sup>21</sup> However, for the patron, the model for locating a marble trophy in a thermal building was the so-called “Trofei di Mario” in Rome, described and drawn by several artists before the sculpture was dismantled and transferred to the Capitol in 1590.<sup>22</sup> Therefore Giovanni da Nola and duke Gonzalo II, artists and patrons, both found in Roman antiquity examples for celebrating a modern Spanish hero.

Meanwhile, the duke of Sessa came to visit its fiefdom and stayed in Sessa for some months. During this period, the governor Lope de Herrera organized a wide set of festivities, including bullfights, drama performances and lectures on poetry. The duke was received outside the town, at the Ponte Ronaco, the old Roman bridge, and then entered the town and reached the castle passing through a wooden triumphal arch painted with the portraits of his parents, Luis Fernandez de Cordoba and Elvira de Cordoba y Figueroa, the previous duke and duchess of Sessa, and that of his grandfather, Gonzalo I “the Great Captain”.<sup>23</sup>

The ephemeral arch erected for Gonzalo II was located close to the castle and the Seggio Della Polita, it is to say, in the same city area of the new door overlapping the celebration of Gonzalo I with that of his grandson Gonzalo II. This new arrangement transformed the trophy from the celebration of a single

man into the glorification of a family and the entire city of Sessa. The trophy was reassembled with the original inscription composed by Paolo Giovio and juxtaposed to a city gate in order to create the image of a permanent triumphal arch. A new inscription claimed that the trophy had been transferred because the location in Sinuessa was not sure from the raids of Turks pirates: NE VERO SVI PRINC./ MONIMENTVM / PIRATAE DEMOLIRENTVR / HVC/ TRANSFERRI CVRARVNT / SVESSANI.<sup>24</sup> The importance attributed by Lope de Herrera to the new city gate is confirmed by choice to do a ceremony for the laying of the first stone (on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1558), with the burial of medals in the foundation.<sup>25</sup> After two months, the building was almost complete, and the arch was closed, but it was necessary to wait until 15<sup>th</sup> July to place the trophy at the top of the gate (fig. 5).<sup>26</sup>

The gate was pulled down in 1825, the inscription was transferred into the cathedral of Sessa, and the sculptures in the Museo Campano of Capua. Unfortunately, we have no images useful to reconstruct their original aspect; therefore, we have to rely on descriptions written before their destruction. By comparing the written sources, we know that in the first half of the seventeenth century, the gate was enriched with two ancient, inscribed marbles set on the two sides of the arch. The presence of these inscriptions is not registered by Fuscolillo – who wrote during the construction – while one of these (*CIL X*, 4755) was seen in 1559 by Antonio Augustin built into the church's exterior wall of Sant'Eustachio, outside the city.<sup>27</sup>

From Antonio Sacco, we know that the other one (*CIL X*, 4752) was discovered under the bell tower of the church of San Silvestro and later transferred next to the door in 1638. Sacco gives both texts specifying that they were located in the Piazza del Trionfo.<sup>28</sup> In 1761 Tommaso Masi del Pezzo described the two inscriptions and added that they were located on the two sides of the door framed by niches.<sup>29</sup>

The transferring of the two ancient inscriptions at the sides of the Porta del Trionfo demonstrates that the gate was felt by the citizen of Sessa as a place for locating the memories of the town and for it the Seggio of San Matteo. The ancient roman *cippi* recalled the value of the ancient inhabitants of the town, and the gate became, together with the Seggio of San Matteo, another place that preserved the shared memory of Sessa and confirmed its civic identity. By the simple movement

of the trophy of Gonzalo I and the statue of Giacomo del Gaudio from their original locations outside the city, these objects became something different and assumed new meanings. Ancient elements like the roman inscriptions, medieval sculptures like the statue of Giacomo del Gaudio, and modern ones, like the trophy of Gonzalo I, were combined in order to confirm the continuity of the glorious history of Sessa Aurunca.

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12. Mommsen, *Corpus*, 466.
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28. Sacco, *Sessa Pometia*, 8v, 75-76.
29. Masi Del Pezzo, *Memorie*, 165-166; Mommsen, *Corpus*, p. 468.

# A DRAWN STORY OF ARCHITECTURAL PHENOMENA. RE-READING FLEMISH ARCHITECTURE OF THE 1960s AND 1970s THROUGH AN ARCHITECTONIC LENS: REDRAWING THE DESIGN PROCESS OF WESTRAND (1967)

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## Abstract

Building on Albena Yaneva's notion of the fourth dimension (the dimension of time), and her manner of understanding buildings as continuously moving networks, this research aims to re-read Flemish architecture of the 1960s and 1970s. With the monograph "Bouwen in België (Building in Belgium), 1945-1970", released in 1971, Geert Bekaert and Francis Strauven published a pioneering survey of the Belgian post-war architectural landscape. It provided a canonical overview of buildings (labelled as attitudes) and architects with a strong impact on Belgium's architecture scene at a time it was given little regard. While still a fundamental source for anyone who seeks to understand this period's Flemish architectural culture, this work has also unintentionally helped preserve the myth of the architect as an *einzelgänger* designing static objects. Although there has been an increase in historical and theoretical research on this generation in recent years, little inquiry goes beyond the existing myths or questions the role of applied design tools and methods.

This paper aims to develop a research perspective starting with a deep reading of a design process from a countercultural and architectural perspective. The first part is constructed through studying the involved human (interviews with close contacts, family, former employees, students and architecture critics) and non-human (archival material, building observations, primary and secondary literature) actors of one particular case: cultural centre Westrand in Dilbeek, Belgium. This part includes drawing as an analysing tool allowing to trace architectonic phenomena of that time. The paper's second part uses drawing as a visualising tool imagining how Flemish architects designed in the 1960s and 1970s.

Ultimately, this paper explores how an architectonic research lens can open up new questions on broader architectonic phenomena characterising the Flemish architectural landscape of the 1960s and 1970s and, perhaps, the current one as well.

## Keywords

Flemish Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s, Alfons Hoppenbrouwers, Design Research, Architectonic Research Lens, Deep Reading

## Introduction

*Schaarbeek* (Belgium), 1967. Engineer-architect Alfons Hoppenbrouwers (1930-2001) discussed with his students of the Sint-Lucas institutes of architecture his ongoing project of *Westrand* (1967-1973):<sup>1</sup> a cultural centre located on the western edge of Brussels. During his lectures, he described how the role of an architect was to be a ‘catalyst’ instead of adopting a dictatorial attitude towards its clients and society.<sup>2</sup> Reacting with the *Westrand*-design against “sterile modernisms”,<sup>3</sup> Hoppenbrouwers and his team called for a new design culture characterised by strategies of “reconnecting with life”<sup>4</sup> where “the architect had to be a political activist, a warrior in the underground and on the barricades”.<sup>5</sup> While Hoppenbrouwers persuaded his architect-students to take on countercultural positions, this paper studies how exactly this relates to the design of the *Westrand*? How did an international awareness of environmentalism, ecology, community and participation reach Flanders, and how was this part of a general movement marking the architectural culture of the 1960s and 1970s?<sup>6</sup>

By starting from Hoppenbrouwers’ only recently disclosed architecture archives,<sup>7</sup> this paper employs a form of historical research in which the language of the architect – in particular drawing – takes a central position. While architectural production in the 1960s was vast, today this period remains to be portrayed as an ‘architectural desert’<sup>8</sup>, where buildings were rather an affair of “experimentation than of theoretical formation”.<sup>9</sup> As such, this architectonic focus aims to bridge the gap between “architecture design as a practice and architecture design as a research practice”.<sup>10</sup> Through a - literal - walkthrough of the building and its surroundings (in its current state) (Fig. 0), this reading sheds light on the design process of several spaces as propellers of a search for a countercultural way of designing architecture for leisure.

## The Golden Sixties’ Rise of a Flemish Leisure Culture: *Westrand* as ‘An Island of Time’<sup>11</sup>

*(Fig. 0, A) When starting this walk in the Kamerijklaan 46 in Dilbeek, a solid grey figure stands out (Fig. 1). Composed by different volumes, its climax ends in a ‘tower’. Upon approaching the building, a canopy indicates the centre’s main entrance as well as its historical name through white capital letters. A banner suspended on the tower and a yellow flag in front*

*of the entrance with a black lion on it (representing the Flemish Lion) are reminiscent of the political climate in which this building arose.*

The genesis of *Westrand* has to be understood as “a confluence of many contingencies”,<sup>12</sup> from political emancipatory processes to changes in society at large.

Its development can be situated in a rise of similar cultural centres in Flanders around the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> As architectural historian Janina Gosseye explained a new culture of ‘leisure’ emerged due to a shift in time perception resulting from the post-war years of welfare.<sup>14</sup> Apart from the expansion of a leisure economy, this newly available time made policymakers understand how public infrastructures could reach and educate a large group of people and potentially provide an antidote against the emerging television and car culture that fuelled a fear of individualisation and inactive citizens.<sup>15</sup> The granting of subsidies would encourage Flemish municipalities to build facilities that were to democratise culture and sport,<sup>16</sup> and above all, create places that, as the Minister of Flemish Culture expressed, would be “permanent areas for encounter for various branches of a folk culture serving a particular community”.<sup>17</sup>

It is important to note that the geographic network of such pluralist leisure architecture around the capital city – from which *Westrand* is a key example - was also part of a Flemish nationalistic strategy called “a belt of emeralds”.<sup>18</sup> Due to the position of Dilbeek on the periphery of Brussels, the Flemish Minister of Culture Frans Van Mechelen (1923-2000) saw the opportunity to plant his first “Emerald” here. This one and the many others to come were meant to serve as a buffer against the ‘Frenchification’ of the Flemish hinterland.<sup>19</sup> Due to accelerated urbanisation and an increase of new settlers in Dilbeek, socio-cultural associations were in favour of such a an ‘emerald’ to remind the local population, and the French-speaking immigrants in particular, of the unilingualism of the area.<sup>20</sup> As a young politician, the new mayor, Philip Vergels (°1930), had an even more ambitious plan in mind for this centre. It should become not only a meeting place for the inhabitants of Dilbeek, but one for the entire western edge of Brussels.<sup>21</sup> The project accelerated considerably and the initial idea to fit the building’s programme into an existing gendarmerie located in the centre of Dilbeek was no longer considered feasible for this ambitious plan.<sup>22</sup> Soon enough the construction of a new building, located on the margin of a green valley (once formed by stone

quarries),<sup>23</sup> was found to be more suitable.<sup>24</sup>

Lastly, in order to obtain the necessary subsidies for the centre's construction, a working group 'Werkgroep Westrand Brussel' (WWB) was assembled which represented various municipalities of the Western Brussels periphery.<sup>25</sup> The required pre-advise bundle that they compiled contained a motivation, the results of sociological research into the socio-cultural behaviour and integration pattern of the population living in this periphery, and a draft of the building's programme visualised by an organisational chart.<sup>26</sup> Multiple meetings, an exhibition and a trip to contemporary cultural centres in the Netherlands were organised in order to refine the programme, its implantation and the building's contemporary design.<sup>27</sup> They pictured *Westrand* as "an island of time" or a permanent and informal meeting place that would be open seven days a week, alongside all organised activities, at any time of the day.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, the document accentuated how a close cooperation between the working group, the inhabitants of Dilbeek and Hoppenbrouwers' team of architects was established. The outcome of this intense participation got rewarded with a granting of subsidies in 1968.<sup>29</sup>

## Designing Successive Moments for Encounter: Resting and Moving

*(Fig. 0, from A to B) The transition from the centre's exterior to interior spaces starts with a gently sloping pavement that continues into the floor of the entrance hall. The dovetailed sheets ceiling of the outside canopy, functioning as a permanent shuttering,<sup>30</sup> carries on along the interior slope. Floor and ceiling seem endless horizontal planes, as the boundaries to the left and right are unclear. A symmetrical disposition of eight slat-formed columns defines a monumental axe, guiding the upward motion to an illuminated area. Several loose elements appear alongside this central corridor. On the left, our gaze crosses a raised and therefore clearly visible seating area (Fig. 2). Depending on where you sit, it offers a view onto the entrance hall or a window overlooking the forecourt. It is designed as a folded seating element, created around a centred low column operating as a lamp and newspaper holder. Moving further up, a couple of steps lead us into this higher area where we suddenly overlook the 'valley' of the Wolfspuuten (Fig. 3). (Fig. 0, from C to D) Up here, the street changes character towards a more organic expression. Rays of westward sunlight illuminate the continuation of the Westrand-street that provides access to all the surrounding functions. Moving towards today's*

*exposition gallery, we pass by a 'foyer'<sup>31</sup> zone embracing the volume of the theatre hall which emerges gradually with every step. A descending slope seems to take a turn where several steps continue behind an exceptionally non-circular column. Behind it, a concrete surface rises in the air. A staircase in the background reveals that it is the railing of a staircase.*

During the construction of *Westrand*, Hoppenbrouwers publicly wrote and frequently discussed with his students<sup>32</sup> how the task of an architect was to be a 'catalyst' who "had to fulfil the desires of the public through their designs".<sup>33</sup> Equally, he stressed how people were no longer the anonymous mass of post-war modernism but specific individuals.<sup>34</sup> Hence, the centre for encounter was meant to stand out against "sterile, puritanical and aestheticizing modern architecture".<sup>35</sup> Hoppenbrouwers elaborated further in his notes on how architecture had to be inclusive and "used by people".<sup>36</sup> They had "to feel at home in it, had to manipulate the environment into their very own, so that it could become an expression of their identity or 'a symbolic environment'".<sup>37</sup> Together with his team, consisting of engineer Rudi Somers (1942-2010) and technical draughtsman Luc Vandenschrieck (1942), as well as architects Bob van Reeth (°1943) and Francis Strauven (1942) during the early design process, the first sketches took form and were heavily discussed.<sup>38</sup> Their design of an 'Island of time', or a permanent and informal meeting place, started eventually with the concept of an 'interior street' that were to reconnect a community and its environment, from a terrace overlooking the valley of the Wolfsputen.<sup>39</sup>

When analysing the few remaining design sketches, it comes to the fore that the role of an 'interior street' as an in-between space connecting all its surrounding functions, was not designed in the most functional way. This street analogy had in fact already acquired a highly charged significance in the ongoing architectural international discourses of that time.<sup>40</sup> Influenced by concepts like habitat proposed by the Team X members, the *Westrand*-street answers their idea of being "a microcosm where street games change with the seasons and reflect the hours of the day in the cycle of street life".<sup>41</sup> Shaped by the arrangement of the surrounding buildings, "an enclosed unity and a sense of belonging were to be expressed".<sup>42</sup> As Aldo van Eyck describes, this architecture "was to be considered in terms of relationship and interaction rather than the result of an analytical study of functions".<sup>43</sup> The architects of *Westrand* therefore no longer considered the

time to move from one place to another as lost time. On the contrary, it became its main activity through which a community would interact with each other and with its surrounding environment.

When moving into the building, “a restricted view on the valley” was to appear in the monumental entrance hall, writes Hoppenbrouwers. Once “approaching the foyer and the cafeteria, the valley had to fold open and become an extension of it.”<sup>44</sup> The preliminary design sketches (Fig. 4) even show how this route would lead its users into the surrounding landscape. Although the boundaries of the entrance hall feel unclear, the ones of the more organic part of the street clearly come to the fore when analysing the genealogy of its design sketches. The open space is on the one hand shaped according to the curvature of the valley, and by the enclosures of the surrounding functions on the other hand. Its free plan enables a ‘dematerialisation’ of the left window façade. Reminiscent of Le Corbusier’s ‘walls of light’<sup>45</sup>, they are no longer, as Beatriz Colomina described, “walls that define space” but windows reduced to “lines of glass whose views now define space.”<sup>46</sup> The right side of the street is formed in a completely different way. Looking back at the series of sketches, we note that this side, in contrast to the other, seems constantly modified across the process because of the changing functional volumes and their interrelations. Hoppenbrouwers elaborated in his notes on how “every function required its own enclosure”.<sup>47</sup> In contrast with the open plan discussed above, each of these solid volumes enclose their inherent function.

Besides reconnecting the community of the Western edge of Brussels to its ecology, longer distances than functionally needed were also designed in order to generate encounters while walking. Hoppenbrouwers believed that a certain distance between two functions “would foster informal talks and shake participants up” and as a result “it would bring life to the centre”.<sup>48</sup> Guided by recurring stratifications that appear when spending time throughout this space, the displacement of light and a geometric play of figures in the fore- and background seem reminiscent of the phenomenal transparency concept of Colin Rowe and Robert Slutsky,<sup>49</sup> which Hoppenbrouwers repeatedly discussed in his lectures.<sup>50</sup> Hoppenbrouwers regularly referred to this form of transparency as “a cubistically layered space with ambiguity” retrieved when two geometric structures can permeate each other.<sup>51</sup>

Besides moving, waiting too was no longer considered as a loss of time. Along the public street, different seating areas were designed to connect and relate with its surroundings. While seated, auditive interactions would for example inform you if a performance had already started. Whilst waiting for someone, changing topographies made it possible to oversee and be seen more easily. Without even realising it, you might have greeted a stranger or got caught up in a conversation with someone who sat next to you. In the case no one was near, a visitor could relax, read one of the available newspapers, or get “inspired by the architecture”.<sup>52</sup>

When Irénée Scalbert studied the Economist Building (1960-64, London) designed by two members of Team X (Alison and Peter Smithson), he noted how “the surrounding functions give importance to the route and activity of the street”.<sup>53</sup> In the case of *Westrand*, the street’s activity was not only reinforcing the connection between its landscape and its variety of functions, it instead became an activity in its own right. Mainly shaped by its topography and its surrounding functions, the notion of an ‘interior street’ was designed as a timeless ‘microcosmos’ bringing the people of the Western edge of Brussels together and in relation to their environment along the axis of moving and resting.

### **Intergenerational DILBUK<sup>54</sup>**

*(Fig. 0, from B to C) Standing in today’s exhibition gallery, a concept drawing (Fig. 5) allows to go back in time and imagine the bustling cafeteria where conference participants would enjoy their lunch, or (grand)parents would spend their afternoon while waiting for their (grand)children to finish music classes. Whilst discussing with other parents, the view from the balcony on the play area made it possible to keep an eye on the kids playing at the playground, a level lower. Still accessible from the cafeteria’s centrally located staircase, visitors can walk from here to a concrete children oasis (Fig. 6). An organically shaped water feature is located next to the playground pyramid. Crossing a small bridge gets you to the other side were a separate room once welcomed senior citizens to spend their ‘old days’ while overseeing the valley from a terrace. Another room with a courtyard hosted the youth that organised gatherings and parties there.*

A 1974 concept sketch of the cafeteria and playground uses a wordplay indicating this area as the “stomach of Dilbeek”.<sup>55</sup> It not only refers to a stomach because of the cafeteria, but also because it was a place where every generation of Dilbeek



would come together. The new forms of time created by the welfare increase of the 1960s became a matter of all generations emphasises the book *Architecture for a Leisure Culture*: “It stretches the youth phase, it extends the ‘old day’, it reduces working hours and it facilitates many forms of work”.<sup>56</sup> A couple of years after the inauguration of *Westrand*, the director of the centre described in an article the purpose of its building as a proper living space where “children, hippies and senior citizens, intellectuals and housewives” would meet.<sup>57</sup> In short, *Westrand* was intended to become “a place where a community would feel at home: a market with lively and quiet areas, where people would come to do something or nothing at all”.<sup>58</sup>

The inauguration of *Westrand* in 1973 stirred mixed opinions by both the inhabitants of Dilbeek but also the architects themselves.<sup>59</sup> The explanatory text attached to the previously discussed concept drawing, described how the - at that moment still unfinished - building feels grey and cold but reassures that a second phase will ‘soften’ this space.<sup>60</sup> In this never executed phase the cafeteria was intended to become an “island of pop” with an acoustic carpet on the floor and ceiling in the shape of a naked woman. Sculptures would create intimate zones, while a transparent partition between the restaurant and the children’s playground would prevent disturbing noises from the latter.<sup>61</sup> In between art and nature, harsh and soft surfaces, through views on different levels of the building and its surroundings an intergenerational setting was meant to be created for a community to spend their free time together.

### **From Chronos to Kairos in a Cosy Corner**

*(Fig. 0, C) We end our walk in a sitting area with a fireplace that is located next to some of the children playground (Fig. 7). A more suitable term would be to dive into it, as visitors descend a small slope leading to an embracing concrete chamber formed by a bench. This lower bench is designed with a high backrest that ensures the visitor’s focus on the fireplace. Unlike the higher seating area in the entrance hall, this one is more of a hidden alcove with almost no view of its surroundings nor of the people sitting in it. It transports you into another time dimension than the measurable Chronos time named Kairos.*<sup>62</sup>

Along the *Westrand*-street, some of the seating areas were designed in order to create a gradient between more public and private areas. The described ‘alcove’

around a fireplace is compared to the entrance seating spot one of these more intimate places where inhabitants could withdraw from the public parts of the street, together or alone. Whereas this shelter withdraws completely, the entrance area is like a panoptical device. Here, time seems to stand still for a moment. In the climate of a population explosion of the 1960s, the authors of *Community and Privacy: Toward a New Architecture of Humanism*, emphasised how the notion of privacy was in danger because of the all-too-open plans of the age of togetherness.<sup>63</sup> Hoppenbrouwers' extensive markings in this book,<sup>64</sup> his design notes on the never executed 'cosy corners', but also the preliminary design sketches showing the search for such areas of withdrawal, self-reliance, and reflection are traces of the search for shaping a physical environment of a togetherness with life on this planet, but also with ourselves.

## Conclusion

This paper interpreted countercultural positions and politics as concrete concepts that directly motivated architectural design in Flanders in the 1960s and 1970s. By an architectonic reading of a walk, in, through and out of a Flemish cultural centre *Westrand* (1967-1973), this research distilled three key material translations altered by new visions of leisure: an 'interior street' for encounters along a resting/moving axis, an intergenerational use of space, and a gradient between public and private areas to withdrawal.

The programme of the Flemish cultural centre as such can already be understood as countercultural: it was conceived as a means of political emancipation of Flanders. Many cultural centres in Flanders were pioneering commodities of a broader culture of emancipation which evolved from the margin to a more institutionalised movement.

In a second line of thought, the methodology to question architectural history might be also countercultural in itself within the current academic climate. Adding to the recent increase of theoretical and historical research on this period's architecture, this paper offered an architectural research lens, throwing an alternative light on an architectural culture where experimentation stood at the core.

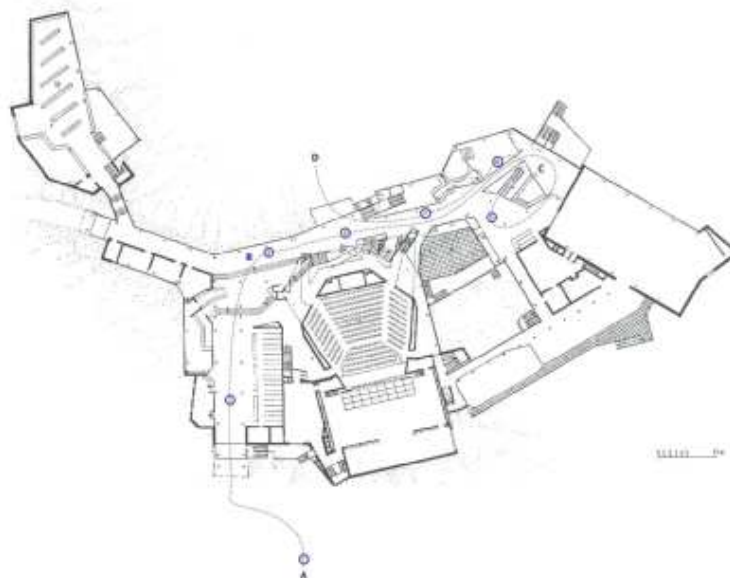
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## Figures



# THE JUDO TAKEDOWN. FRENCH TILES IN THE RIO DE LA PLATA BASIN (2ND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY)

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## Abstract

During the first half of the nineteenth century, most of the Latin American colonies became free from the old Spanish Empire. Since this process, the already independent countries built a new relationship with the contemporary European powers, mainly England and France, that introduced Latin America to the new world order that they have imposed.

This new order was based on an extractivist system through which the Global South provided raw material to the rising European industry, and simultaneously consumed industrialized products made in Europe.

In this context, and talking specifically about Architecture, Latin American countries became consumers of European building materials that had been unavailable before.

The arrival in Latin America of European construction materials was very important because the ships that came from Europe to pick up raw materials could not make the North-South trip empty. For this reason, they had the need to load a heavy ballast in Europe to unload in Latin American ports. Construction materials were ideal for this goal.

Focusing on tiles, the subject matter of this paper, different kinds of models from several origins started to arrive in Latin America, but French tiles from Pas de Calais stand out. The French port of Calais in the Northern Sea was perfect for charging the ballast at the beginning of the round-trip Europe - South America – Europe.

But the invasion of a huge quantity of a foreign product as part of an extractivist and colonial project was surprisingly assimilated and fundamentally appropriated for the Rio de la Plata basin communities to be used in the traditional way that they know for centuries.

This paper discusses the case of Desvres' tiles as an example of the power of the colonized people to construct our own future even reverting the power of the colonizers.

## Keywords

Extractivism, Desvres' tiles, appropriation

*“In the face of modernity one does not turn inward, one does not retreat; one moves sideways, one moves forward. All of this is creative adaptation.”<sup>1</sup>*

During the first half of the nineteenth century, most of the Latin American colonies became free from the old Spanish Empire. This process was supported, intellectually, economically, and even militarily by England and France, countries recently transformed by the ultramarine colonialism and the parallel Industrial revolution in the major world powers of those times.

Since this process, the new “criollo”<sup>2</sup> governments of the already independent countries built a new relationship with those new European powers that, during the Spanish colonial rule, had prohibited commerce with the colonies and were very interested in introducing them to the new world order that they have imposed.

This new world order was based on an extrativist system through which the Global South provided raw material to the rising European industry, and simultaneously consumed industrialized products made in Europe. Thus, an asymmetrical exchange system was generated in which Global North became richer and richer meanwhile Global South became poor and dependent.

This system is kept up to the present in several aspects<sup>3</sup>, although, especially in the twentieth century, it changed due to the introduction of the United States of America as the new world power with an increasing influence on the whole American continent<sup>4</sup>. Simultaneously, the rising industrialization of Latin America generated a gradual substitution of some manufactured products. (Fig.1)

Back in the nineteenth century, especially during the second half, the new power relationships made in the Independence process context provoked changes in the preferences of Latin Americans, who started to view the new European powers as a model for the future development of the new Latin American countries. In this context, European technology, arts, and fashions became highly desirable products for those new avid consumers.

Talking specifically about architecture, at the same time, the new role of the Latin American countries as consumers of European industrial products introduced new building materials that had been unavailable before and new model aesthetics which had a very evident impact on Latin American architecture from those times up to the present.

The arrival in Latin America of European construction materials was very important because the ships that came from Europe to pick up raw materials (especially cereals and cattle products) could not make the North-South trip empty. For this reason, they had the need to load a heavy ballast in Europe to unload in Latin American ports. Construction materials were ideal for this goal.

Focusing on tiles, the subject matter of this paper, different kinds of models from several origins started to arrive in Latin America, mainly from England and France. Tiles were a fantastic ballast because there was a product not manufactured in Latin America at those times, heavy and easy to transport. Other featured products used as ballast were stones for paving streets, but tiles were preferred because they had a higher added value.

The Rio de la Plata Basin, that is, Argentina, Uruguay, and even the South of Brazil is an important cattle and cereal production region. Then, a lot of ships came here from Europe, so we received and bought tons of “ballast tiles” interchanged by our cereals.

During the Spanish rule, tiles came to Latin America mainly from Seville, Catalonia, and Valencia and were used especially for constructive reasons and also for their aesthetic impact. The origins of the Spanish use of tiles can be traced to the Middle Ages during the Arabic Iberian period and were deeply studied<sup>5</sup>.

Traditionally, tiles were a waterproof surface easy to install, and particularly useful to avoid soil humidity in the lower section of the walls and to cover easily spheric surfaces like domes in order to prevent the effects of rain. Also, tiles were used in constructions related to water like cisterns and fountains<sup>6</sup>.

But, incorporated in the new extractivist world order we receive tiles from different European countries, Belgium and England are good examples but French tiles from Pas de Calais stand out. The French port of Calais in the Northern Sea was perfect for charging the ballast at the beginning of the round-trip Europe - South America – Europe. Alejandro Artucio points out that several tens of thousands were received monthly only in Uruguay<sup>7</sup>.

Those French tiles are mostly square, around 11 cm x 11 cm, white and stencil painted especially in blue, but also someone in black, green, brown, and yellow. Motifs were very varied, including geometrical, vegetal, animal, and even human figures. Most of them were made in the small city of Desvres, near Calais. Several came from the same factories Fourmaintarux Hornoy and Jules Fourmain-



traux that exported to South America and to the French North African colonies<sup>8</sup>. (Fig.2)

But, beyond the visible differences in aesthetics and production technique, these tiles were used in this region for the traditional purposes common in Iberic-Arabian traditions, that is, in plinths or basing around backyards and in mags of wells, reservoirs, and wellsprings, in all the cases to prevent weathering caused by use and, mainly, by humidity.

This implies that Iberic-Arabian design criteria<sup>9</sup> about how, where, and what tiles use should be for were kept valid. The change was shown in decoration patterns, and technical features related to the foreign origin of these imported materials.

So, the invasion of a huge quantity of a foreign product as part of an extractivist and colonial project was surprisingly assimilated and fundamentally appropriated for the Rio de la Plata basin communities to be used in the traditional way that they know for centuries. The material was foreign, but the ideas and thinking remain local.

The deep effect of the appropriation of these foreign tiles in our architecture was so important that decades later became even a nationalist motif. During the second and third decades of the twentieth century, a Spanish colonial Revival architecture was developed. The main goal of these projects was to recover old Spanish-colonial traditions<sup>10</sup>.

But surprisingly, this nationalist architecture also recovered the French tiles as a featured regional design. And, because French tiles were not available in those times, national factories started to produce local copies based on the old French models<sup>11</sup> to be used in the 20's and 30s nationalist buildings. (Fig.3)

Even nowadays some models inspired by the French tiles' motifs are produced and available in the market to be used in contemporary works. Definitely, those tiles that came as ballast in a foreign imposition of the extractivist colonial system became a regional symbol.

In a judo takedown, the strength of the opponent is the main tool to beat down him<sup>12</sup>. Desvres' tiles are an example of the power of the colonized people to construct our own future even reverting the power of the colonizers. (Fig.4)

## Endnotes

1. Gaonkar, D. (2001) *Alternative Modernities* Durham: Duke University Press, p. 22.
2. Name given to the ruler high class of Spanish descendants, born in Latin American colonies.
3. As an example, my country, Argentina remains still nowadays as a mainly world cattle provider meanwhile the industrialization of the country is not properly developed.
4. As a consequence of the Monroe doctrine based on the idea of “America for the Americans”
5. I devoted my academic career to the study of the Islamic Links in Latin American Architecture. For the use of tiles topic can be seen: Martínez Nespral, F. (2019) “Migraciones, interculturalidad, exilio y arquitectura. Cerámicas españolas del siglo XVII en Túnez y América, un puente transatlántico” in *Area: Agenda de Reflexión en Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo*, 25, Universidad de Buenos Aires.
6. They have been studied by several authors, such as Vicente Nadal Mora by mid twentieth century and more recently by Uruguayan Alejandro Artucio. See: Nadal Mora V. (1949) *El azulejo en el Río de la Plata (siglo XIX)*, Buenos Aires: American Art Institute / Artucio Urioste, A. (2004) *El azulejo en la arquitectura uruguaya, siglos XVIII-XIX y XX*. Montevideo: Linardi y Risso.
7. See: Artucio Urioste, A. (2004) *El azulejo en la arquitectura uruguaya, siglos XVIII-XIX y XX*. Montevideo: Linardi y Risso, page 17.

## Figures



Figure 1: The port of Buenos Aires (Argentina) 1890

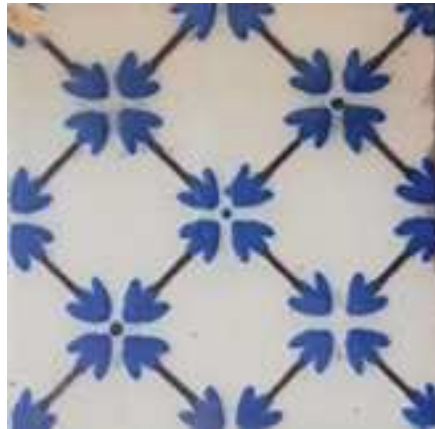


Figure 2: Pas de Calais tile, Private collection, Photo by Fernando Martínez Nespral



Figure 3: Pas de Calais Tiles in the plinth of a house (Published in “El azulejo en la arquitectura del Rio de la Plata, by A. Artucio Urioste, Montevideo, 1998)



Figure 4: Pas de Calais Tiles private collection, Photo by Fernando Martínez Nespral

# MARIO PANI, A MODERN STEMMED FROM THE ÉCOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS

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## Abstract

In June 1934 Mario Pani (1911-1993) received his architecture degree from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Upon his return to his native Mexico, he began a fruitful work in the fields of architecture and urban planning, with answers that initially derived from his academic teaching, seeking results appropriate to the urgent requirements of the country. In the early 1940s, he was actively involved with the institutions that were building, so to speak, post-revolutionary Mexico. He collaborated with José Villagrán García in the “Seminario de Estudios Hospitalarios” and the “Plan Nacional de Construcción de Hospitales”, as well as in the foundation of the Comité Administrador del Programa Federal de Construcción de Escuelas, CAPFCE, between 1942 and 1946. Two projects stand out from this period, the National School for Teachers and the National Conservatory of Music, where the organization is academic but the architectonic expression takes a modern aspect. In these cases, the use of axes is clearly perceptible in the design of the buildings, with the integration of works of art, both sculptures and murals, some by José Clemente Orozco, underline his fidelity to the Parisian teachings. Later, the influence of Le Corbusier, whom he had met and assessed in France, helped him to move towards an architectural expression where his main concern was not with materials or forms, but with solutions to problems through appropriate and innovative contributions. Thus, in 1949, with the Centro Urbano Presidente Alemán, the LeCorbusian characteristics prevailed, and Mario Pani achieved a personal amalgam of what he had learned in his time in Paris. However, the academic imprint prevailed, throughout his maturity with numerous features of his work that this paper will seek to reveal.

## Keywords

Mario Pani, Beaux Arts, Corbusian Projects, Works in Mexico

## Mario Pani at the *École de Beaux Arts*

In 1929, Mario Pani enrolled at the *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris, coming second of the contenders on his first attempt.<sup>1</sup> He was born in Mexico City in 1911, and arrived to Europe in June 1919; his father, Arturo Pani, was a diplomat and, from 1925 onwards, as Consul in Paris he enabled the young man to study there. It is important to note that at the time Mario Pani joined the prestigious art school, “despite the heavy cannon fire that Le Corbusier, Gropius and Frank Lloyd Wright were firing against hybrid architecture... classicism was not a dead letter for us”.<sup>2</sup> For the students, newly admitted to the renowned Parisian school, the freedom to study Greco-Roman and Renaissance sources was a way of facing, at that time, “the storm” of the modern.

Indeed, when he started his studies, Pani, with his Russian-born friend Vladimir Kaspé,<sup>3</sup> chose to enrol in the studio of George Gromort, who was also the professor of architectural theory and, moreover, the only one to have his studio on the school premises.<sup>4</sup> The Mexican followed the school curriculum, which imposed various competitions for the approval of the school cycles, including history courses and drawing practice; the latter is evident from some of his deliveries, in which he copied buildings and architectural elements of the past, with perfection. (Fig. 1) From his participation in internal competitions, we know that he obtained some medals, with projects of clear academic workmanship; this is the case of the “Museum of Anthropology in Mexico”, 1932, which shows the symmetry and monumentality prevalent in the academic precinct.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the future architect decided not to enter the *Prix de Rome* competition, opting instead to make a thesis and complete his studies as soon as possible. He obtained his degree on June 5, 1934, which he validated at the National School of Architecture of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM, on October 2, of the same year. It should be noted that his thesis, “Maison au Mexique”, presents a particular case with the appearance of some variations within the *École des Beaux Arts*, which shows certain traits of modernity and localism, as well as a tinge of the nationalism prevalent in post-revolutionary Mexico.<sup>6</sup>

## Back to Mexico

Upon his return to his native country, Mario Pani developed a fruitful practice in architecture and urban planning, where we can initially recognise responses derived from his academic teaching. He also became a teacher at the National School of Architecture, UNAM, where he taught composition as head of a workshop between 1940 and 1948.

## Establishment of a magazine: *Arquitectura/Mexico*

Few years after his arrival, Pani started, in 1938, the magazine *Arquitectura/Mexico*,<sup>7</sup> where he proposed in the first issue that “detached from all exclusive doctrine, from all sectarianism, its main task will be that of selection; a rigorous selection, to make room within its narrow limits only for true architecture.... It is not intended to point out a path, to impose a trend, but to document”.<sup>8</sup> The most striking part of this introduction, are the two accompanying images of the Parthenon of Athens, that seem to contradict the text, but in reality they intend to connect, in a subtle way, modernity and Beaux Arts.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the first article consists of four interviews, intended as an “Enquiry” with 11 questions.<sup>10</sup> The piece was written by Pani’s school friend Kaspé, with answers by their professor Georges Gromort, and three important Parisian architects at the time, Michel Roux-Spitz, Auguste Perret and Le Corbusier. Two questions relate mainly to the dichotomy of the moment: Is it possible to consider the existence of 20<sup>th</sup> century style and, if so, which are its characteristics? Do you think it is necessary to continue a tradition? Accompanied by images of their publications or architectural works, the answers are quite predictable, mainly the ones by Gromort and Le Corbusier. The first states “20<sup>th</sup> century is dominated by the machine... but, even so, there is a good architecture with the eternal aesthetic values.” and “It is indispensable to maintain tradition though the correct study of preceding architectures.”; the former says that “There already is a style of the 20<sup>th</sup> century...” and “Tradition is ‘forward’ and not ‘backward’...”

It is also notable to find featured works by Luigi Moretti, Jean Ginsberg and François Hepp, or Berthold Lubetkin with Tecton, and in a minor mode of only two pages, two houses by Mexican architects and a hospital by José Villagrán García, considered by then the leader of modern architecture.

In *Arquitectura* n.2, Kaspé writes about their *alma mater*, with a review of the École de Beaux Arts, the building and the subjects of the classes with the organization of the ateliers, as well a description of the student's activities. Again, at the end two houses in México, one by Villagrán. It should be added that up to the number 23 of the architectural review, there was normally an article copied from Gromort's publications, and that number 15 was the first one containing only Mexican projects,<sup>11</sup> included in the National Plan for Hospitals Building headed by Villagrán, Pani and Enrique Yáñez.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that in 1939, with a special permission of Paul Valery, Pani translated *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte*, 1921, as an homage to his classic education. In the Preface of *Eupalinos o el Arquitecto* he states that "The Parthenon, with its immense plastic abstraction, is the best definition of harmony, equilibrium and the Greek *logos*."<sup>12</sup> Concluding with his unlimited admiration to the "higher art", that evolves from "the marvellous chain formed by the architecture of all times".

### **Mario Pani's First projects**

It is within this uncertain context of that Mario Pani's first architectural works emerge, retaining from the Parisian teachings, both a precise analysis of the programme with clearly functioning projects showing the search for symmetry, as well as the careful use of construction systems and materials. In this sense, one of the first examples of his work is the Hotel Reforma, 1936, offering an axial symmetry, to locate the entrance in the corner, including a wide staircase that places the entrance hall in a sort of *piano nobile*. The proposal presents, on the one hand, contemporary and comfortable rooms, accompanied by various facilities for the wellbeing of guests, such as shops and elegant restaurants, and a modern roof garden; on the other, it seeks to be integrated into the surrounding urban environment, with exterior stone finishes, similar to those of historic buildings in the nearby centre of the city.<sup>13</sup> (Fig. 2)

It is important to note that he designed, at the time, two buildings for accommodations, the Hotel Alameda in Morelia, 1944, and the Hotel Plaza in Mexico City, 1945-1946. In these cases, the same location on a corner lot is repeated, which allows him to put the entrance door towards the corner, although, in the former, the body of the building curves inwards to leave a space, in the manner

of an access plaza; in addition, in this building, copies of two colonial portals were placed, seeking to harmonise with the atmosphere of this city, in the State of Michoacan.

Contemporary to these projects, there are some flat and office buildings, in many of which a careful symmetry prevails, accompanied by coherent programmes, with sensible and durable materials. These are the two apartment buildings on Avenida Juárez and on Avenida Insurgentes Norte, both dating from 1941. Particularly interesting is an apartment building on Avenida Rubén Darío, which reiterates the axial symmetry, placed on a corner; in this case, we see the use of annealed brick left exposed, which would be a recurring material in the works of the young designer from that time onwards.<sup>14</sup>

### **Socially engaged architecture**

Between 1942 and 1943, together with José Villagrán García and Enrique Yáñez, Mario Pani was one of the coordinators of the “Seminario de Estudios Hospitalarios” (Hospital Architecture Seminar) and the “Plan Nacional de Construcción de Hospitales” (National Plan for Hospital Building), as well as of the Comité Administrador del Programa Federal de Construcción de Escuelas (Administrative Committee of the Federal School Construction Program), CAPFCE. These were two undertakings that sought to fill important gaps at national level in a country emerging from the difficult armed conflict of the Mexican Revolution. In the hospital sector, the proposal was that architects and doctors worked together, as Julien Guadet had proposed in his course on the theory of architecture at the famous Parisian Beaux Arts school.<sup>15</sup> They sought to find an architectural solution to health problems by proposing a hospital policy in keeping with the times. As a logical consequence, this interdisciplinary group drew up the criteria for an action plan to rationalise medical services, the “Hospital Construction Plan”.<sup>16</sup>

These three architects were also active in the founding period of the above mentioned CAPFCE, headed by the Secretary of Public Education, Jaime Torres Bodet. During the first Three-Year Plan, between 1944 and 1946, when the construction of schools throughout the country was undertaken, Pani designed two unique works: the National School for Teachers, 1945-1947, and the National Music Conservatory, 1946-1948.<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 3)



Both projects follow an orderly academic system, with clear axes of symmetry, while the formal language is close to Art Deco, with a careful use of durable materials. It is also worth noting the presence of important artists of the time, in search of a plastic integration, like José Clemente Orozco, Luis Ortis Monasterio and Armando Quesada.<sup>18</sup> Noteworthy are certain common elements, among which open auditoriums and efficient classrooms that stand out in each case. At the National School for Teachers, a passageway was created where inspectors could evaluate the performance of future teachers without being seen, and at the National Conservatory of Music, the curved walls of the practice rooms have a particular acoustic function; this solution was obvious, since he was an accomplished cellist and had attended diverse music schools in Europe. Finally, it is a coincidence that the two buildings are located on triangular plots of land, with the main façade facing the corner.

### **A new approach to design**

While Pani was studying in Paris, he had the chance to become familiar with the *avant-garde* proposals of Le Corbusier, both in presentations, as well as in his writings. This influence led him towards a work in which his main concern did not lie so much in the materials or forms, but in the solution of problems, with appropriate and innovative contributions where clear function was his goal. Thus, in 1949, with the Centro Urbano Presidente Alemán, CUPA, (“Presidente Alemán” Urban Housing),<sup>19</sup> the Lecorbusian influence emerged with Pani looking to achieved a personal amalgam of what he had learned in his time in Paris. (Fig. 4)

It can be said that he was examining suitable solutions to the problems of Mexico, proposing new paths, going to the core of the buildings and its purpose. That is why the essence of his efforts, at the time, was concentrated in designing the most urgent architectural typologies, like hospitals, schools and housing. For this last one, the proposals by Le Corbusier were an important source, mainly the solutions that the last one put forward in his book *La Ville Radiense*, of 1935, that evolved from *Urbanisme*, of 1922: The superblock, the tall “à redent” buildings, and the surrounding green space.

The CUPA project, can be considered one of the most significant and innovative works of this architect, the first vertical housing ensemble in Mexico, proposing urban densification.<sup>20</sup> The complex occupied a super block, with a total

of 1,080 apartments in 6 buildings with a ground floor and 12 floors, 4 of them placed in the “à redent” or zigzag disposition; there were also 6 parallel buildings with only 3 floors. The ground floor of the tall ones, was supported by a *pilotis* structure, but not always open, since most of the time located businesses that catered to its inhabitants. Furthermore, the ensemble included a nursery, a kindergarten, administrative offices, a pool and public spaces for sports and gardens. Also, the apartments were developed on two stories, an idea that also had its roots in Le Corbusian projects, eminently the Marseille’s Ville Radieuse. Pani borrowed from the Swiss architect the idea of two apartments that occupy three floors, but with a slight variation, so that the street or hallway access was exterior, since the Mexican weather allowed it.<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that when Le Corbusier was first publishing these proposals, Pani was in a first row, as young student in Paris.

Also, it is necessary to recall that he had travelled to Rio de Janeiro in 1944, with Villagrán and Gustavo Baz, the Mexican Minister of Health, to study Brazilian Hospitals. At this time the Ministry of Education and Health, “Gustavo Capane-ma Building”, was near to conclusion, by Lucio Costa, Jorge Machado Moreira, Hernâni Vasconcelos, Carlos Leao, Affonso E. Reidy and Oscar Niemeyer, landscape by Roberto Burle Marx and Le Corbusier as an adviser. It is only natural to assume that Pani was influenced by the powerful Brazilian Modern Movement, that was also trying to assemble an architectural expression and composition, that was rooted in the tradition and the local, as well as in the European vanguards.

### **A turning point**

Another important undertaking by Mario Pani, this time with Enrique del Moral, is the master plan of the University City of the National University, 1950-1952. Chosen by their colleagues, after a competition at the National School of Architecture, they developed the urban plan, based on the urban concept of the super-block that Le Corbusier advocated, but following the road system by promoted by Herman Herrey.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, with a third architect, Salvador Ortega, they designed the Dean’s Tower, the most notorious building on campus, deriving from the main lecorbusian precepts; a slender building, standing on *pilotis*, that consisted in an underground parking lot, a large main floor with a large area for administrative procedures, and the tower with a mezzanine and twelve levels. In addition, the project shows a search within the national identity, with the use of

local materials like onyx, and especially with the integration of three murals by David Alfaro Siqueiros.<sup>23</sup> Of special note is the careful approach to the architectural program, taking into consideration the advice of previous Deans, that evolved from Guadet and Gromort teachings related to consultation with the users. Also, the thorough analysis of the structure and the durability of the finishings. (Fig. 5)

Other important undertakings by Pani took place from 1950 onwards. Of special note are the Airport, the Yatch Club, and several hotels and houses in Acapulco, in association with Del Moral.<sup>24</sup> Here, that main concern was the adaptation to the site and its tropical climate, resulting in alluring and original buildings. The previous considerations of design and style, were overtaken by the study of winds and sunning, to offer comfortable and sound responses. Nevertheless, program, functionality and materiality were never minimized.

## **Coda**

Mario Pani was a classical man, with various interest, amongst which music, since he was a gifted musician, playing the cello in many circumstances. The restraint and balance of this trade were propitious to Beaux Arts studies. But he was also an audacious man of his time, well-travelled and informed of the architectural world panorama, as well as of the many missing aspects for the welfare of the people of Mexico. Furthermore, he held an important place in the field of architecture both in teaching, publications and trade associations.

Much can still be said in relation to the academic practice in his ample production, a career based on a solid Beaux-Arts preparation that evolved to a modern expression both by his awareness of the vanguards and the prevailing architectural trends, as well as influenced by the local conditions of social concern. In search of a particular and original language, he explored abstraction, novel spatial conceptions, urban relations, integration of plastic art, but standing firmly within the adequate functional answers and the logical technical solutions. Undoubtedly, an important architect of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Mexico that evolved from academic tradition into a personal modern manifestation.

## Endnotes

1. See Vladimir Kaspé, “Tiempos de Estudiante con Mario Pani”, *Arquitectura/México* n. 67, Mexico, 1969. Pani and Kaspé had met in 1928 at the Academie Julian, preparing for the entrance exam to the *École des Beaux Arts*.
2. *Ibid.* p. 152.
3. Vadimir Kaspé, 1910- 1996, lived in Mexico from 1942, where he carried out an important architectural practice and a continued teaching at various universities.
4. Georges Gromort, 1870-1961, in his writings he follows the concepts of Julien Guadet. Georges Gromort, *Essai sur la théorie de l'architecture : cours professé à l'école nationale supérieure des beaux-arts*, Paris, 1942.
5. Manuel Larrosa, *Mario Pani. Arquitecto de su época*, Mexico, UNAM, 1985. P. 128.
6. It should be noted that Pani had travelled to Mexico in 1932, since he was in charge of supervising the production and transport of the metal elements for the interior of the Palace of Fine Arts, manufactured by Edgar Brandt, based on designs by Federico Mariscal. Louise Noelle, “Federico Mariscal: Mayan architecture and the Palace of Fine Arts”, *Arquitectura y ciudad. Métodos Historiográficos: análisis de fuentes gráficas*, Mexico, UAM-Xochimilco, 2010.
7. Originally the name was *Arquitectura*, but in issue number 20, April 1946, changed to *Arquitectura/México*.
8. *Arquitectura*, n. 1, Mexico, December 1938. P. 3.
9. There are photos of the Parthenon in 1924, taken by Arturo Pani.
10. *Arquitectura*, n. 1, *Op cit.*, “Encuesta”, P. 5-20.
11. *Arquitectura*, n. 15, Mexico, April 1944.
12. Mario Pani, *Eupalinos o el Arquitecto*, Mexico, Editorial Cultura, 1933. P. 6.
13. In particular the use of tezontle, a reddish volcanic stone typical of baroque Mexican buildings.
14. It is interesting to note that this material would sometimes be called “Pani brick”.
15. Julien Guadet, Professor of Theory at the *École des Beaux-Arts* and author of *Éléments et théorie de l'architecture : cours professé à l'École nationale et spéciale des beaux-arts*, Paris, Librairie de la construction moderne, 1894.
16. *Salud y Arquitectura en México*, Mexico, UNAM-SSA, 1998. Mario Pani, designed half a dozen hospitals and a master plan for the Medical Center with Villagrán: *Arquitectura* n. 15, Mexico, April 1944.
17. “Escuela Nacional de Maestros”, *Arquitectura/México* n. 24, Mexico, March 1948; and “Conservatorio Nacional de Música”, *Arquitectura/México* n. 29, Mexico, October 1949.
18. José Clemente Orozco with an extraordinary mural in the open auditorium, and Luis Ortiz Monasterio with a stone relief, both at the National School for Teachers; at the National Conservatory of Music, José Clemente Orozco painted a mural in the concert hall, and Armando Quesada is the author of the façade sculptures.
19. Mario Pani, *Multifamiliares de Pensiones*, Mexico, Editorial Arquitectura, 1952.

20. Pani had the collaboration of Salvador Ortega Flores (1920-1972), José de Jesús Gómez Gutiérrez and Jenaro de Rosenzweig in the design, and in the urbanism José Luis Cuevas (1881-1952), Domingo García Ramos (1911-1978) and Homero Martínez de Hoyos (1917-1998).

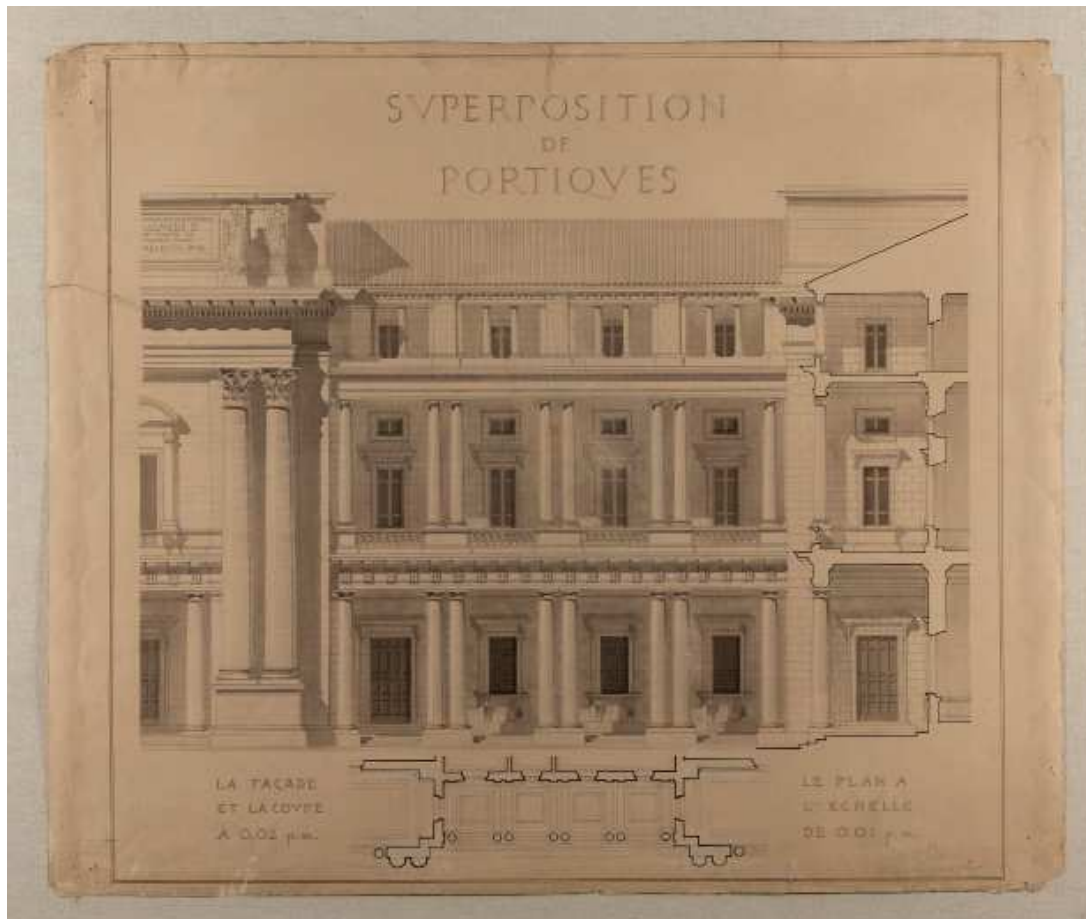
21. Other housing complexes by Pani and his associates, that follow the same guidelines, are the Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez, 1950-1952, the Unidad Modelo No 9 and 7 Neighbouring Units, 1950-1951, the Santa Fe Urban Housing Project, 1953, the Nonoalco-Tlatelolco Housing City, 1962-1964, the John F. Kennedy Urban Housing Project, 1965, and the Lindavista-Vallejo Urban Housing Project, 1965-1966.

22. Herman Herrey (Austrian architect, emigrated to the US), “Comprehensive Planning for the City: Market and Dwelling Place”, Pencil Points, April 1946. The Mexican urbanist involved in the design was Domingo García Ramos.

23. *Arquitectura/México* n. 39, Mexico, September 1952. The issue is devoted to the University City, World Heritage since 2007.

24. Mario Pani, Louise Noelle Comp., Mexico, IIE-UNAM, 2008.

## Figures



1. Mario Pani, drawing from his time at the École de Beaux Arts, “Superposition de portiques”, c. 1932. Louise Noelle archive.



2. Mario Pani, Hotel Reforma, Mexico City, 1936. Photo Guillermo Zamora, Louise Noelle archive.



3. Mario Pani, National Music Conservatory, Mexico City, 1946-1948. Photo Guillermo Zamora, Louise Noelle archive.



4. Mario Pani, Centro Urbano Presidente Alemán, CUPA, Mexico City, 1949. Photo Guillermo Zamora, Louise Noelle archive.



5. Mario Pani, Dean's Tower, University City, Mexico City, 1950-1952. Photo Guillermo Zamora, Louise Noelle archive.

# COMPARATIVE HISTORIES OF ARCHITECTURE: HISTORY, ARCHITECTURE, OR IDEALISM?

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## Abstract

This paper contrasts comparative histories of architecture, prevalent from the 19th and 20th centuries, to the critical method of history that is claimed by recent works. Comparative history arose out of the Idealist philosophy of history and combined its deterministic narrative with a disciplinary bounding of architecture that followed modern assumptions about decision-making in design. Critical history, on the other hand, is a materialistic approach that sees the discipline as one aspect within broader social forces. Whereas critical history may lay claim, nowadays, to being the only proper form of historiography, comparative histories were more closely linked to the methods and categorizations of the discipline of architecture. Some 21st-century architectural history textbooks, committed as they were to the critical method, nevertheless allowed Idealistic determinism to creep into their narrative structure. I argue this creep is not a shortcoming of these individual works, but a consequence of the contradictions between the non-disciplinary project of critical history and its uncertain place in the professional architectural education. I further develop on this contradiction by comparing it to the broader problem of how the critical history of architecture relates to supporting disciplines such as building archaeology, the archaeology of architecture, or the scholarship of vernacular environments. These fields interact with history by providing source material and preliminary interpretations, yet they have an uneasy relationship to critical history due to their partial reliance on concepts and categories developed in the professional practice of architecture. The inability of critical architectural history to come to terms with the historical legitimacy of its supporting disciplines is akin to its inability to acknowledge the persistence of Idealistic assumptions in textbooks that cater to the professional education market.

## Keywords

Comparative history, Idealism, Professional education, Textbooks, 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries



## Introduction

In this paper, I contrast two ways of looking at the architecture of the past: “comparative histories” and “critical history”. Many textbooks from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries adopted a comparative method, made famous by Banister Fletcher’s eponymous book.<sup>1</sup> More recently, however, criticism has become so central to our understanding of the “duty” of history<sup>2</sup> that we would hardly admit comparative studies as a form history at all. This notwithstanding, I argue the comparative form has a stronger claim to being architecture. This brings up a long-standing paradox regarding the place of architectural history in professional education and practice. I discuss how this paradox plays out in a few 21<sup>st</sup>-century textbooks that attempted to distance themselves from the comparative method. Then, I look at other disciplinary methods used in the study of past architecture and their relation to historical criticism.

Idealism is known for preferring the general concept to the individual example.<sup>3</sup> More importantly, however, it is predicated on the subject’s historically determined agency through the act of construing concepts. Materialism is evidently the brainchild of this assumption.<sup>4</sup> In practice, materialist historiography has come to mean criticism emphasizing effective socio-economic change, rather than conceptual worldviews.

## Comparative History as Architecture

Comparative histories of architecture were developed in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe at the intersection of the Idealist philosophy of history and the modern discipline of architecture. Textbooks such as James Fergusson’s *Illustrated Handbook of Architecture*,<sup>5</sup> Auguste Choisy’s *Histoire de l’architecture*,<sup>6</sup> or Banister Fletcher’s *History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*<sup>7</sup> portrayed architectural history as a sequence of characteristic styles<sup>8</sup> determined by the constraints of the natural and social context.

Comparative histories went to great lengths to explain the agency of architects, since it was by means of historical classifications, wrote Baydar Gülsum, that “the boundary between the inner and outer worlds of architecture is carefully maintained for the purposes of disciplinary regulation and control.”<sup>9</sup> Although styles were the most conspicuous of classifications (Fig. 1), comparative histories insisted on

how architects had balanced a variety of social and material requirements. Consider the following statements drawn from Fergusson, Fletcher, and Choisy respectively:

Another refinement [in Greek columns] was making all the columns slope slightly inwards, so as to give an idea of strength and support to the whole.<sup>10</sup> [Fig. 2]

The main entrance [of the English Gothic church] was frequently by a south-western porch, acting as a screen against the cold winds...<sup>11</sup> [Fig. 3]

Most Romanesque barrel vaults have their intrados broken up at regular intervals by ribs ... these ribs were strengthening to brace thin vaults.<sup>12</sup> [Fig. 4]

In each case, a stylistic motif (roman text) is followed by a rationale for its existence, in the form of an aesthetic, functional, or structural problem it solved (my italics). Comparative historians thus likened the unselfconscious traditions of earlier ages to the predicament of self-conscious decision-making facing the modern architect. They emphasized the emergence of the discipline of architecture through the evolution of structural and decorative devices. In this sense, then, comparative histories of architecture were not so much history as they were architecture; the anachronistic comparison between ancient traditions and modern design was admitted for its usefulness as a teaching device.

### **Critical History and the Global Textbook**

Critical history arose as a denunciation of operative anachronism; criticism's emphasis on fragments not synthesis made interest in the disciplinary textbook falter:<sup>13</sup> the last editions of both Choisy and Fletcher (not including its later rewrites)<sup>14</sup> date from the 1960s.

Still, the humanistic ideal of architecture education in the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula continued to demand some sort of manual, and new textbooks continued to appear. In the ever-evolving landscape of critical history, a compromise work as Spiro Kostof's *Settings and Rituals*<sup>15</sup> could not claim authoritative status for long. Panayiota Pyla showed Kostof resorted to "Renaissance architecture as a yardstick" to assess non-European building cultures, and showed little interest in those where interaction with Europe had been limited.<sup>16</sup>

Pyla's doctoral advisor, Mark Jarzombek, would go on to author his own textbook in collaboration with Vikramāditya Prakāsh and Francis D. K. Ching, *A Global History of Architecture*.<sup>17</sup> Jarzombek went on to claim a "global history" of architecture was an explicit rejection of the "globalized" appropriation of architecture as a

diverse collection of national histories.<sup>18</sup> This harked back to Sibel Bozdoğan's discussion of the opposition between difference and diversity.<sup>19</sup> Postcolonial criticism, Bozdoğan had written, resists naturalizing cultural differences as an ethnographic exhibition of diversity.<sup>20</sup>

Given this genealogy of critical approaches to global history, it is perhaps disappointing that *A Global History* does just that sort of naturalizing the juxtaposition of cultural difference. The book chains discrete examples in simple chronological order, under chapter headings with numbered years rather than the conventional culture–epochs of Western art. *A Global History of Architecture* is a disciplinary textbook geared to the humanistic ideal prevalent in the professional education of architects in the Americas. Although the book's authors shunned stylistic analysis in general, they fell into the Idealistic pitfall that linear time is the one legitimate source of meaning for all the world. *A Global History* reduced so-called “non-Western” societies to the Western student's grasp of linear history. The textbook projected backwards the contemporary anxiety about essentializing non-Western traditions, and in so doing neutralized the difference between the historicist societies arising in Early Modern Eurasia and others having different understandings of cultural transmission through time. Upon close inspection, even the book's seemingly neutral chapter headings appear to be aligned with conventional epochs in European art history.

### **Non-disciplinary history in architectural education**

Kathleen James-Chakraborty circumvented the historicist pitfall in her book *Architecture since 1400* by establishing the study of cultures that are increasingly aware of their own history as the “basic premise” of her book.<sup>21</sup> This insight allowed her to explore the full methodological implications in the core “project” of critical history:<sup>22</sup> dismantling the link of architectural history to the disciplinary delimitation of architecture in favor of a non-disciplinary history of unbounded social processes.<sup>23</sup>

When putting forward the non-disciplinary program of critical history, Tafuri excluded visual analysis, the disciplinary toolkit par excellence. He considered it hopelessly entangled in whichever ideological system was current. In contrast, the complex web of relations that made up the productive system of architecture could only be criticized in non-visual terms of relations of production.<sup>24</sup> James-Chakraborty thus downplayed reliance on images as a gateway for understanding the social

role of buildings: of the Gate of Felicity in Topkapı palace, she said “it may not seem particularly imposing, but that is because architecture was never the whole story here.”<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, whereas *A Global History* packaged a critical project for easy consumption in architectural education, Architecture since 1400 took the less disciplinary path of doing history through architecture more than history of architecture. This opened up a web of possible connections beyond the conventional boundaries of the profession. That said, some connections are so far-fetched as to seem arbitrary, as in the comparison of Versailles to coeval site plans:

If Bess’s gaze out from the long gallery of Hardwick Hall gave her command of the surrounding territory, and Shah Abbas viewed the proceedings on the Maidan from the Ali Qapu, on how much greater a scale could Louis XIV look out over his dominion...<sup>26</sup>

If *A Global History* fell into the pitfall of apparent narrative neutrality, then certainly Architecture since 1400 fell into that of discounting its very subject matter. For all the decentering of European assumptions in James-Chakraborty’s book, its final premise sounds off-key: “rather than merely reflecting culture, architecture contributes to crafting it.”<sup>27</sup> But if the latter manual downplayed the disciplinary aspects of architecture—visual composition and professional tradition—, how could it single out an architecture that crafts culture while standing outside it? The answer, I believe, is that behind its critical method lies a philosophy of history: namely, modernization and historicism as legitimation for a transcendental concept of architecture.<sup>28</sup>

### **Disciplinary tools in (or around) critical history**

Critical textbooks on architectural history show an incomplete transition from the study of buildings within the disciplinary framework of architecture, and towards a non-disciplinary historiographic ideal of the past. This transition will be ever incomplete because the textual craft of non-disciplinary, critical history uses philological evidence produced by disciplinary fields of architecture.<sup>29</sup> This philological framework lies to a great extent, nowadays, in building archaeology. It developed in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Germany as a critical alternative to stylistic analysis.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it is still a form of disciplinary scholarship in architecture<sup>31</sup> and thus an outlier with respect to architectural history.<sup>32</sup>

The scholarship of vernacular architecture, on the other hand, has often been viewed as operative and, therefore, un-historical.<sup>33</sup> It deals with social themes that continue into the present<sup>34</sup> and therefore often ends up entangled with building practice, both in experimental settings and as part of social activism.<sup>35</sup> However, vernacular architecture studies have a critical pedigree, that of anthropology in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>36</sup> Since then, scholars of vernacular buildings have increasingly claimed historical status for their research.<sup>37</sup> A sister field of architectural anthropology, the archaeology of architecture has an even stronger claim for critical analysis, unrestrained by disciplinary boundaries<sup>38</sup> but still leveraging disciplinary tools drawn from architecture: the study of functional and symbolic programs, spatial hierarchies, climate studies, and so on.<sup>39</sup>

The affiliation of vernacular studies to the disciplinary domain of architecture is not without its own contradictions. Jarzombek denounced how the operative disciplines, subsumed in the “preservation industry,” contaminated the scholarship of global premodern or traditional architecture with anti-global, nationalist ideologies<sup>40</sup> pertaining to an Idealistic philosophy of history. Jarzombek thus echoed Tafuri in holding global history is “not a discipline” but “an accusation” tasked with exposing “the epistemological regimes... that lie at the core of the architectural world.”<sup>41</sup> There is no easy way to reconcile the disciplinary toolkit of vernacular and archaeological scholarship with the distrust critical history has for it. The Marxist ideal that this contradiction would be overcome once every disciplinary specialization is diluted into “abstract... technical labor”<sup>42</sup> shows no sign of coming to pass.

## Conclusion

Despite the ever-widening reach of criticism, then, Idealist philosophies of history keep creeping into architectural scholarship. This may stem from critical history deserting certain subjects or rejecting contamination by operative requirements. In other cases, however, Idealism shows in unstated assumptions or expedients in works that otherwise adopt a critical method. We have thus seen how *A Global History of Architecture and Architecture since 1400* had mixed results in dismantling disciplinary narratives. Even as these two books explicitly reject the Eurocentric argument for an evolutionist history, their approaches to collecting buildings and societies uphold the Eurocentric structure of a universal architectu-

re determined by the Idealistic framework of change through linear time.

The latest editions of Banister Fletcher's textbook, in contrast, have attempted to break free from this structure by shunning the narrative unity provided by coherent authorship in favor of isolated chapters written by specialists. This is unusual in the textbook genre and found more often in Companions,<sup>43</sup> although the SmartHistory project Reframing Art History is another, promising example of this approach.<sup>44</sup> However, critical history of architecture today functions in a broad landscape where it interacts with other, more or less disciplinary fields. The points of contact between these disciplines and history expose conflicts between the philological toolkit drawn from the professional field of architecture and history's critical project of steering away from disciplinary boundaries and unitary narratives.

Much of the disciplinary knowledge about buildings of the past does not, indeed, make the cut of critical history. This knowledge, however, continues to provide source material for writing histories of architecture that pride themselves on a critical perspective. The contradiction between both domains may well be inescapable. Even so, architectural history has yet to come to terms with the legitimacy of disciplinary knowledge of the architectural past. Failure to do so has led not only to an uneasy coexistence between history and its supporting fields, but even to the continued creeping of Idealist assumptions into historical narratives.

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# FRENCH DIVING INTO BRAZILIAN MODERN ARCHITECTURE

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## Abstract

Royan is in a privileged location between the estuary of the Gironde River and the Atlantic Ocean. It was a small French village of fishermen and farmers, which had its development throughout the 19th Century when going to the beach became a healthy way of having fun. When the train line arrived, the city became a trendy vacation spot attracting the elites of Bordeaux and Paris. The beautiful natural landscape coexisted with cottages, country houses, Victorian hotels, and Baroque-inspired casinos. Then, in January 1945, an Allied bombardment destroyed over 85% of the city, which had turned into a pocket of German resistance in France. In June of the same year, Claude Ferret, professor, and director of the Bordeaux School of Architecture was hired to carry out the reconstruction works. The idea of reconstitution was not even raised from the beginning, and the first known projects, from the end of 1945, had a Beaux-Arts inspiration. The city's cleaning works lasted almost three years, until 1948. During that time, the projects changed radically. According to the authors themselves, this inflection occurred because of the disturbance caused by the special edition of the magazine *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* dedicated to Modern Brazilian Architecture, when no work had yet begun, in September of 1947. This paper intends to present and discuss the conversion of Royan's reconstruction project to Modern Architecture, specifically the Brazilian one.

## Keywords

Brazilian modern architecture, modern architecture, modern heritage

## Boarding in Royan

Royan is in a privileged location between the estuary of the Gironde River and the Atlantic Ocean. It used to be a small French village of fishermen and farmers, which experienced a great boom throughout the 19th Century, when going to the beach became a healthy way of having fun. In 1843 the first town's casino was built, a very successful enterprise that contributed greatly to Royan's success. In 1875, the first train from Paris arrived in Royan, which gave the city a new dimension, becoming a trendy vacation spot that attracted the elites of Bordeaux and Paris. In the next twenty years, it was one of the most luxurious seaside resorts. *Tout-Paris* was there, and its fame went far beyond the French borders.

While other locations attracted their clientele by arguing about the health benefits of their microclimate, others, like Royan, bet on the image of entertainment and games. The fancy neighborhoods like Pontillac were covered by luxurious eclectic English style villas, and in a few years three new casinos were opened. After the First World War the municipality obtained the classification of the city as a summer resort, and welcomed many distinguished guests, as Pablo Picasso, and Sarah Bernhardt. Royan was a *chic* resort town, with an economy dominated by tourism. In the 1930s, while the concept of vacation was democratized, the beach continued to be frequented by high society, whose demand was met by a variety of entertainment such as games, concerts, dance nights and movies.

During the Second World War, Royan was occupied by the German troops and became very important strategically to stop the advance of the Allies. As a result of the armistice of June 22, 1940, it was part of the occupied zone which included the Arvert Peninsula. On June 24, the 44th division of the Wehrmacht was deployed to Royan, and the officers occupied Pontillac. While Rochefort, Saintes and Bordeaux were liberated in the autumn of 1944, Royan remained in the hands of the occupiers. Then, in January 1945, an Allied bombardment hit the city. The inhabitants found themselves prisoners of the ruins for more than two months of an icy winter, and isolated. A second bombing raid that preceded the ground attack and the liberation of the city took place on April 14, 1945. The city was drowned under 5,000 tons of additional bombs. The napalm experiment reduced the city to a shapeless heap of charred ruins.

The Provisional Government of the French Republic (GRPF) did not wait for the complete liberation of the country and the end of hostilities to create, in November 1944, the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism (MRU), which appointed an urban planner and a chief architect in each city hit by the war. But no guidelines were established for reconstruction, as had happened after the First World War, when the adoption of a style like that of the destroyed property, as copies, was imposed. In 1944, an Architecture Commission was created to define the guiding principles of reconstruction on the sidelines of the MRU. Le Corbusier, Auguste Perret, and André Lurçat participated in it, but they were the minority among conservative architects, all very attached to what they used to call the great French tradition, inherited from the 17th and 18th centuries, and which the French schools of Art and Architecture still considered as an ideal model.

In 1945 the MRU hired Claude Ferret, professor, and director of the Bordeaux School of Architecture, to carry out the reconstruction works in Royan. Graduated from the *École des Beaux-Arts*, in Paris, in 1937, he had never built anything until then, and owed his nomination, probably, to the notoriety of his father, Pierre Ferret, an important figure among the bourgeoisie of the region. Louis Simon and André Morisseau were appointed deputy chief architects. Of the rest of the staff, a quarter of them were from Bordeaux and most of them, Ferret students. The reconstruction of the city in its previous form was never even raised by the architects. On the other hand, their initial ideas attest that there was no aspiration to modernity either. They were clearly Beaux-Arts inspired.

### **Diving dip in the Royan's projects**

The process of finishing destroying buildings that were in danger of collapsing, cleaning up the ruins, recording all damage and raising funds took a long time. The first large-scale operation that marked the real launch of the rebuilding of Royan did not begin until January 1948, three years after the first bombing devastated the city. It was the construction of Boulevard Aristide-Briand, the commercial axis perpendicular to the beach. The built work is faithful to the first known sketches concerning the seafront and the city center, in front of the *Grande-conche* (big shell) beach, dating from the end of 1945 (Fig.1).

That solution featured two axes, one parallel and adapted to the curved design of the beach, and the other perpendicular, the Boulevard Aristide-Briand,

the city's main commercial artery. The intervention area seemed like a triangular figure whose base was the beach and the seafront. At the southeastern end was the casino, and at the western end, the post office. At the end of the Boulevard Aristide-Briand, there was the central market. The two monumental arms of the seafront that embraced and enhanced the curve of the beach are based on a colonnade. At the meeting with the perpendicular axis there was a large square that extended to a smaller one, also surrounded by a colonnade, a recurring solution in Beaux-Arts designs.

The many sketches preserved attest to a long process of refinement and adaptation of the project. Gradually, Ferret took some "liberties", mixing Beaux-Arts compositional principles with more modern strategies, such as the search for better climate orientation and respect for the city's landscape. Perhaps this "modernization" is due to the influence of his young collaborators, attentive to novelties, one of them not far from there. Le Corbusier was appointed by the MRU as the architect and urban planner responsible for the La Rochelle-La Pallice project, 1945-1947. The project, in the end, was not executed, but a modern breeze was blowing on the coast of Charente-Maritime.

In 1957, Claude Ferret claimed that a single mandatory condition had guided him: "to do something modern".<sup>1</sup> And this is the common saying about the city until some time ago. But that doesn't seem to be true, and Royan's early urban and architectural projects attested that. Only more recently, when the archives of Simon and Ferret were opened, enriched by the consultation of public funds, it was allowed access to certain forgotten or hidden stages of the Royan's project. These elements provide new keys to understand how the design process was, and to question the idea of a city dedicated from the beginning to modernity.

During the Second World War, France did not receive any news about architecture. After that, and in the face of the enormous destruction, the debate of ideas quickly resumed. The magazines *L'Architecture Française*, *Techniques et architecture*, and *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, that were banned during the war, were reauthorized before the end of 1945. In September 1947 a special number of *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* dedicated to Brazil was published. It presented a vast panorama of Brazilian production, from 1935 to 1947, based on the book *Brazil Builds*, and some buildings that were not finished during Goodwin's voyage, such as the church of São Francisco, by Niemeyer, in Pampulha, and the Rio de Janeiro Airport, by the Roberto Brothers.

Special attention was paid to Oscar Niemeyer's Pampulha, in collaboration with the landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx and Brazilian innovative artists like Cândido Portinari, Paulo Werneck, Alfredo Ceschiatti. The Pampulha Ensemble, that brought together four articulated buildings - a casino, a yacht club, a dance hall, and a chapel - around the water mirror of an artificial lake and its shore, reveals a beautiful landscape through gardens especially designed with the constructions along the shore in a way they are all connected. The predominantly hedonistic character of the project is a point of approximation with the seaside atmosphere of a resort town, such as Royan.

Even with several studies in progress, no work had started in the city when the magazine was published, and only the Boulevard Aristide-Briand projects were in the conclusive stage. In fact, the construction of that area became the first large-scale operation that marked the real launch of the rebuilding of Royan, in January 1948. From then on, the projects changed a lot, moving from the Beaux-Arts universe to modernity. The magazine upset the architectural convictions of the 80 architects who participated in the rebuilding of Royan, led by Ferret. The change of references is revealed for the first time at the end of 1948, almost a year after the magazine publication, in the *casino* project. From then on, modern architecture became the norm among Royan's reconstruction projects.

Built in an area on the east end of the new seaside, *le casino* was designed by Pierre Marmouget, along with Claude Ferret and Adrien Courtoisthe, in 1954 (Fig.2). It was a fan-shaped layout, arranging different volumes around a circular focus. A parabolic section marquee protected the access to this central roundabout that gave access to a cinema, a theater, and a restaurant. Around it, in the interstice between the different volumes, there were colorful gardens of organic design. On the right side of the access, along the curved facade of the rotunda, an external staircase led directly to the rooftop. Entirely glazed, the rotunda was the heart of the casino, place of meetings, strolling, games, parties, that also hosted the *Bar de la Rotonde*.

*La Poste* (the post office), by André Ursault, was located at the western end of the waterfront and dates from September 1951. The location is at the end of a triangular block and the trapezoidal floor plan of the original building was the basis used for the new project. The volume is composed of two bars of different heights that started from the tip of the triangle and opened along the two streets

that flank the block. At the meeting of these bars, a third part housed the front entrance of the building, in a volume marked by an imposing blind facade facing the city. In front of it, the lower curve body of the glass reception opens onto the street, at the entrance to the building. A very delicate and elegant marquee winds its way along the ground floor of the building, from the reception to the *Front du Mer* (sea front), to which it is connected by a spiral staircase (Fig.3).

At the end of the Boulevard Aristide-Briand was the *Marché central*, designed in 1955 by architects Louis Simon and André Morisseau, assisted by engineer René Sarger. The building had a circular floor plan and was located on a triangular plot. There were five entrances, all of them marked by a marquee, three of them facing the boulevard. The volume was a flat vault, made of reinforced concrete 8 cm thick, covering a diameter of just over 50 m, with a height at the center of the volume reaching 10.50 m. It was a shell that became undulating in sinusoidal paraboloids when reached the 13 points that supported it. These supports were linked together by tie rods embedded in the ground to avoid deformations, and this interesting structural solution did not require any interior pillar. The facade follows the shape of the roof but was set back. It was a wall, blind to a certain height and glazed from there to the top, closing the roof catenary. Internally, the merchants' stalls were organized in concentric circles.

The other work that was part of this set launched in the first stage of the project are the buildings on the *Front du Mer* (Fig. 4). They formed two arched sections, like two open arms towards the beach of the *Grande-conche*, segmented by the transverse axis of the Boulevard Aristide-Briand. Two roads ran parallel to the seafront at this point: the *Route du Front de Mer*, facing the bay, and the *Rue Gambetta*, towards the city. Likewise, each arch was made up of two parts, one for each side. On the beach side, an extensive bar housed a commercial strip set back on the ground floor, while the four top floors, supported by *pilotis*, housed apartments. The first two floors featured a continuous and monumental succession of *loggias* and balconies. Between the two parts there was an esplanade of connection raised above the colonnade on the ground floor, creating a monumental portico that connects the beach to the axis of Boulevard Aristide-Briand.

On the city side, the arches presented a different architecture, but equally monumental. Here, unlike the continuous bars on the seaside, the U-shaped buildings followed one another, forming comb-shaped islands grafted onto the back of

the bar, which alternated with large patios. Each of these patios opened onto a passage that crosses the bar to open onto the beach, multiplying the connections between it and the city. The rear facade looks more modern, with its vertical *brise-soleils* and aluminum trusses, with an airplane wing profile.

Many other equipment that spread through the city at the time were modern, as the *Palais des Congrès* and the *Notre-Dame de Royan* (Fig. 5). The first one was a convention center, designed between 1954-57 by Claude Ferret, Pierre Marmouget and André Courtois. Facing the bay of Foncillon, it dominated the beach like a viewpoint. Intended for congresses, balls, banquets, and receptions, it was equipped with a large foyer, an oval-shaped modular auditorium, and meeting rooms on the ground floor. Upstairs, a restaurant open onto a balcony overlooking the sea.

The building was isolated at the top of a block, flanked by two side bars. Behind it there was a square. The proposal was a large cobblestone above *pilotis* that disappeared back behind the basement facade. The entrance was elevated, on the floor that rests on the basement. The main box was completely open on the facade facing the street, reducing itself to a continuous frame that exposed the interior parts of the building, all set back, like the curved wall that enclosed the main auditorium. This setback resulted into a terrace that allowed circulation outside the building. From there, an external staircase led to a balcony on the upper floor that connected, on the right, to an open terrace and a larger staircase added to the main volume. This staircase allowed direct access to the upper floor. The interior layout combined curved and sloping walls in a very deft and elegant way. The rear face had a similar solution to the front, with the external frame delimiting the recessed facade. Here, too, there was an entrance staircase that led from the park level to the main floor. Although similar, this facade is more restrained than its opposite, but was almost entirely glazed.

One last example is the *Notre-Dame de Royan*, by architects Guillaume Gillet and Marc Hébrard, in collaboration with engineers Bernard Laffaille, René Sarger and Ou Tseng, inaugurated in 1958. The church stood on a relatively triangular block behind the seafront and to the left of the Boulevard Aristide-Briand. The plan was an elliptical shape, organized along a longitudinal axis, 45 m long, and 22 m wide. The facade was a plied wall that alternated V-shaped concrete elements and vertical strips of glass. The roof was a bold solution, a very thin, concave concrete



basin. The bell tower was surmounted by a six-meter cross and had 60 m high in response to the wishes of the mayor, Guillaume Gillet, that wanted it to mark the city's skyline creating a strong visual landmark, visible from the ocean. The tower stands on an esplanade where there is an altar for outdoor religious celebrations.

In many of these examples, the joint work of architects, engineers and builders arrived at sophisticated structural and design solutions, something similar to what happened in Brazil years before.

### **Emerging from Royan's experience**

In addition to all monumental works, this trend also affected domestic architecture. Royan was gradually transformed into a coherent modern architectural ensemble, according to Jacques Lucan "the most *cinquante* of France"<sup>2</sup>, and that was how the city became known at the time. The Beaux-Arts characteristics of the initial projects were only revealed more clearly recently, a fact that contributed to attributing even greater importance to the episode of the so-called Brazilian influence on the city's works.

The *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui's* special edition acted as a trigger for an important change. The "tropical" variant of modern architecture made by Brazilians brought a touch of hedonism, certain *joie de vivre*, very suitable for a resort city, ingredients that the architects of the reconstruction had not yet managed to give to their projects. Holidays by the sea are an opportunity to live more connected with nature, so special attention must be paid to the transition between indoors and outdoors, terraces, balconies, skylights, large awnings, pergolas, and covered galleries. Furthermore, the recreational atmosphere attributes to all this a strong libertarian, spontaneous character, which seems so well represented by the curved shapes, the colors, and the light structures. And these aspects are present in Brazilian modern architecture.

But it is important to remember that the good reception of Brazilian architecture, so important in the reconstruction of Royan, did not extend beyond the limits of this work, apart from a few specific cases. Perhaps the French, as well as a good part of Europeans and Americans, still considered Brazilian architecture an exotic and irrational experience, perhaps even vulgar, suitable only as a setting for brief escapes from the First World reality.

In the 1970s and 1980s, when modern architecture seems to have gone out of fashion, Royan's buildings were neglected, and from that time on, the modernist heritage of the city seems to be threatened. Besides, due to the use of sea sand in the manufacture of concrete intended for reconstruction, as a matter of economy, the internal structures of the main buildings had suffered corrosion. Weakened, their degradation has been fast.

Concrete slabs stick out from the roof of the casino, causing it to be placed under surveillance and then closed to the public in 1984. Despite violent controversies, it was undertaken on the following year. In 1986, it was the turn of the portico, the link between the two arms of the *Front du Mer* to be demolished. *Le Palais de Congres* was renovated in the late 1970s. At the beginning of the 1980s was *la post* time, and the glazed reception and its elegant marquee disappeared completely, giving way to a ring of reinforced concrete. The church of Notre-Dame was placed under surveillance and then classified as a historic monument in 1988, which made it possible to finance a restoration campaign.

More recently, in the 2000s, residents raised concerns about the dilapidated state of its mid-century infrastructure and began to fight for help. In 2011 Royan was designated a city of art and history by the French Ministry of Culture and has since received financial support for maintenance work on historically significant buildings.

## Endnotes

1. Giles Ragot, *L'invention d'une ville: Royan années 50* (Paris: Éditions du patrimoine, 2003), p.11.
2. Idem..

## Figures



Fig. 1. Ferret, first sketch of the urban project, 1945. Source: Fonds Ferret, School of Architecture and Landscape, Bordeaux.



Fig. 2. Ferret and Adrien Courtois, Casino, 1954. Source: Collections du Musée de Royan



Fig. 3. Left: André Ursault, Royan's post office, 1951. Source: <https://www.c-royan.com/arts-cvulture/architecture/la-ville-au-fil-du-temps/1441-histoire-du-marche-central.htm>

Right: Louis Simon and André Morisseau, Royan's central market. Source: <http://astudejaoubille.blogspot.fr>



Fig. 4. Ferret, Royan's seafront, 1953. Source: <http://archipostcard.blogspot.com/2007/10/le-portique-la-plage.html>



Fig. 5. Left: Claude Ferret, Pierre Marmouget and André Courtois, Royan's congress palace, 1957.

Source: <http://archipostalecarte.blogspot.com/2013/03/congres-damateurs-sur-le-toit.html>

Right: Guillaume Gillet and Marc Hébrard, Royan's Notre-Dame, 1958. Source: <https://hiddenarchitecture.net/notre-dame-a-royan/>



# HÉLIO OITICICA IN LONDON: “THE WHITECHAPEL EXPERIENCE” AND THE PROTAGONISM OF ARCHITECTONIC SPACE

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## Abstract

During the prolific 1960s and 1970s years, the promise of technological development to free humanity from a life driven by work built a rich variety of proposals that questioned the very aim of a modern society ruled by functionalism, discussing themes such as the play and the game, collective leisure, freedom, the sin, the Pop society, hedonism, through architectonic proposals exploring, with utopic or dystopic tones, alternative realities by critical readings of economic and cultural contexts. The Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980) arises in this scenario with potent projects where architecture plays a powerful role in conquering a spatial dimension as resistance against the structuring processes of capitalism imbued in the art field. In his theory “Crelazer” (1969), Oiticica explores the “structure-behavior” that acts as a “catalyzer of non-oppressive energies in building of collective spatial constructions”. His spatial structures re-signified artistic proposals and opened a fertile field for architectonic investigations, leading to nonrepresentational design theories. This paper discusses Oiticica’s seminal exhibition “Éden – The Whitechapel Experience” (1969), as an important contribution to the theoretical discussions of the period with architectonic space as the protagonist, with temporary structures aimed to host people instead of displaying objects, setting an important reference to the soon to be defined “art in an expanded field” discussion.

## Keywords

Hélio Oiticica, Art and Architecture, Whitechapel Experience

*“(...) structures become general, provided, open to the collective-casual-transitory behavior. At Whitechapel, the behavior opens up to whoever comes and leans before the created environment, off the cold of London streets, closed and monumental, and recreates oneself as if returning to nature, to the childish enthusiasm of letting oneself be absorbed in the uterus of the open built space; more than “gallery” or “shelter”, is what that space was about...”*  
*Hélio Oiticica, 1969<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

London's contemporary art scene by the 1960s was pregnant with several innovative Latin American artists, through the intense activity of the Signals Gallery, run by David Medalla and Paul Keller,<sup>2</sup> presenting shows by Sergio Camargo, Lygia Clark, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Alejandro Otero, Mira Schendel, and Jesus Rafael Soto, among others. Hélio Oiticica's show was scheduled for 1966 but, due to financial problems, the gallery closed, despite some of Oiticica's works having already been dispatched to London. Critic and curator Guy Brett, Oiticica's friend, kept Oiticica's works in London to present them to art circuit key figures, such as Bryan Robertson, Whitechapel Gallery's director since 1952,<sup>3</sup> who was very enthusiastic about Oiticica's work<sup>4</sup>. He invited him to a larger solo exhibition, betting the artist would benefit from the “free and independent atmosphere of a non-commercial art gallery”<sup>5</sup>. Oiticica planned to occupy the gallery with an “experimental field”: the **Éden** Project, outlined in the text “Aparecimento do Supra-Sensorial na Arte Brasileira” (1967), where he proposed “to transform art processes into life sensations.”<sup>6</sup>

The Radical Movement of the 1960s in architecture in Europe was exploring ways to cope with postwar cities huge transformations and technological development. The main critical positions focused on attacking functionalist modern society that, empowered by fast-growing capitalist turnover, was imprisoning people in a life driven by work, with direct urban consequences. Themes like the play, the fun, and collective leisure were addressed through different approaches in architecture projects: New Babylon (Constant Nieuwenhuys, 1959-74); Fun Palace (Cedric Price, 1959-61); No-Stop City (Archizoom, 1969); Continuous Monument (Superstudio, 1969); Sin Center (Mike Webb, 1961); Instant City (Archigram, 1968); Exodus (OMA, 1972). Immersed in this globalized context, exercising a

bold South American perspective, Hélio Oiticica developed a rich and prolific work process producing theoretical texts, projects, and exhibitions as proposals for an “environment behavior”. His focus was the resignification of art processes, away from representation, to reconnect people to their inner selves, as an alternative to fight the ever-growing systematization of a capitalist society. Architecture played an important role in this process, providing meaningful spatial structures for an environmental art, offering an alternative direction for the artistic field. The **Éden** Experience, first displayed in London, was a direct interchange with this economic cultural background, defining and influencing it, representing a major reference in the transformations taking place.

*“The Whitechapel Experience was one of the most audacious visual art events in London in the 1960s and 1970s. Hélio conceived the space as a completely integrated “environment”, instead of a display of discreet objects (...) Hélio’s experiment was audacious proposing the “spectator participation”, an aspect that was received with lot of skepticism, or even disdain, by countless critics. In this regard, the show at Whitechapel anticipated Robert Morris’ experience at the Tate Gallery in 1972, an exhibition that became famous because it was closed a few days after its inauguration due to the public’s physical destruction of the work (aggressive energy and a conflicting dynamic that did not happened in Hélio’s show at Whitechapel). (...) For years, Oiticica’s exhibition was remembered in the British art world. The show profoundly inspired countless artists and others that got in touch with it, having been remained hosted in their minds as a liberating experience.”<sup>7</sup>*

## The Whitechapel Experience

Oiticica’s **Éden** Project was a new spatial proposition after his previous works *Núcleos*, *Penetráveis*, *Bólides e Parangolés* (1960-1967) and the new *Ninhos*, structures to host daily life activities opening new possibilities to engage all sensations by the actual experience of the space, “transforming what is immediate in the daily life into non-immediate, eliminating all representative and conceptual relation still embedded in art.”<sup>8</sup>

Named “*Penetráveis*”, these architectonic structures that one enters, passes through, and goes around, proposed free creative and introspective connections based on common daily life, creating transformative experiences, disrupting art’s established processes based on representation and closed meanings. With simple



structures resembling ephemeral shelters, made up of scrap materials available in big cities, Oiticica wished to achieve what he called “the supra-sensorial”, the dilatation of usual sensorial abilities to discover an inner creative core, an asleep capacity, conditioned by the daily life. That is precisely how architecture fits in perfectly, as a familiar provider of the spatial structures in which life unfolds, performing, in the artist’s hands, as a potent disengaging tool for transformation.

**Éden** was built as an open field of sand inside the gallery, with structures in a sequence, in a kind of campus defining different “regions”. Oiticica referred to the set as a “mind-settlement”.<sup>10</sup> The participant was to take the shoes off to embark on the proposed action. It was “an invitation to the play and to the daydream, of which ends were open and unconditional. (...) More than a simple and mechanic way of behaviorism.”<sup>11</sup> The regions were constituted by different smells of the built materials, by their textures and the sounds produced by their use. (Fig. 1)

Cama-bólido, structure for “leisure concentration”, of “deprogramming of the conscious activity”.<sup>12</sup>

Penetrável Iemanjá, with water.

Penetrável Lololiana, with tree leaves.

Penetrável Cannabiana, with straw.

Bólido área 1, with sand.

Bólido área 2, with hay.

These regions aimed to evoke an actualization of the body/mind/environment relationship, right after the initial “suspension of the conscience” gained through the Cama-bólido experience, where the participant was invited to lay down and relax in a bedlike structure. They were followed by three Penetráveis, an invitation to a “new world-leisure”:<sup>13</sup>

Penetrável Black Tent: to hide oneself, as in an egg, in the search for introspection, in a stripped interior where “the idea of a world aspires its beginning”;<sup>14</sup>

Penetráveis Tia Ciata e Ursa: shelters aimed to lead “the introspective movement through perceptive and motor selected stimulus for the new conscious connections between body/mind/environment.”<sup>15</sup>

Closing the circuit, two empty regions: an “open area for the myth”<sup>16</sup> and the two cells named Ninhos:

Fenced Ninho: open space “to be in a condition to found what does not exist

yet, to found oneself.”<sup>17</sup>

Ninho “non environment and possibility of everything to create itself”<sup>18</sup>.<sup>19</sup> (Fig.2)

For the artist, “Éden is not a manifestation of personal choices. There is nothing to be deciphered. The value of these works is not proven by reference of extensive interpretations. Such as games and rituals, we are the ones that make them happen and exist, involving ourselves with them. They are effective only when we truly take part in them.”<sup>20</sup> So what triggers these interplays is the spatial structures, primary familiar architecture that hosts daily life. To Brett, these architectonic structures “represent a return to the internal origin of all external elements that were codified by us, left inactive at the architectonic archives: roofs, walls, balconies, terraces, places to sleep, perspectives etc.”<sup>21</sup>

Éden is where Oiticica’s theory “Crelazer” was meant to unfold, as “non-repressive leisure, opposite to the thought of oppressive diverse leisure”<sup>22</sup>, as an original experience: “possibilities bubbles”, where everything can be created, a world “where I, you, we, each one of us is the mater-cell”<sup>23</sup>.

### **The protagonism of architectonic space**

Since the 1960s Oiticica was developing forms in space to expand the works of art dimensions, “founding the work in time”, adding, as a decisive outcome, the condition of “completeness”<sup>24</sup> of the work, achieved only as an outcome of the relationship between the artistic proposition and the participant. To Oiticica, the conquest of a limitless art, that evolves itself in time, is achieved with the use of spatial structures, by stretching the forms in space, earning time through the participant’s fruition, actually “founding” the space of the work of art. Far more complex than single planes spatially organized, Oiticica aims for the architectonic qualities of spaces that have always sheltered people, evoking powerful inner sensations to unleash transformation and deconditioning from the highly conditioned capitalist society and its modes of reproduction. (Fig.3) He often refers to an “architectonic structure”,<sup>25</sup> capable of embodying the real space into a virtual one, added with the dimension of time, to achieve an *esthetic experience*. This “experience” – the name of the Whitechapel’s show, for he refused the term “exhibition”<sup>26</sup> – attests to the transformation of the art object into a “hybrid product” created by the growing participation of the spectator, “surpassing the object like

the end of the esthetic expression.”<sup>27</sup> His main target was the transformation of the participant through art.

The Whitechapel’s experience photographs reveal its mundane aspect: people *using* the structures *to do nothing*, wandering inside and around them, laying down, talking, and free. (Fig.4) There are plenty of architectonic references in the informal arrangement of the ephemeral structures made with scrap materials, with voids and interstices resembling the Brazilian favelas,<sup>28</sup> or shelters providing daily life domestic enclosures resembling homes. Or, to use Oiticica’s recurrent idea, the founding of public spaces, places to build free community life, unprogrammed, open to new practices, a forum where politics and ethical standpoints are debated, all of these made possible through architectonic structures.<sup>29</sup>

In *Éden*’s Ninhos is striking the profound search for the essence of the experience of *living somewhere* – “to inhabit” – provided by the architectonic structures and their embedded practices. The founding of this space is a key element to the actual transformation through “Crelazer”, when the visitant is required to live this transformation through an artistic practice: “to revest the Ninho and to make a cover to oneself with any material, considering not its original function but only the fact that, to the visitant, this material affords a secret adequacy with the act of living.”<sup>30</sup> Vito Acconci pointed out the vanguardist aspect of Oiticica’s nests: an artistic proposition that creates, inside the museum, places for people *to stay*, “in a time when nobody was thinking about that.”<sup>31</sup>

## **Defying expographic typologies and art institutions**

The Whitechapel Experience anticipates important achievements in art theory. Namely, the surpassing of the “visual” arts to the detriment of “environmental” art that called for ethical and political positioning, that transformed the art world and its institutions. In his search for an art form founded by the spatial conquest through architectonic structures, Oiticica announces the parameters of his art experiences:

“The process of dislocating the main esthetical focus far away from the so-called “visual” arts and the introduction, thus, of other senses, should not be considered, or overlooked from a purely esthetic point of view; it is much more profound than that; it is a process that, in its most extreme sense, relates itself and proposes a possibility of a new unconditioned behavior: the conscious behavior

as the fundamental key to the evolution of the so-called art processes.”<sup>32</sup>

If we are to trace this evolution of art processes from Oiticica’s own practice, it becomes clear that this path goes through the conquest of space and time dimensions defining an enlarged artistic field where all the senses are activated by the experience of the participant. Performing leaps through different spatial dimensions, Oiticica’s works traced ever-growing spatialized experiences, starting from the Metaesquemas (1950s) to the Núcleos (1960s), where the structures represented in two dimensions jumped to space gaining the third and fourth dimensions. (Fig.5 p.31) In the artist’s remarks, “The construction of the Núcleo, that will characterize the “núcleo médio”, is architectonic *par excellence*, not only by its layers of plaques but by its orthogonality.”<sup>33</sup> What makes the proposed experience possible is the interaction with architectonic structures to unleash the culturally shaped individual baggage (sensations of sheltering/protecting/hosting/enabling life to unfold) where one is invited to get in touch with one’s own behavior from the engagement with daily activities. This process, in Oiticica’s view, presented a powerful tool to face the alienated processes that engulf contemporary life, producing unavoidable anarchist statements. As a result of this process, Oiticica’s “environmental program”<sup>34</sup> consisted of “the indivisible reunion” of all forms of creation available to the artists, freedom that implies ethical and political standpoints.

The first clash that such an art statement faced up was the one with the controlled space of art institutions: its systems, rules, formats, and patterns. “The museum is the world, it is the daily experience”<sup>35</sup> affirms Oiticica, anticipating the abandonment of the museums as the main art venue also performed by many of his contemporary artists.<sup>36</sup> This process will end up at the Parangolés, “environmental art” *par excellence* when any structure is surpassed in the quest for the pure art experience.

The Whitechapel Experience was an invaluable experience for the artist himself, when he learned the impossibility of “exhibiting objects” in a museum or gallery, but instead, “proposing things”,<sup>37</sup> considering the necessity to expand it to open-air places where new relationships and influences would apply. All expographic methods and typologies were then abandoned in favor of the founding of an environment for the performance of his artistic experiences.

This discovery shed many doubts on whether he would accept MoMA's invitation to participate in the groundbreaking exhibition *Information*,<sup>38</sup> in the next year, when he was one of the three artists who was offered to occupy a big room at the museum. Hopefully, he accepted it, justifying that "(...) I thought it would be ridiculous and pretentious to refuse it (...)," wasting the opportunity to show his work "at the most central and visceral place there is".<sup>39</sup> Oiticica built there twenty or more cells with three floors furnished with burlap – "nests to be inside"<sup>40</sup> – following the aspiration to create community-based structures as public spaces. Vito Acconci, also participating in the exhibition, underlined the importance and innovative approach of Oiticica's proposal, demanding a reevaluation of the meaning of art through direct communication with the participant, conquering a field of action in the broader context of contemporary life.

### Final considerations

It is with *Éden* that Oiticica articulates his work as a whole,<sup>41</sup> finding "the aspiration of a public place, a labyrinth of living collective experiences" where a "behavior transformative architecture acts as a builder of public spaces for deconditioning practices,"<sup>42</sup> offering an alternative to the ongoing spectacle society.

As a true postmodern proposition<sup>43</sup> that defies the very core of a modern society based on functionalism, that came about through powerful abstract objects of dehumanized spaces, Oiticica's Whitechapel Experience defied architectonic space in the same coin, as a valuable tool enabling art to face the ever-growing structuralized processes of capitalism with structures to live on, to relate with, to build upon. Aligned with architectonic proposals of the Radical 1960s that focus on collective practices as means to build a more open and communicative city, facing the real problems of different contexts, Oiticica used architectural structures to surpass a closed, representational art, that mastered the space as field of action for art proposals.

Following the development of Conceptual art, ten years after the Whitechapel Experience, Rosalind Krauss wrote the text "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", signaling that the space was finally conquered as battlefield for a contemporary art able to face its time. Almost as valuable as the result of such collective based art propositions were the processes of producing them, opened to different appropriations and results, surpassing representational practices of a structuralist era.

Architecture would very soon face up this challenge as well, rethinking its own design processes, empowered as it was in Oiticica's hands, by the quest of open forms to host real life experiences.

## Endnotes

1. Hélio Oiticica, "Apocalipopótese" in *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986), 130.
2. The Signals Gallery was active from 1964 to 1966, located at Wigmore Street, London.
3. Guy Brett, "Experimento Whitechapel II" in *Brasil Experimental arte/vida: proposições e paradoxos* (Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa Livraria, 2005.), 45.
4. Brett, "Experimento Whitechapel II," 45.
5. Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto, "'The Whitechapel experiment', o projeto Éden e a busca por uma experiência afetiva total," *ARS* (São Paulo) Ano 15, no. 30 (2017): 116.
6. Hélio Oiticica, "Aparecimento do Supra-Sensorial na Arte Brasileira" in *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986), 102-105.
7. Brett, "Experimento Whitechapel II," 42-43.
8. Hélio Oiticica, "A Transição da Cor do Quadro para o Espaço e o Sentido de Construtividade" in *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986), 53.
9. Oiticica, "Aparecimento do Supra-Sensorial na Arte Brasileira," 104.
10. Brett, "Experimento Whitechapel II," 46.
11. Ibid.
12. Suzana Vaz, "HO/ME: Hélio Oiticica e Mircéa Eliade – Tendência para o Concreto: mitologia radical de padrão iniciático" in Paula Braga (Org.), *Fios Soltos: A Arte de Hélio Oiticica* (São Paulo: Ed. Perspectiva, 2008), 87-89.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Guy Brett describes his own experience in the Éden on "Experimento Whitechapel I" in *Brasil Experimental arte/vida: proposições e paradoxos* (Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa Livraria, 2005.), 39.
20. Brett, "Experimento Whitechapel II," 47.
21. Brett, "Experimento Whitechapel I," 39.
22. Hélio Oiticica, "The Senses Pointing Towards a New Transformation" apud Paula Braga, "Conceitua-

- lismo e Vivência” in Paula Braga (Org.), *Fios Soltos: A Arte de Hélio Oiticica* (São Paulo: Ed. Perspectiva, 2008), 267.
23. Hélio Oiticica, “Crelazer” in *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986), 116.
  24. Hélio Oiticica, “4 de Setembro de 1960” in *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986), 21.
  25. Hélio Oiticica, “22 de Fevereiro de 1961” in *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986), 29.
  26. Brett, “Experimento Whitechapel II,” 42.
  27. This ideas are developed in Oiticica’s text “Aparecimento do Supra-Sensorial na Arte Brasileira” of 1967, that anticipates in 12 years Rosalind Krauss’ discussion about the sculpture in the expanded field: “Such as happened with the picture, the sculpture transformed itself, left off the old conditioning to which it was subordinated, breaking the base, leaving towards mobility and transforming itself in a hybrid product, the object, in which also ended up the picture.” Oiticica, “Aparecimento do Supra-Sensorial na Arte Brasileira,” 102.
  28. During the year 1964, Oiticica lives at the Mangueira community, a Rio de Janeiro’s favela.
  29. As Paula Braga points out in “Conceitualismo e Vivência” in Paula Braga (Org.), *Fios Soltos: A Arte de Hélio Oiticica* (São Paulo: Ed. Perspectiva, 2008), 268-270.
  30. Brett, “Experimento Whitechapel I,” 39.
  31. Vito Acconci Apud Braga, “Conceitualismo e Vivência”, 268.
  32. Hélio Oiticica Apud Paula Braga, “Conceitualismo e Vivência”, 264.
  33. Hélio Oiticica, “7 de Agosto de 1961” in *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986), 33.
  34. Hélio Oiticica, “Programa Ambiental” in *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986), 78-81.
  35. Oiticica, “Programa Ambiental,” 79.
  36. Aligned with his contemporaries, such as Robert Smithson, Richard Long, Daniel Buren, among others.
  37. Hélio Oiticica Apud Paula Braga, “Conceitualismo e Vivência”, 267.
  38. “Information, one of the first surveys of Conceptual art, opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in the summer of 1970. Conceived by the curator Kynaston McShine, this landmark exhibition assembled artworks from a movement that defied gallery and museum systems.” Information catalogue, facsimile edition of the original exhibition catalogue reproduced on the occasion of Information’s 50th anniversary, 2020. New York Museum of Modern Art.
  39. Hélio Oiticica Apud Paula Braga, “Conceitualismo e Vivência”, 268.
  40. Ibid.
  41. Oiticica, “Apocalipopótese,” 130.
  42. Braga, “Conceitualismo e Vivência”, 269.
  43. See Mário Pedrosa “Arte Ambiental, Arte Pós-Moderna, Hélio Oiticica” in *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986), 9-13.

## Figures

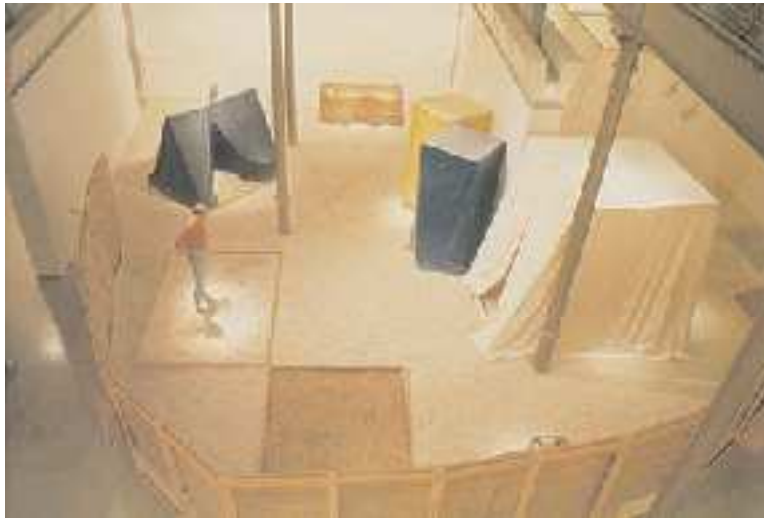


Fig. 1. Hélio Oiticica, *Éden*, Whitechapel Gallery, 1969.



Fig. 2. Hélio Oiticica, *Éden*, Whitechapel Gallery, 1969.



Fig. 3. Hélio Oiticica with *Núcleo 6*, 1960.





Fig. 4. Hélio Oiticica, *Éden*, Whitechapel Gallery, 1969.

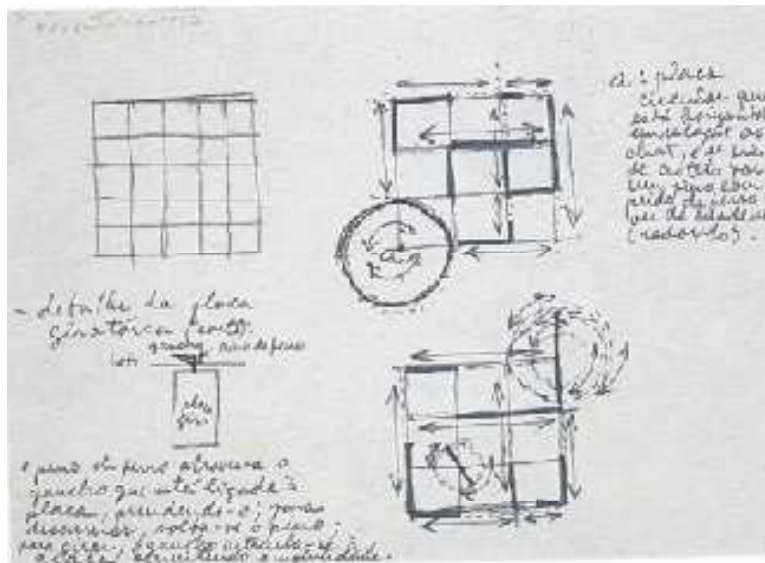


Fig. 5. Hélio Oiticica, Study of Rotating Plaque for Núcleo, 30/10/1962.

# **DOUBLE PERIPHERIES. HOMELESSNESS ON THE EDGE OF THE CITY OF BARCELONA: THE CASE OF POBLENOU**

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## **Abstract**

This research questions the nature of a periphery based on a doubly peripheral case study (regarding both territorial and social aspects): a non-central neighbourhood in Barcelona in which much homelessness is concentrated. In recent decades, the Poblenou neighbourhood in the Sant Martí district has been affected by the global dynamics of neoliberal urban transformation with the aim of redefining the industrial periphery (22@Plan (2000), Forum (2004), Superblocks (2016) and Green Hubs (2021)). This is in addition to previous efforts to do away with the slums that characterised the area during the first half of the 20th century. Decades later, homelessness replaced the historic slum dwellings of this neighbourhood with a nomadic, precarious and invisible condition of life, thereby turning into the contemporary expression of the tradition of slums that were censored as a source of conflict. Therefore, this paper states the hypothesis that homelessness has traces and latencies of the district's peripheral nature and makes them evident, despite attempts to create new centrality. Identifying correlations between destitution and new urban "regeneration" plans for the area is consequently proposed. In addition, the meaning of the term "periphery" is broadened by presenting homelessness as another type of spatial periphery, but this time one that is rootless, dynamic and much larger. To analyse where these two realities meet, the spatial practices and ways of living of homeless people in the neighbourhood are examined based on a bibliographic study and field work, which consists of conducting semi-structured interviews and recording observational data. Accompanied by the concepts of invisibility, dispossession and the right to the city, this paper raises questions such as power relations and borders, the tension between centrality and marginality, and between self-sufficiency and interdependence. Ultimately, it is about drilling down into the meaning of the periphery and its contemporary multiple voices.

## **Keywords**

Periphery, homelessness, fragile city, Barcelona, Poblenou.

## **Introduction: tensions between homelessness and periphery**

One of the challenges facing global metropolises is the exponentially growing phenomenon of homelessness. It is one of the main expressions of urban vulnerability with a multifactorial root cause that is manifested in forms of social exclusion and in particular in depriving people of access to housing that can satisfy their basic needs in a safe and sustained manner over time. We use the term homelessness to describe the situation of “people who do not have the minimum standard of housing conditions that allow them to live with dignity”.<sup>1</sup> Large cities like Barcelona do not escape from this reality, and the context of 2020’s pandemic linked to the still existing consequences of the 2008 economic crisis have emphasised the effects on people who were already living below the threshold of extreme poverty. Recent studies<sup>2</sup> show that for this group the most serious aspect has not been the risk of contracting coronavirus, but the loss of all the support resources that were suppressed as a result of the pandemic. Lockdown meant the breakdown of a base that was already fragile<sup>3</sup> and, in addition, implied the breakdown of mutual aid networks.

Although the number of homeless people has doubled since 2008,<sup>4</sup> which is a reality that can be widely seen throughout the city, the data show that the main increase since 2020 has taken place in the peripheral districts, such as Sants-Montjuïc (20%) and Sant Martí (18%). The people who live on the street in the district of Sant Martí are the ones who, proportionally, present the highest vulnerability (25%),<sup>5</sup> while in the total of Barcelona it is 18%. This is why we have chosen the district of Sant Martí as a case study (and more specifically one of its neighbourhoods, popularly known as Poblenou) to set out the relationship between a “geographical periphery” and a “social periphery”.

## **Methods**

The research starts by dealing with a series of theoretical bases to guarantee an ethical approach to the concept of homelessness, which is a reality largely unknown from the fields of architecture and urban planning. Examination of the methodology established by the *European typology of homelessness and housing exclusion* (ETHOS)<sup>6</sup> has made it possible to become aware of the need to break the dichotomy between a situation of homelessness and a normalised situation and

to question the stigmas and prejudices entailed by the use of the term. Primary and secondary sources have been studied in order to understand the historical trajectory and the current situation in the Poblenou neighbourhood. The data obtained from public sources of the Social Assistance Service for Homelessness in Public Spaces (SASSEP)<sup>7</sup> has been explored. Finally, fieldwork has been carried out through participatory observation; that is, surveying the territory and conducting five semi-structured interviews with homeless people based on contacts provided by social organisations involved in the fight against homelessness and social exclusion. The support of two professional anthropologists has accompanied the process. All the interviews took place during 2021. Having obtained the interviewees' consent, we refer to all of them anonymously and do not provide any details that could reveal their identity.<sup>8</sup>

### **Results: Homelessness as a continuous trace of the peripheral condition**

Poblenou is a territory located in the northeast of Barcelona's old walled area, and has now become a neighbourhood of the city. The analysis of the process of forming the neighbourhood is of interest because it helps to explain the peripheral nature that has historically defined this area. Unlike other areas of Barcelona, such as Gràcia, Sant Andreu, Sarrià, Sant Gervasi and San Martí de Provençals, Poblenou has been marked by its peripheral nature from its very start, as it emerged rather as an excrescence of the city itself at a time when Barcelona was already bursting at the seams rather than as an independent entity.

Until the 18th century, the territory of what is now Poblenou was sparsely populated and agricultural in nature. During the same century, the city of Barcelona began to place considerable pressure upon surrounding areas. The establishment of a military fringe around its walls after the construction of the Citadel and the creation of a new defensive system was probably its first move towards the direct appropriation of the territory and the origin of its future periphery. The city started externalising bothersome spaces that did not fit inside its perimeter, and, in this way, began building its incipient outskirts. This was not so much a completely exterior zone, but a border space that started to orbit around the urban centre of gravity. First, a military facility for artillery practice in a place known as Camp de la Bota, and after that, the lazaretto<sup>9</sup> and the first cemetery outside the walls of the city.<sup>10</sup>

During the 19th century, Barcelona, which was already suffocating in its historical space, started placing growing pressure on its surroundings. In the middle of the century, industries that no longer fit within the walled area began to settle in this nearby area, which was already equipped with certain easements. This gave rise to the creation of a working-class neighbourhood around the factories that, practically from its inception, was considered as one of Barcelona's expansion projects. Cerdà's grid plan therefore incorporated it into the general layout of the city. And although the project entailed a modification of the central nature of the city that brought Poblenou closer to the new city centre, the truth is that in practice its development maintained the peripheral nature of the working-class neighbourhood.

The area continued to receive what the city centre would no longer accept. Therefore, Poblenou saw the emergence of large slum neighbourhoods such as Trascementerio or, at the edges of the district, Somorrostro and Pequín.<sup>11</sup> The slums were a fragile living space both because of their poor construction conditions and because of their irregular legal status. According to the *Statistical Yearbook* of 1910, in that year there were 492 shelters "or slum dwellings" in Barcelona, and most of them belonged to the neighbourhoods of Somorrostro, Pequín and La Llacuna,<sup>12</sup> in the vicinity of Poblenou.

Parallel to the consolidation of shanty towns, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th the city placed some of its main welfare resources for homeless people in the area. The municipal shelter was located in the water tower close to the Citadel Park, while childcare facilities and the shelter for transients and immigrants were located in what would later become Wad-Ras prison, one of the last "inconvenient" facilities that the city placed in Poblenou at the end of the 20th century. The infectious diseases hospital, near Barceloneta, also mainly received people with few economic resources, often "transients" or migrants. These three institutions offered welfare with a strong component of social control, and their very existence was linked to the presence of homeless people in the city.<sup>13</sup>

The eradication of the slum dwellings coincided with the start of the processes of urban transformation promoted by democratic city councils in the 1980s. The Olympic project, with its Villa in Poblenou, brought about the end of the slum areas, and was the first of a series of interventions that aimed to rethink the

peripheral nature of the area through the creation of new central areas, always within the framework of speculative urban planning dictated by the interests of financial capital. Subsequent projects for the Cultural Forum 2004 and 22@Plan<sup>14</sup> can be looked at in this context. Even recent projects such as the Barcelona Superblocks (Fig. 1) and the Green Hubs are plans that can have collateral effects on access to housing if not accompanied by precise measures.

These operations share the desire to try to erase the peripheral nature of the neighbourhood that has been the case since its origins, as mentioned previously. For the moment, they have involved renovation activities (Fig. 2) that have also included gentrification, removing some of the residents and attracting inhabitants with high purchasing power.

The peripheral condition, understood here as existing on the margins of what the dominant discourse understands as central, is now reflected in the related phenomenon of finding it difficult to access housing, substandard housing and, at its harshest degree, homelessness that involves sleeping rough.

After having been deported twice and having migrated three times under the cab of a lorry, his voyage began when he crossed the Strait of Gibraltar at the age of sixteen. This is the story of Hamza, a thirty-seven-year-old man who lived in a self-built shack on an empty plot in Poblenou in 2020. He was evicted during lockdown when Spain was in a state of alarm. The plot is still empty today, hidden behind brick walls painted with graffiti. He has lived nearby ever since on a street that was urbanised by the Barcelona Superblocks project. Next to his tent, he has built up a collection of assorted junk, furniture and clothes that he covers with sheets, pieces of plastic and blankets. He explains that some construction workers call him to pick up cables made of copper, iron and other materials which he then sells at the informal stores set up in nearby semi-abandoned warehouses. His food comes from supermarket leftovers. He attends a day centre located half an hour away and the beach provides him with a place where he can take a shower. He describes Poblenou as a quiet place when the construction shifts end. There's no one around at all, he stresses. However, he tells us how he was attacked in the middle of the night several months before the interview. Two individuals in camouflage gear set fire to his tent while he was sleeping inside. Security staff from the building across the street were able to help him. He emphasises the emotional consequences of this tragic event on his mental health. A welfare organisation

reported the attack, but the perpetrators have not yet been identified despite the images recorded by a hotel camera.

Anita tells us her story, which does not go so far back in time. We do not know how old she is, but we do know that she sleeps in a tent with her teenage son, also on a street affected by the Barcelona Superblocks Plan. There are picnic tables nearby that are empty most of the day. She takes shelter under the portico of a public facility. She tells us that her son protects her. She holds meetings with a social worker and attends interviews to find private work as a domestic cleaner. She arrived from Venezuela a few years ago looking for “success,” she says with some irony. The pandemic left her without the job she had found in a restaurant. She lived in a sublet room, and soon her income dried up. She says that Poblenou is a quiet area and the people are friendly. The cleaning crew greets her and she explains the timetable she has to adapt to when she has to take her belongings apart and put them all back again. They consist of cardboard, a large shopping trolley and a mattress. Her son looks for copper cables that he can later resell. Men who are known in the neighbourhood for their drinking sleep near her. She says they often make trouble and that she is not very comfortable with their presence, but she explains that she is capable of showing a violent side in order to keep her distance and defend her territory. Her appearance is perceived as adapting to the social norms that define masculinity, a deliberate way of putting up barriers in order to be respected.<sup>15</sup>

She was born in Barcelona’s Raval neighbourhood and he comes from Murcia. They are a couple and are currently sleeping in another outlying area on the slopes of Montjuïc park. They tell us about the months they spent living in a building in Poblenou that was going to be demolished. We ask them if they were “squatting” and they answer in the affirmative, although they did pay rent. Four people were living in the same apartment, with three other families on different floors. Everyone was immediately left on the streets. Both with addiction problems, they tell us about the trips they took from Poblenou to Ciutat Vella to move their belongings.

Another young man interviewed is Abdoul. He speaks Spanish and Catalan perfectly, and was in school for a while. He is twenty-seven years old and has been homeless since he was seventeen. In his case, his presence goes completely unnoticed. He sleeps on some cardboard and a mattress hidden from sight by some bushes in a kind of passageway. He explains that his father sleeps in the same

park as Anita, and that he prefers to keep away from that particular environment to avoid bad influences. He tells us he has psychological problems, and describes the confrontations he has had with the police during the pandemic, in particular because he had nowhere to spend lockdown. He was given two fines, including one on the Rambla del Poblenou. He says how silent the neighbourhood is, especially at night, and he has to sleep under a streetlight to feel safer. He has been the victim of attacks by groups of young people at night. There are several large nightclubs in the area and illegal drinking parties known as “botellones” are a frequent occurrence. It’s particularly dangerous when people get drunk, he explains. He got the clothes he is wearing from the used clothing bins in the street. He goes to a soup kitchen in the neighbourhood and likes to swim in the sea when the weather allows it. His mother lives in the city and he visits her when he needs to take a shower.

Finally, we spoke to Vasile. He is thirty-two years old and came to Barcelona to avoid being repatriated after some months in prison in England. We interviewed him on the beaches of Barceloneta, the old Somorrostro mentioned in the previous section. He has breakfast at a welfare centre that in post-war times was already committed to providing resources to the families of fishermen who lived in the slum dwellings facing the sea. But Vasile does not know this story. He expresses a great deal of passion for the city. He sells drugs to tourists looking for a way to escape from the world, saying he performs an almost social and therapeutic function for his customers. He likes the neighbourhood of Poblenou and says it seems quiet, having spent some time there living in an abandoned factory and also frequenting the large junkyard there. But Vasile has no fixed place, he changes his location depending on the relationships he establishes with the circles he moves in. On occasions, Poblenou has allowed him to escape from conflictive situations that he has experienced in Raval. He feels that he is still young and only has a sleeping bag. He explains that he has had confrontations with other people asking him to pay a fee to sleep on the pavement. The street is a public space, he states, it does not belong to anyone, so he does not accept this form of extortion. He would like to live on a small plot with nature around him, and he uses his fingers to draw the shape of the house he imagines in the beach sand.



## **In conclusion. Hypotheses on geographical periphery and homelessness in Poblenuu**

These eye-witness accounts allow us to set out a series of hypotheses in relation to the double periphery that is the experience of being homeless in a territory that is geographically peripheral. But first, we must again warn readers that although the use of the term periphery in this context is useful from a certain point of view, as we will try to explain, it should not be taken in absolute terms, as it is conceived from a subjective place different from that of the interviewee, who can become central just by changing the point of view.

The periphery implies a distance for the person that names it, since the person that names it speaks from the centre of the language. It is that distance and that “over there”, perhaps, that Judith Butler is talking about when she asks “Are ‘those who have suffered’ at a distance from ourselves? Are we among them or are they ‘over there?’ as the other?”<sup>16</sup> This is why it is better not to consider the condition of the periphery as absolute, as this would lead to converting the subject being analysed into a mere spectator of other people’s wounds, disaffecting the point of view of those who believe they do not belong to it and that, in fact, they cannot belong to it. What is made invisible with this is the nature of homelessness and dispossession, both also centralist, which Athena Athanasiou and Judith Butler talk about. The “periphery” has an invisibilising effect on poverty and spaces that are not considered central. To borrow the words of Robin DiAngelo: “If I am not aware of the barriers you face, then I won’t see them, much less be motivated to remove them. Nor will I be motivated to remove the barriers if they provide an advantage to which I feel entitled”<sup>17</sup>

However, denying the fact that homelessness is a peripheral situation for a good percentage of society, including those with the greatest capacity to generate a dominant discourse, could have serious effects. It is important that we are clear about this vision because, as Lefebvre maintained, society and space are mutually produced.<sup>18</sup> That is, if for “society” homelessness is the periphery, the presence of homelessness produces spatial “periphery” or reinforces the peripheral nature of the space. This is why, among other things, the peripheral understanding of a given condition by a dominant social group cannot be ignored, as it can help alert us to the existence of movements to relocate phenomena when

the intention is to create new geographical and social centralities. In addition, this understanding could help explain (although, as we will see, it is a multifactorial phenomenon) that Poblenou and other peripheral areas are the ones that have seen the greatest increase in the number of homeless people, as the situation of the “periphery” in the “periphery” would be logical. But this does not offer a full explanation, because the district in which there is the greatest concentration of the phenomenon is the historic and symbolic centre of the city, whilst in other outlying areas it occurs to a much lesser extent.

The interviews carried out allow us to take a more complex approach. If there are any outstanding features in the neighbourhood as a positive element, it is the peaceful life lived there, which in turn can be explained considering the historical makeup of the neighbourhood. It is a subordinate area of the city centre where facilities for the secondary (initial) and tertiary (later) sectors have been located to a greater extent, generating empty streets outside working hours and spaces with little social interaction on one hand, and many vacant plots (Fig. 3) and abandoned warehouses that have the potential to be occupied by squatters. In addition, networks linked to production make it easier to develop a space for the informal buying and selling of scrap metal; our interviews allowed us to identify this is an activity carried out by some homeless people. This way of making a living is aided by the large number of demolitions and works being generated in the neighbourhood due to intervention plans. In turn, the existence of welfare organisations in the neighbourhood which to a certain extent reflect the tradition of old facilities, and, above all, the proximity and good communication with the historic city centre, where most welfare resources are concentrated, allows people to make the most of them without having to live in less peaceful environments (Fig. 4). The beach is also very close, which is perceived as a positive value of this space.

These are some of the factors that can help explain the increased concentration of homeless people in this area, always assuming that it is dispossession that creates the phenomenon. We ask ourselves, as did Athena Athanasiou and Judith Butler, “whether there can be a way to answer the call of the dispossessed without further dispossessing them”.<sup>19</sup> Let’s hope so.

## Endnotes

1. Lluís Guilera Roche, Maite Mauricio Jareño and Ramón Noró Camats, *Podrias ser tú. Guía de estilo sobre sinhogarismo* (Barcelona: XAPSLI and Barcelona City Council, 2016). This concept has been reconsidered over time to move away from an approach that used to focus on an individual dimension that projected a stereotypical and negative image of rootless people without resources, making them responsible for their own situation.
2. Data discussed in the documentary “El otro confinamiento” [The Other Lockdown] focusing on the case of Madrid directed by Luiza Schultz in 2021, in addition to the report *Arrels Fundació, Viure al carrer en temps de pandèmia. Una enquesta a les persones que viuen al ras a Barcelona* (Barcelona: Arrels Fundació, 2021).
3. The use of the term “fragile” refers to broader research within which this paper is framed: “Barcelona fragile city”, a research project at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC) financed by the Generalitat de Catalunya. The project stems from an initial idea by the Architecture, City and Culture research group, a group directed by Professor Marta Llorente. See the website [www.barcelonafragil.org](http://www.barcelonafragil.org).
4. Ana de Inés, Grecia Guzmán, Maria Verdaguer and MaFe Contreras, *El sensellarisme a Barcelona. Evolució i joves en situació de sensellarisme* (Barcelona: XAPSLI and Barcelona City Council, 2019).
5. *Arrels Fundació, Viure al carrer a Barcelona. Radiografia d’una ciutat sense llar* (Barcelona: Arrels Fundació, 2020).
6. ETHOS has been developed by the European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless AISBL (FEANTSA) *Fédération Européenne d’Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri*. A summary can be consulted in: <https://www.feantsa.org/download/en-16822651433655843804.pdf>
7. SASSEP belongs to the Department of Prevention Services of Barcelona City Council.
8. The project has defined an Ethical Research Protocol that includes specific methods for interaction with people affected by social exclusion. The Protocol has been approved by the Ethical Committee of UPC.
9. Book of “Villetes” from 1724, Archive of the Crown of Aragon (ACA), Real Audiencia, Records, number 0368, ff. 84r-85r. The first news about the lazaretto came from: Elías de Molins, Antonio, *Catálogo del Museo Provincial de Antigüedades de Barcelona* (Barcelona: Provincial Commission of Historical and Artistic Monuments, 1888), 249-251. We have followed the thread, quite literally, that the State Archives posted on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ArchivosEst/status/1250464788326596610?s=20&t=iMQfLalobrE3TELEN8yYUw>. See also: Book of Agreements from 1724. Contemporary Municipal Archive of Barcelona, pp. 164r, 168v, 235v-242r. And: ACA, plans.
10. Elisa Martí, “El primer cementiri del Poblenou, 1775-1813”, *Icària* 13 (2008): 13.
11. See: Paco Candel, “Vecinos del mar y la Muerte”, *Icària* 13 (2008): 52-55; Mercè Tatjer and Cristina Larrea (ed.) *Barracas. La Barcelona informal del siglo XX* (Barcelona: Barcelona City Council, 2010) and Mónica Aubán Borrell, “Memorias de la ciudad sin historia: la importancia de los afectos en la construcción y en las vivencias del barrio de La Mina” (PhD diss., Polytechnic University of Catalonia, 2021). On-line: <http://hdl.handle.net/10803/672425>
12. *Anuario estadístico de la ciudad de Barcelona. Año 1910* (Barcelona: Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 1912): 146.
13. Carmen Rodríguez Pedret and Carlos Bitrián Varea, “La fràgil memòria de la pandèmia. Espais i re-

presentacions de la grip de 1918 a Barcelona”, XVII Congrés d’Història de Barcelona. Salut i ciutadania a Barcelona, 2022.

14. Gabriela Navas, “Viatge al barri d’Icària. El patrimoni viscut d’un passat industrial arxivat”, *Revista d’Etnologia de Catalunya*, no. 43 (December 2018): 258-271.

15. Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

16. Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press, 2013): 117.

17. Robin Diangelo, *White Fragility: Why it’s so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

18. Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l’espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1974).

19. Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, 112.

## Figures



Figure 1. A current view of Poblenou: the first Superblocks implemented project and processes of urban renovation behind. Image: Marta Serra-Permanyer, 2021.



Figure 2. On-site works for a public facility by recovering an old factory facade as a trace from the industrial heritage. Image: Marta Serra-Permanyer, 2021.



Figure 3. Settlement of slums in an abandoned industrial plot in Poblenou. Image: Marta Serra-Permanyer, 2021.



Figure 4. Temporary appropriation of space for shelter and overnight stays in Poblenou. Image: Marta Serra-Permanyer, 2021.

# RETRO-TRANSFERENCE: LE CORBUSIER IN ASUNCIÓN, PARAGUAY, 1929

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## Abstract

Retro-transference implies recognizing that every trip -outward and return- contains an action that transfers something back; in other words, researchers need to study the cultural contents that may have permeated the protagonists in their travels in both ways. It is necessary to consider why, how, and when these exchanges took place and consider the contributions that could have been exported in each direction of the traveler's trip. This article considers the effects of the South American environment on the transformation of the architectural ideas of European travelers. It comes from ongoing research based on documentary sources, advancing some hypotheses for the interpretation of some events that, having taken place on American soil, could have triggered a change of direction in the protagonist's thinking. Its subject is the short two-day trip to Asunción del Paraguay by Le Corbusier in 1929, and its possible repercussions on his subsequent work.

## Keywords

Architectural Historiography, Europe-Latin American Exchanges, Le Corbusier, Paraguay

*“My head is still full of America and this morning (I boarded yesterday), there were no European infiltrations in this powerful mass of sensations and American spectacles”*<sup>1</sup>. Le Corbusier onboard the *Lutétia*, offshore Bahia, Brazil, on his way back to Europe, on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1929.

Research on 20<sup>th</sup>-century architects’ travels acknowledges the reception of their ideas in their destinations but offers simplified versions of the effects they have had on them and their subsequent works. New perspectives are needed to expand horizons and deepen the analysis, changing the crystalized way of interpreting the North’s place as the universal and generic provider, as opposed to the South as a particular and exotic receiver, incorporating Crasemann Collins’ notion of international dialogue<sup>2</sup>. The North as the productive center of ideas and its travelers as illustrious visitors and promoters of high culture is often present even in Latin American own historiography. Instead, the idea of an international dialogue seems more suited as an interpretation cadre, addressing both a policy of recognition and the need to base interpretations on accurate documental historical knowledge. Retro-transference is a useful concept for historiographical analysis. It recognizes that every trip -outward and return- contains an action that transfers something back, acknowledging the cultural contents that may have permeated the traveler in both ways. It is necessary to consider why, how, and when these exchanges took place and affected modern traveling architects.

A close look at *Precisions* (1930), reveals the importance of Le Corbusier’s first trip to South America in 1929, a feat only more recently confirmed by modern architecture historiography.<sup>3</sup> This paper presents an ongoing research advance based on documentary sources, considering the retro-transference of architectural ideas from the South American environment. Its subject is Le Corbusier’s short two-day trip to Asunción, Paraguay, and its possible after-effects on his ideas, suggesting some interpretative hypotheses on how it could have triggered a change of direction in his thinking.

### **Le Corbusier’s South American trip in current historiography**

Twentieth-century architecture historiography has focused on the effects of Le Corbusier’s innumerable visits on his destinations’ architectural cultures but has seldom considered the possible retro-transferences. Furthermore, it has paid relatively

little attention to Le Corbusier's first trip to South America, as many authors frankly underestimated its importance. Curtis's comments only on the change of materials of the Errázuriz project.<sup>4</sup> Frampton interpreted that project "for a remote place in Chile" as a change of scale affecting his following domestic projects, that "begin to contemplate landscapes of titanic proportions".<sup>5</sup> Von Moss barely sketches a hypothesis about the trip's importance to Le Corbusier's concern for nature in modern urbanism.<sup>6</sup>

Retro-transferences have been acknowledged by European authors regarding Le Corbusier's shift from his earlier work, when the affirmation of rational conditions and machinist ideas was crucial, after his travel and projects to Algiers, accepting that it triggered Le Corbusier's new vision of architecture, geography, and landscape. Only Polesello affirms that South America's anterior trip was an important source to the Algiers plan<sup>7</sup>.

1929's South American travel importance was highlighted in 1987, by the centenary of Le Corbusier's birth, by South American historians, on seminal studies revising its documentation, detailing the trip's contents, and establishing new interpretations. In Brazil, Santos, Pereira, et al.,<sup>8</sup> presented a new and extensively documented vision. A paper by Pérez,<sup>9</sup> and another by Liernur and Pschepiurca,<sup>10</sup> affirmed its importance in Le Corbusier's biography, followed by a book with more than 15 authors broadening the perspectives on Le Corbusier's relations with the subcontinent, consolidating new visions.<sup>11</sup> After that, the acknowledgment of the presence of landscape awareness in the master's urbanism became more frequent. Its understanding was deployed by Jean-Louis Cohen's curatorial work for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) exhibition, in whose catalog stands out Liernur and Comas's contributions.<sup>12</sup>

In his 1929's South America travel Le Corbusier visited Asunción, a fact that is frequently but always briefly cited. Although some papers provided clarity on some aspects,<sup>13</sup> confusions have been frequent.<sup>14</sup> Due to the trip brevity and the tenuous documental traces left, it has yet to be properly valued.

### **One way luggage: a short trip within a long travel**

Le Corbusier visited Asunción del Paraguay fleetingly for two days as part of his South American tour in 1929. He left Buenos Aires on Tuesday, October 22, early at 4:30 a.m. and arrived at Campo Grande, Asunción's airfield, at 1:00 p.m.<sup>15</sup> The



travel back departed from Asuncion on Thursday, October 24 at 6:00 a.m. and arrived in Buenos Aires around 2:30 p.m.<sup>16</sup> Little is known about the trip and the stay, besides what Le Corbusier stated in *Précisions*<sup>17</sup>, that is repeated in all accounts, with a few additions from the croquis of his Carnets.<sup>18</sup>

The airplane trip was an invitation from the Aeropostal Company in Buenos Aires. It was not the inaugural flight, as so often claimed, but the one in which the Company launched a new aircraft<sup>19</sup>. On the outbound flight, Jean Mermoz was the pilot and André Villes the mechanic. Among the passengers was Aeropostal's General Director, Captain Almandos Almonacid, accompanied by a then not so well-known pilot, Antoine de Saint Exupery, the line's traffic manager, and two Company directors, Emanuelle de Sieyès and Roman de Sezé<sup>20</sup>; as well as other prominent businessmen aspiring to invest in Asunción and Paraguay<sup>21</sup>, like engineer Crucien Luiggi, President of the Asunción Port Concession Corporation, perhaps the most significant investment in that city. Finally, there were Le Corbusier-Jeanneret and Jacobo Fijman - a poet who collaborated with *Martin Fierro Magazine* and had been close to surrealism during his stay in Paris. Known to the visit organizers, he was probably invited to accompany Le Corbusier.<sup>22</sup> Paraguay's Minister of Finance Eligio Ayala<sup>23</sup> was waiting for them on their arrival; he had held the country's Presidency on two occasions between 1923 and 1928, increasing its economic prosperity. On the return flight Colonel Luis Latorre, the Argentine military attaché, filled in for the director of the Port. Several people moved to the military airfield of Campo Grande to see the travelers off.<sup>24</sup> On both flights, Le Corbusier had time to fraternize with his fellow business people travelers, despite his interest in the aerial observation of the land.

### **The land from the plane**

Le Corbusier's affection for airplanes is well known. In *Towards an Architecture*, they are deemed as one of the paradigmatic modern forms;<sup>25</sup> later he reflected on drawings made onboard flights.<sup>26</sup> Paraguay's flight was not his first: in 1928 he had taken off from Le Bourget, bound for Prague with stops in Cologne and Berlin.<sup>27</sup> The flight path crossed over the Argentine pampas, then followed the Uruguay River's course until the first stopover in Monte Caseros. Then it crossed Misiones' forests, flying over Posadas to Asunción. A couple of days after the flight, he wrote a detailed report of the flight to his mother<sup>28</sup>.

The sequence of his sketches starts with “the 24-hour solar cosmic cycle” chart: the dew of the dawn (4 am), the flatlands of Uruguay (10 am), at noon the forests, the storm and rain (5 p.m.) coinciding with “the apotheosis of a great day”<sup>29</sup>, the sunset and the river’s meanders. “Events that sharpen the curiosity of an urban planner on a lecture tour”.<sup>30</sup> He reflects on rivers and plains, “the confusion born of complexity, the violent turn of action and reaction,” which will result in the theorem of the meander. Then “the biological determination that fixes the fundamental characters: truth, the authenticity of the standard. In times of crisis, it is necessary to go back to the truths of the standard”, written beside the sketches on the “atolls of reeds,” “the dispersion of palm trees in the wild plain,” and the diagram that combines the geography of water with the forest and the idea of the river in its vehicular function. Recording the course of the water, its harmonious regularity, its obstacles, and disturbances, he establishes “the laws of nature that man is free to confront, but which take relentless revenge soon after.”<sup>31</sup> He drew Colonia Liebig (province of Corrientes), its regular outline and its superimposed donkey trails – which appeared in the internal layouts of the Ville Radieuse’s superblocs; then Posadas, with its foundational regularity, “the other Holland, by a different phenomenon (water) the same profoundly human mechanism.”<sup>32</sup> Then he drew the city of Corrientes, again highlighting its regularity. In a minutia annotation he sketches the Spanish block of 110 x 110 meters, focusing on its “inner substance,” and the greenery, a critical observation repeated in Asunción.

Almost all of his flight’s drawings will be resumed in the Ville Radieuse’s, placed as reflections concerning the laws of nature, the sun, the law of the meander, the world seasons, and man, to converge in the essential pleasures.<sup>33</sup> The trip deepened his reflections on nature, resulting in the “Ville Verte.” The drawings begin with a strong statement: “I have seen virgin nature, and how man faces and appreciates this universe, amid tremendous and indifferent values: by the geometrical will. I have brought back a lesson.”<sup>34</sup>

## City and nature

The plane flew over Asunción, on the banks of the Paraguay River, before landing, allowing its vision from the air. He observed without drawing its layout configuration, and how it flowed over the riverbanks into the green. In 1929, Asunción had about 150,000 inhabitants. A 1930 plan of the city shows its standard

Spanish-founded layout; the streets next to the banks follow the topography of the slope, meandering and descending towards the river. The Port stretched over the northern edge, at the entrance to the bay, and the Custom's Building shows a long succession of regular arches. The government palace's tower rose over the city's roofs and some churches' domes. The city displayed a different formal coherence by sector.<sup>35</sup> The city center was consolidated with buildings from the mid and late 19th century.<sup>36</sup> Several had columnated galleries facing the street, with notable 2 or 3 floors neoclassical buildings with refined rigorous architecture. The periphery exhibited low houses, some with street galleries with wooden columns, others with thatched roofs, or simple white volumes with doors and windows openings.

“Abandoning any vehicle, and relying only on my legs, I went for Asunción, to see the houses of the Indians.” His summary: “it is a small city sunk in the middle of an admirable vegetation: 50% of grass of an understandable rawness, next to another 50% of red soil; immense trees that are completely mauve, saffron or chili pepper.”<sup>37</sup> He sent a postcard to his mother<sup>38</sup>, not with the city buildings but showing a palm grove in San Bernardino, near Lake Ipacarái, a most frequently depicted image.

His best-known drawings were probably from near the Port area. One shows two women carrying baskets on their heads.<sup>39</sup> The barely registered urban environment shows a simple construction and a water mill with blades. The other is eloquent due to the scene and the color.<sup>40</sup> A woman with her back turned walks down a red soil street that slopes towards the river on the horizon; simple white buildings with few openings depict a suburban environment. The third and more enigmatic one shows a scene in what looks like a *culáta-yovái*<sup>41</sup> in which an unmistakable Le Corbusier is reclining in an armchair with a cigar in his hand, accompanied by Jacobo Fijman (who is named) and two naked women, one of them entering the adjoining room<sup>42</sup>, amid an exuberant vegetal environment and under the watchful eye of an ox. The atmosphere of possible sexual enjoyment perhaps suggests how their time was spent in Asunción, but that is only a guess. The records and the postcard choice avoid the representation of the city and focus on the margins, in which simplicity, life, and nature are the protagonists.

## Five cities, four proposals

Le Corbusier envisioned South America as a place where his ideas could flourish, especially in face of other places' indifference to them. In each city he visited his strategy was to interact with influential people to outline some ideas on public policies and validate his approach into possible further actions.<sup>43</sup> Buenos Aires's sketches extend the flat land of the pampa into the river to support the business city. The other three plans were drawn after the trip to Asunción. They show greater attention to the topographical conditions, proposing geographical infrastructures over the landscape. In Montevideo, a building stretches 18 Julio Avenue beyond the promontory and into the bay. In São Paulo, two extensive buildings cross, riding on the low foothills landscape. Rio de Janeiro's sinuous proposal is an epiphany of its bay geography through a continuous ribbon of urban architecture. Geography becomes the protagonist, architecture is there to highlight it.

In Asunción, the only notable geographical feature is the hoop of the river, where the flat land descends to the banks; nature itself is the protagonist, the profuse vegetation everywhere in the city, the periphery, and the countryside. A few days after the Paraguay trip he stated:

*[...] at the landing field [...] I was introduced to the Minister of Finance of Paraguay, who asked me what I could advise him regarding the urbanization of Asunción. To this good minister, I told him, sincerely and categorically, that Paraguayans do not need to change anything in terms of urban planning; that in Asuncion, there is a happy air and naive and overflowing well-being, and this smiling city does not have to be modified at least according to urban planning, because it is made for the life that is lived there. [...] any city that responds to the demands of its activity that normally fulfills its vital functions, is a city that needs nothing because it already has everything. [...] You cannot imagine what artists Paraguayans are, what a sense of nature they have, and how well they understand the intimate relationship between architecture and vegetation.*<sup>44</sup>

## The luggage carried back to Europe

Despite his unstoppable will to do, Le Corbusier's trip to Asunción did not provoke in him the need for a design, like the other four cities he visited. The peaceful settings recorded in his sketches inform of this renunciation. He left clues as

to how to interpret the impossibility he faced: “Asunción! It is here that I drop, suddenly, on the red soil.”<sup>45</sup> He understands that rationalizing this world might not make sense, and he falls disarmed. Facing the landscape, there was no plan and no need for technical lyricism. What would the new spirit be able to do in this place? The will to design the new world vanishes. He did not offer a plan, despite having traveled with the Port Company president and some investors in search of opportunities and been received by those who managed the country’s economy. His interest in approaching those who had the power, to allow a future, was absent. It was likely a pleasure trip, to enjoy a new environment, perhaps a curiosity for a previously imagined exoticism, prompted by the attraction of planes and flying. We know his interest in drawing the places he saw on the flight. But there is no record of Asunción.

A few days before the trip, he said, “Architecture is everything, urbanism in everything”<sup>46</sup>. Ten years earlier, he had said: “Without a plan, you have a lack of order and willfulness”<sup>47</sup>. Not in Asunción. It seemed to do not need it. Perhaps his instruments for thinking the city did not appear to be apt for transforming an urban situation that otherwise seemed admirable to him.

Le Corbusier returned to Europe with his “head full of America.” This “powerful mass of American sensations and spectacles”<sup>48</sup> that he took in his luggage on returning changed him. With our heads also full of America, we are beginning to understand them.

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40. Le Corbusier, *Carnets*, Image 246
41. The Culáta-Yobaí is a traditional typology of the rural areas of Paraguay, composed of a central space usually open and covered where daily life takes place with two symmetrically opposed rooms. A simple construction that shows the interaction with the surrounding open space.
42. Le Corbusier, *Carnets*, Image 243.
43. He also visited Mar del Plata and La Plata, but there are no records of contacts with power sectors; however, he visited the Mayor of Avellaneda, considered part of Buenos Aires. See: Liernur, Pschepiurca, *La Red Austral*, 77.
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## Figures



Figure 1- Asunción's Port, Customs Building, Photo Maas, 1927. Álbum Belisario Rivarola. Acervo Milda Rivarola en [www.imagoteca.com.py](http://www.imagoteca.com.py)



Figure 2 – Aerial view. Concepción neighborhood, Asunción. Photo Luis de Bocard, 1927. Acervo Milda Rivarola en [www.imagoteca.com.py](http://www.imagoteca.com.py)





Figure 3 – Palma Street, commercial area, Asunción Photo Maas, 1927. Álbum Belisario Rivarola. Acervo Milda Rivarola en [www.imagoteca.com.py](http://www.imagoteca.com.py)



Figure 4 – Palm groves close to San Bernardino and Ypacaraí Lake. Photoi José Fresen 1905. Acervo Milda Rivarola en [www.imagoteca.com.py](http://www.imagoteca.com.py)

# “DREAM-LIKE SPACES” AS SPACES OF LIKES: TOWARDS THE NEW RESEARCH SOURCES

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## Abstract

Today we collect likes as the equivalent of the value in society. After adding another “like”, we long to experience the architecture as “tangible”, intensely, multisensory. Consequently, a contemporary trend that greatly influences architecture, interior design, and urban spaces has developed with social media platforms’ popularization. This trend could be metaphorically referred to as building “dream-like spaces”. “Dream-like spaces” take references from the history –architectural styles or iconic modern architecture– and (re)interpret them by translating them into a contemporary context so that they become “likable”. Conceptual architects/3D artists such as Antireality and Peter Tarka developed this trend through social media platforms.

Between tangible and intangible, these spaces imply the need for an in-live experience that refutes or confirms the virtual one. The first impression experience of architecture refers to the atmosphere in architecture, a phenomenon that has been more intensively debated since the 1990s. By generating an atmosphere, the intangible experience of architecture –through social media– is translated into the tangible by emphasizing the intangible architectural elements. Some examples of “dream-like spaces” are: interiors – GAVELLO nel blu jewelry store (Mykonos, 2021), Paradiso Ibiza Art Hotel (2018), The Budapest Cafe (Chengdu, 2017); building in its entirety – Sino-Italian Cultural Exchange City Reception Center (Chengdu, 2021); urban space – I Believe Swings (Brisbane, 2021). These “dream-like spaces” have implemented various historical references and some ideas of popular culture. They are ambiguous, illusion-like, yet fully functional.

The paper examines the new research scope in which architecture criticism can use social media as a relevant documentary research source. The research could be approached through a phenomenology-based comparative qualitative analysis of the original, iconic spaces and the users’ experiences of their contemporary interpretations as “dream-like spaces”. Comments on social media and users’ photos will also be considered research material.

## Keywords

Likable, Dream-like, Atmosphere, Historical reference, Research source

## Introduction

“Like” as the equivalent of the value in the contemporary social context arouses a question: what is the equivalent of “like” as a quality in architecture? Is it the tangible or the intangible in architecture, or perhaps something between these two? Social media platforms presented and popularized the current trend in furniture and interior design, architecture, and urbanism – the “dream-like spaces” phenomenon. “Dream-like spaces” are illusory but also fully functional; they take references from the history of architecture –architectural styles or modern/post-modern architecture– and translate them into a contemporary context, into “likable” architecture. The paper explores if “likable” “dream-like spaces” shaped by interpretations of historical references could open up new approaches to experiencing and understanding the history of architecture, as well as a possibility of a new approach to architectural criticism.

“Dream-like spaces” are experienced affectively – by the first impression. Their intangible experience –through social media platforms– stimulates the desire for tangible experience, while intangible elements of architecture shape tangible experience. Therefore, the question of the experience of architecture with the first impression is generating and experiencing the architectural atmosphere, as one of the main approaches to building “dream-like spaces”.

The paper’s primary aim is to examine and present a new research framework for the history of architecture and its contemporary interpretations, with social media as relevant documentary research sources. The method used in the research is the analysis of reference examples of “dream-like spaces”, a comparative phenomenological-qualitative analysis of the experience of historical iconic architectural, and interior spaces and their contemporary interpretations – “dream-like spaces”. The sources used in the analysis process are: descriptions and photos of historical reference projects and their user experiences; “comments” and photos of visitors to “dream-like spaces” published on social media platforms, and architects’ (authors) projects’ descriptions and “comments” of social media platforms users.

## **“Dream-like spaces,” Atmosphere, and Interpretations of the History of Architecture**

### *The phenomenon of “dream-like spaces”*

This descriptive but metaphorical concept is derived from the 3D conceptual spatial design practice developed and popularized on social media platforms by protagonists such as Polish architect Monika Woźniak (Antireality) and British 3D artist Peter Tarka. However, the “dream-like spaces” phenomenon has developed in a contemporary context, originating from conceptual, utopian architectural imaginative spaces, which are also characterized by “likability” at a first impression. Architectural studio Antireality explains the process of creation and experience of such spaces: “ANTIREALITY is a conceptual world built on the basis of abstract ideas about reality [...] characterized by the absence of limitations and standards [...] This space is like the first stage of sleep. The sensation of still being awake but already experiencing some surreal visions entering a semi-conscious mind”.<sup>1</sup> “Dream-like” is a derived term that integrates all the above characteristics of this phenomenon: illusory, phantasmagorical, non-materialized, utopian, limitless, non-standard, unfinished. “Dream-like spaces” are the phenomenon “in-between”<sup>2</sup> - between tangible and intangible, contemporary and historical, built and virtual, ephemeral and permanent, subjective and objective, reality and dream.

### **Reading “dream-like spaces” by perceiving the atmosphere**

As Peter Zumthor claims, quality in architecture is the “experiential presence” of the atmosphere; that is, the quality of architecture is in its potential to “move” the user/perceiver.<sup>3</sup> The atmosphere is a phenomenon experienced by the first impression. A parallel can be established between the potential of architecture to move the user and the virtual possibility of “moving” users on social media in the form of collecting “likes”. If the hypothesis is that “like” is the equivalent of social value, then the equivalent of “like” as a quality in architecture is its potential to produce an intense first impression and “move” the social media observer. “Dream-like spaces”, as spaces “likable” at first glance, are characterized by the intense presence of the atmosphere. Therefore, one can ask the question of the reciprocity of the “experiential presence” of the atmosphere of “dream-like spaces” and the number of their “likes”.

The semantic connection between “dream-like spaces” and the atmosphere in architecture is commonly defined – both are phenomena “in-between”. Thus, the definition of the atmosphere is: “Atmospheres are an ‘in-between’, made possible by the (bodily but also social and symbolic) co-presence of subject and object”,<sup>4</sup> which implies that the bodily presence of users conditions the experience of the atmosphere. Due to the parallel between the atmosphere and the space of “likes”, the following questions arise for further research: How is the atmosphere of “dream-like spaces” read from the comments of virtual observers (users of social networks)? What is the connection between the atmosphere of historical reference examples interpreted in architectural criticism and user experiences of historical examples/user experiences of contemporary spaces and the atmosphere presented on social platforms by a) architects and b) perceivers (users of social media platforms)?

According to Juhani Pallasmaa, in a user’s experience of the atmosphere perception, memory, and imagination are intertwined.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is essential for interpreting how “dream-like spaces” (re)interpret historical references from architecture and translate them into a unique atmosphere, and how users experience it.

### **Comparative Analysis of “Dream-like Spaces”**

To examine the potential for a new approach to interpreting and reading the history of architecture, examples of “dream-like spaces” of various sizes were analyzed - interiors, buildings, and urban spaces, which also (re)interpreted specific historical iconic references of architecture and design. The analysis was performed by the qualitative-phenomenological method, according to pre-determined parameters. In order to confirm or refute the possibility of using social media platforms –mainly Instagram– as new adequate documentary sources in research and interpretation of architectural history or as a relevant tool of architectural criticism, the materials used in the analysis are from these platforms. In addition to comparing historical/original reference projects and their contemporary interpretations - “dream-like spaces”, the method used in the analysis was reading posted photos of “dream-like spaces”, the number of their likes, comments, and the reaction of the users of these platforms who have experienced these spaces with physical or virtual experience, as well as the description/explanation of the

space by the author-architect. Criteria for selecting examples of “dream-like spaces” refer to: the transparency of relations with historical references, the potential of space to stimulate imagination, the possibility of experiencing the atmosphere as unique and intense, and popularity on social media platforms.

The “dream-like spaces” analyzed in the paper are: interiors – GAVELLO nel blu jewelry store (Mykonos, 2021), Paradiso Ibiza Art Hotel (2018), The Budapest Cafe (Chengdu, 2017); building in its entirety – Sino-Italian Cultural Exchange City Reception Center (Chengdu, 2021); urban space – I Believe Swings (Brisbane, 2021).

GAVELLO nel blu jewelry store on Mykonos (2021) is an example of the unexpected, “dream-like” interior space. The authors of this interior design are the Saint of Athens design agency collaborating with Dive Architects. The first impression is that you, straight from the street, enter the pool from the 1960s with jewelry on the walls. The contemporary restoration of Paradiso Ibiza Art Hotel (2018) is characterized by a combination of the Art Deco style of the 1920s and the avant-garde industrial design of the Memphis Group from the 1980s. However, there are certain references from popular culture in addition to the interior concept. The authors are Interior Design Studio IlmioDesign – industrial designer Andrea Spada and architect Michele Corbani. The Budapest Café (Chengdu, 2017) directly refers to the iconic reference it (re)interprets, also the imaginary interior of The Budapest Hotel from the film of the same name by Wes Anderson, designed by Interior Design Studio Biasol from Australia. The Sino-Italian Cultural Exchange City Reception Center (Chengdu, 2021) is a hybrid blend of East and West culture, designed by AOE - an Architecture Office firm from China. The example of modern ephemeral “dream-like” urban space - I Believe Swings (Brisbane, 2021) is an installation of art studio ENESS in Melbourne, which stimulate –activate– the imagination.

The methodology based on the phenomenological-qualitative analysis<sup>6</sup> of selected examples of “dream-like spaces” was implemented in two steps by considering the following relationships: Atmosphere of “dream-like spaces” vs. atmosphere of their historical references, and Virtual vs. bodily experience of the atmosphere of “dream-like spaces”.

## The atmosphere of “dream-like spaces” vs the atmosphere of historical references

By analyzing these interiors and considering the elements of the atmosphere that refer to historical styles and design, GAVELLO nel blu jewelry store and The Budapest Café can be grouped as interiors that generate a similar atmosphere and separately consider the interior of Paradiso Ibiza Art Hotel.

When entering the GAVELLO nel blu jewelry store, the bodily experience of the atmosphere is intense because the first impression is unexpected and contrasting. From the warm and sunny atmosphere of the street, one enters the blue interior, which with the combination of color and material, encourages the experience of a colder atmosphere - the walls and floor are covered with pastel blue tiles. It is as if the visitor has entered the pool, and the overall form, as well as architectural and design details, evoke it because they imitate the elements of the pool (at the same time somewhat banal, but effective and necessary) - like circular integrated bulbs at the bottom of the wall, and stairs “descend” from the ceiling/water surface (Fig. 1). Interior detailing is essential for the space function - exhibiting and accentuating jewelry pieces. The jewelry pieces are exhibited in illuminated display cases integrated into the “pool wall”, which emphasizes their details and brilliance. Here, a parallel can be established with the metaphor of jewelry falling into the water –pool– and thus becoming even more precious and “lost” and, at the same time, an object of desire and search. The designer’s concept is an allusion to the “1960s luxury pool” - unified pastel-blue tiles of the exact dimensions, which encourage a tactile experience while the form is geometric, often symmetrical. The luxury pool of the 1960s symbolized glamor, hedonism, intrigue, and seductive beauty, while the atmosphere of calm water in the blue, clean pool is relaxing and intimate but still hints at hidden depths and dangers.<sup>7</sup> The pool metaphor as a luxury “dream-like space” compares with the pool as the embodiment and the end of a dream –death– of the Great Gatsby, who was killed while swimming in the pool of his villa.<sup>8</sup> The interior of the jewelry store, which is inverted, shows the interior of the pool, or jewelry - glamor as such, with its minimalism leaves room for interpretations and personal experiences of the world of luxury. Interpretations and comparisons of the interior of the jewelry store with the aesthetics of director Wes Anderson –pastel colors, symmetry, a combination of retro and

modern design— have also appeared on the Internet, with which *The Budapest Café* in Chengdu was directly referred to the movie (Fig. 2). The color of the cafe interior is also soft, and pastel, mint green, white, and pastel pink predominate. Similarly, as in the *GAVELLO* nel blue jewelry store, architectural detailing is applied, only in the case of cafes do details encourage interaction and generate an atmosphere of play and exploratory spirit. Arches are present in the interior and geometrized repetitive functional and decorative elements and details: stair-like stair railing, decorative element of the wall, and the stepped part of the bar end. Decorative elements as a motif are taken from the combination of Art Deco, Art Nouveau, and Jugendstil, which are also combined in the interior of the *Budapest Hotel* movie. In the cafe, geometric details are also the only decoration, unlike the hotel's interior in the movie. Although it has elements that encourage play, the cafe's atmosphere also leaves room for subjective experience and imagination, while the atmosphere of *The Budapest Hotel* is mainly narrative.

Unlike the reduction and lack of decoration in previous interiors, the interior design of *Paradiso Ibiza Art Hotel* has taken various references from the history of architecture, as well as concepts from contemporary pop culture, shaping them into contemporary eclecticism and the Art Hotel concept. References in the history of architecture relate to Miami Beach's Art Deco style (MiMo aesthetic) – a combination of Art Deco ornamentation of the 1920s and Memphis style design of the 1980s, as well as the avant-garde design studio 1960s Archizoom and Italian architect Ettore Sottsass – a founder of postmodern Memphis Group/Memphis Milano 1980s–, which are recognizable in the modern interpretation of furniture design with minor or significant changes concerning their iconic originals. The leitmotifs of the furniture, which are an interpretation of historical design, are a white Safari sofa with red upholstery in the hotel lobby - original Archizoom design and a frame on the wall above the headboard in the rooms that evoke Ettore Sottsass's mirror frame (Fig. 3). The walls, floors, and furniture are bright neon, accompanied by neon lighting and floor materialization of ceramic tiles with mosaic and plastic furniture. This eclectic style is confirmed by the architect Robert Venturi's "Less is a Bore"<sup>9</sup> concept, so it is both narrative and semiotic. In addition to elements of architectural styles and avant-garde movements in design that have been taken over and translated into modern hotel interior restoration, within the concept and relationship of function and form, ideas and concepts of



pop culture have been applied. There is an entirely transparent “Zero Suite” in the lobby, where guests can stay, as well as artists, whose everyday life would be a form of art installation, such as Orwell’s “Big Brother” concept, popularized through modern reality shows. The hotel also has an open-air cinema, “Cinema Dorado”, which evokes the characteristic spaces of cultural events that have been innovative and popular since the early 20th century. The overall atmosphere of the hotel interior is playful and dynamic, but at the same time relaxing –pool, bar, and outdoor cinema. Since the interior is a mix of different colors, shapes, and materials, the experience of the atmosphere involves both visual and tactile, and auditory senses - forms encourage a haptic experience, while ceramic floor materialization and plastic furniture create a diversity of sounds.

The Sino-Italian Cultural Exchange City Reception Center in Chengdu is a hybrid fusion of East and West culture, China and Italy, materialized through exterior and interior design. The concave form creates an intense haptic effect and the experience of the facade and building’s exterior before entering the interior, which is illuminated due to the unified white walls (Fig. 4). In addition to white, the shape of the space is enhanced by semi-circular walls, vaulted ceilings, large circular skylights in the entrance hall, and repetitive arched elements –Roman arches and domes–, which create dynamic shadows and the effect of diffused light. The concave-convex form made it possible to form open spaces that are integrated within the building, and which entirely refer to the concept of The Piazza Italia –the entrance fountain Piazza, the Italian Piazza, and the outdoor theater–, surrounded by the ruins of the Roman arches. Besides the form as the dominant element that shapes the “dream-like” atmosphere, the main atmosphere elements are light, color, water, sounds, airflow –through arched openings–, and fluidity of movement. The atmosphere is perceived as relaxing but at the same time encouraging, following the purpose of the cultural center and the fusion of two different cultures.

Ephemeral light installation in urban space in Brisbane I Believe Swings also aims to encourage introspection – through bodily interaction and visual observation of symbolic elements – signs that convey metaphorical meanings. The three swings, whose bearers are in the form of retro symbols of the UFO 1960s (Fig. 5), convey the message of the mystery of life and faith and hope for a positive future, encouraging the thinking about the meaning of life through questions about

“the cosmic; the inexplicable; the spiritual; the innate and incalculable power of our inner selves”.<sup>10</sup> The atmosphere that the installation radiates is liberating and mystical, through the feeling of freedom and curiosity that it encourages with imagination and contemplation. When it comes to historical references, the parallels can be drawn with the communication system in the city of symbols, developed by Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi in their postmodernist manifesto *Learning from Las Vegas*.<sup>11</sup>

### **Virtual vs. bodily experience of “dream-like spaces” atmosphere**

To examine how the atmosphere of the analyzed “dream-like spaces” is transmitted and experienced/read virtually through images “posted” on social media platforms versus their physical experience, the following were taken into account: comments from Instagram platform users, comments from blog visitors, and platform design below articles about these spaces, user reviews of analyzed hospitality projects, and descriptions of architects and designers-authors of “dream-like spaces”.

Comments on Instagram and design platforms about the interior of GAVELLO nel blu jewelry store are different. While some experience the atmosphere through photography similarly to visitors who experienced it physically and perceived both its tangible and intangible atmospheric qualities and effects - “So fresh!”, “Another great set for Wes Anderson”, “Absolutely fabulous. The light play from the shadows of the exterior square corbels to the coffered lights in the pool, magic”, “I love the concept for its simplicity, novelty, and color choices”, others are skeptical and criticize the details of the design - “Much of blue”, “... I could do without the ladder. That one detail feels a bit gimmicky to me”, “Was this a design requirement?”.<sup>12,13</sup>

Instagram users’ reactions to The Budapest Café’s interior are of admiration and delight, and what stands out in the comments is the fascination with lighting, pastel colors, marble bar materialization, and the overall mood of the space. In addition, architects emphasize details - evocative arches and stair-like elements and invite visitors to interact with the elements and details of the interior.

The analysis can interpret the experience of the Paradiso Ibiza Art Hotel atmosphere from visitors’ reviews, which, even according to the same parameters, are experienced oppositely. For example, the atmosphere is described as “very

relaxing” or “Lots of noise in the corridor throughout the night”, while positively experiencing both tangible and intangible elements of the atmosphere “... has an original and beautiful decoration”, “Hotel smells nice”, and other similar reviews. Furthermore, the hotel’s official Instagram posts frame interior segments and details, emphasizing that “Art can create a new feeling every time”.<sup>14</sup>

Comments about the building of the Sino-Italian Cultural Exchange City Reception Center on Instagram indicate at the same time the originality of the form, as well as some metaphors that it evokes and references to which it alludes. “Look like Casa Baldi - Paolo Portoghesi” because of the concave massive facade walls, or “It looks like a small segment of Kurpaty health resort in Crimea”, or more banal form metaphor “Like the inside of a watch”. Other comments refer to the first impression of enthusiasm - “Wonderful”, “Breathtaking”, “Spectacular”, and similar.

In one of the Instagram posts of the Brisbane Light Festival showing the installation of I Believe Swings, one user asked the question “... do you need to book to use the swings?”<sup>15</sup>, which indicates the perceiver’s desire for bodily experiential experience and interaction with the installation. All the comments are positive reactions, and while the authors, on the one hand, encourage on social networks with the image of swings to believe in their dreams, the organizers of the Brisbane light festival encourage users of social networks to come and take pictures on the swings.

## **Results and Conclusions: Towards the New Research Sources**

By summarizing the results of phenomenological-qualitative analysis of atmospheric experiences, and thus the quality of architecture and design of reference examples of “dreamlike spaces”, certain parallels can be established that lead to conclusions about the potential for forming a new research framework for contemporary interpretations of architectural history, using social media as relevant documentary research sources, and open new questions for further research on this topic.

Firstly, after comparing the relationship between the atmosphere of “dreamy spaces”, which refers to the atmosphere of exemplary examples taken from the history of architecture, as well as the atmosphere of “dreamy spaces” read by presenting on social media platforms, it can be concluded that these three types of

atmospheres are intertwined and interconnected. The reactions of users of social media platforms can open up different interpretations or reveal the (silent) inspiration of architects/designers, which they (consciously or unconsciously) took from history and implemented in their concept of “dream space”. On the other hand, architects and interior designers have in mind what could be popularized on these platforms, and to some extent, it affects the choice of references from history and the way they are interpreted. This should certainly be taken into account when architecturally criticizing “dream-like spaces”. The question arises to what extent do “dream-like spaces” take references from each other, and to what extent do they embody original contemporary design?

Secondly, there are questions about how contemporary phenomena, popularized on social media platforms, would influence the emergence of new interpretations of the history of architecture and its relevance. For example, in what way is the experience, and thus the contemporary interpretation of the history of architecture, shaped through “dream-like spaces”? Do users of social media platforms interpret specific historical references that are not explicitly mentioned and read those references in a new way through these spaces? Can any interpretations of history through “dream-like spaces” be considered relevant, and to what extent?

Continuing the discussion initiated by summarizing the results of the phenomenological-qualitative research in the paper, it is concluded that architectural criticism should (with some distance) consider social media platforms as a documentary research source for interpreting the history of architecture. One of the suggested ways, developed through the methodology in the paper, is the use of sources available on these platforms - photos, comments, and reactions of users based on affective, first impressions, as well as descriptions of architects-authors of “dream-like spaces”, and the relationship of all these virtual elements. The final aim of these case studies is to interpret the phenomenon of the atmosphere of historical references as an element that symbolizes ephemerality in architecture and always new and different interpretations and experiences.

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## Figures



Fig. 1. Interior of GAVELLO nel blu jewelry store, Source: <https://gavriilux.com/gavellomykonos>, Photos: Gavriil Papadiotis <https://gavriilux.com/>, Concept: Saint of Athens & Elizabetta Gavello, Interior design: Saint of Athens, Architectural works: Dive Architects



Fig. 2. Interior of The Budapest Café in Chengdu, Source: <https://biasol.com.au/portfolio/the-budapest-cafe-chengdu-china/>, Photos: James Morgan <http://jamesmorgan.com.au/>, Interior design: Biasol.



Fig. 3. Room in Paradiso Ibiza Art Hotel, Source: <https://www.homejournal.com/en/article/Feast-For-the-Senses:-A-Pastel-Paradise-in-Ibiza/>, Photos: Adam Johnston <https://www.adamjohnstonphotography.com/>, Architecture: IlmioDesign



Fig. 4. Sino-Italian Cultural Exchange City Reception Center, Source: <https://amazingarchitecture.com/exhibitions/sino-italian-cultural-exchange-city-reception-center-a-city-art-hall-hidden-in-the-woods-by-aoe>, Photos: Arch-Exist photography <http://www.arch-exist.com/home.html>, Architecture: aoe architects



Fig. 5. I Believe swings, Source: studio ENESS archive, Photos: studio ENESS <https://www.eness.com/>, Design: studio ENESS

# THE PUBLIC OF ARCHITECTURE: PARTICIPATION AND DISCIPLINARY AUTONOMY

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## Abstract

At a time when concepts of participation are pervading artistic and architectural realms, this paper proposes to review certain narratives linked with countercultural trends that emerged in architectural practice after the dissolution of the CIAM.

To consider participation movements of the time related to urban policies and the housing question, the cases of late-1960s Italian architectonic culture, and of the social housing service SAAL, which arose from the Portuguese democratic revolution of 1974, will be discussed, with a particular focus on the contributions of Giancarlo De Carlo and Álvaro Siza.

In 1969, Giancarlo De Carlo held a conference entitled “Le publique de l’architecture” in Liège, published the following year in the Italian magazine *Parametro*; while in a 1976 issue of *Lotus*, Álvaro Siza published the text “L’isola proletária come elemento base del tessuto urbano.” De Carlo’s text conveyed the optimistic and egalitarian spirit of 1968, and the indignation of a young modernist generation on discovering that the social ideals of the Modern Movement had been abandoned or betrayed. Its political tone recalls a time when the impact of global capitalism was strongly felt. Siza, while working in the SAAL, took what may have been considered at the time an unpopular position regarding the process of participation, thus taking an attitude that was countercultural within the counterculture.

By comparing texts and practices, this paper seeks to identify the overlap between critical thought and the response to social housing needs and considers the texts and the built work of Giancarlo De Carlo (Matteotti neighborhood, Terni) and Álvaro Siza (Bouça neighborhood, Porto). It argues that during the 1960s and 1970s, the counterculture movement embodied both a radical sense of modernity, and a process of social restructuring, and brought issues such as participation, commitment, and disciplinary autonomy to the very heart of architectural debate, by defying canonical narratives.

## Keywords

Participation; Housing; Álvaro Siza; Giancarlo De Carlo



A counterculture emerged in the 1960s within an architectural culture that was becoming aware of the complexity of the city, the large-scale challenges of the land beyond it and, to some extent, the social responsibility of architects. Arising from the realm of social welfare in the West, and following highly innovative initiatives conducted in Latin America, particularly the PREVI Program in Lima<sup>1</sup> (Peru), these actions, experiences, and their after-effects, precipitated an intense interdisciplinary clash between the worlds of technology and the humanities. This flare-up exposed the architectural discipline to the real world far more than it ever had been by traditional architectural education. An unprecedented realism arose through direct engagement in the public participation that was starting to be seen as key to meeting the needs of everyday people, architecture's true public.

Participation emerged as a factor from the protest movements of the late 1960s, and the demand of housing for all, for the “*grand nombre*”, but also became a focus of student struggles regarding the teaching of architecture. In this essay, the contributions of two architects, the Italian Giancarlo De Carlo and the Portuguese Álvaro Siza, will be analyzed, and the implications will be considered of designing not for, but with architecture's public, “which coincides with people – everyone who uses architecture.”<sup>2</sup> These two “singular” authors, acting outside the mainstream, distinguished themselves in a range of issues. In Giancarlo De Carlo's case, these included the rehabilitation of a historic center, in his intervention in the plan for Urbino (1958-1976), his involvement of the local population in defining the Villaggio Matteotti program, and his workers' housing project for Terni (1964-1974). For Siza, this included working with the population of the Bouça neighborhood in Porto to define his housing complex there (1974-1976) and, in the following decade, planning the reconstruction of the Chiado in Lisbon.

### **The Humanization of Architecture and the Existing City**

At the Darmstadt conference, held in 1951, the process of post-war European reconstruction was discussed, and the great issue for the architecture of the Modern Movement was considered: how to meet the need for housing. Organized by Otto Bartning,<sup>3</sup> the first conference held after the war on German territory, four years after the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany, heralded the appearance of a counter-current to the hegemony of the International Style.<sup>4</sup> Entitled “*Mensch und Raum*”, Man and Space, it brought together German architects including Hans

Scharoun, Otto Bartning, Rudolf Schwarz, Egon Eiermann and Hans Schwippert, but also the sociologist Alfred Weber and the philosophers Martin Heidegger and Ortega y Gasset.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, one cannot forget the unprecedented contribution of Ortega y Gasset on the theme of mass society in his major work *La rebellion de las masas*, published in 1930, in which he defined the “mass-man,” the man “without qualities,” who became part of the force of the crowd. Ortega’s mass-man, the sophisticated individual, at the same time disdainful of culture and subverting the status quo, remains a potent idea.

The Darmstadt conference will forever be associated with the reflection on the future, and on becoming, announced by Heidegger in his famous speech “Bauen, Wohnen, Denken”, Building, Dwelling, Thinking. Thinking implied dwelling, and dwelling was the condition for building, argued Heidegger. In contrast to the banal and rigid repetitiveness of the International Style then being applied to social housing, the powerful idea of the inseparability of building and dwelling, and the thinking underlying this duality, was received as a warning against massification. Emphasis was given to the importance of place as opposed to abstract space, to relationships as opposed to objects. Above all, Heidegger argued that dwelling was indivisible from building and thinking, because thinking cannot be separated from either dwelling or building: “the nature of building is letting dwell. Building accomplishes its nature in the raising of locations by the joining of their spaces. Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build.”<sup>6</sup>

Later, in 1974, Kenneth Frampton in his text “On reading Heidegger” used precisely this argument regarding dwelling to attack the conceptual principles of post-modernism, which he considered were based on the notion of style and limited to the understanding of the image as a symbol. Praising the key role of place, Frampton argued that “that which remains critical is the process by which decisive priorities are established” reminding us of De Carlo’s design goals “legitimized through the activation of the public sphere.”<sup>7</sup>

In the 1960s, the concepts of pre-existence and, to a certain extent, the idea of regionalism, cited by Tzonis and Frampton, were reinforced, from a critical point of view, by architects such as Álvaro Siza and Giancarlo De Carlo, who experimented with original approaches to the idea of participation, mainly linked to social housing and interventions in historic centers. Their approach implied

looking to the city again, establishing an alternative vision to the practice that was being massively implemented in post-war reconstruction with the creation of New Towns according to the urban zoning principles of the Athens Charter. In contrast, Siza and De Carlo considered the fundamental prerequisite for the rehabilitation of the existing city was to acknowledge the value of its heritage.

### **The Question of the “Great Number” and the Historic Center**

In Italy, a pioneering attitude emerged in the post-war period towards safeguarding historic centers, by approaching them from a comprehensive social and economic point of view. This attitude led to the old city, with its historic center, being re-discovered and appreciated, and played an integral role in the development of architectural discipline and culture. As Filippo De Pieri<sup>8</sup> argues, the historical townscape was particularly important in the work of Italian architects in the decades following World War II, when many of the architects who considered themselves rooted in the “new tradition” of rationalism searched for ways to adapt the conceptual framework of modern architecture to Italy’s historic culture and environment.

Dealing with the preservation of the historic city in his plan for Urbino (1958-1964), De Carlo formulated an alternative approach in which urban planning was a participatory process and employed a multi-layered methodology to address the complexity of contemporary urbanization.<sup>9</sup> The plan received considerable attention outside Italy and was the only Italian planning document of the time to enjoy a full translation into English.

The historical built and human environment of the city seemed to pose challenges to which planning tools grounded in CIAM and post-CIAM traditions did not appear entirely suited. De Carlo conducted extensive research on the economic and social structures of the city and its housing conditions. His plan for Urbino had a strong focus on all matters related to the protection and conservation of the historical townscape, including aspects introduced in the postwar debates at CIAM on issues such as “the new monumentality” and the “heart of the city,” which were then pursued, with a different emphasis, in Aldo Rossi’s *Architecture of the City*. As De Pieri argues, De Carlo’s plan seemed to conceive of urban heritage not only as a built testimonial of the city’s past, but also as a resource, with historical architecture almost posited as a generating force for future architectural interventions.

De Carlo's experience with the Urbino masterplan, the design of a new university campus (Collegio del Colle, 1962-1965) and new masterplan for the city center of the Borgo San Giuliano in Rimini (1970-1972), were all important for the development of his understanding of the relationship between the design process and participation by common citizens. De Carlo put forward the theory that the lower classes and the common people needed to become involved in the process of designing the city.

In the meantime, in 1968, Giancarlo De Carlo curated the *XIV Triennale di Milano*, identifying the topic of the "great number", and proposing it as a thematic challenge to the group of architects with whom he had been close since the days of the former Team X, namely the Smithsons and Aldo van Eyck, but also the young Arata Isozaki.

The following year, he wrote on the subject of participation in "Il pubblico dell'architettura", in response to the theme of the conference held in Liège on October 24, 1969: "*L'architecture n'a plus d'audience. Quel est l'avenir du domaine bâti?*"<sup>10</sup> Published in the journal *Parametro* in 1970, it argued for the legitimacy of architecture and the importance of designing not for, but with the public, meaning, with people, with everyone who uses architecture. In his essay, De Carlo began by addressing the question of the school of architecture's uprising and frustration when the 1968 university contest exploded: architecture schools were at the forefront in claiming architecture's social mission and its potential to transform the world. It was not just about contesting teaching methods, but about embracing the "social destiny" of architecture. The ambiguity of the architect's role, somewhere between servant and demiurge, was invoked to challenge the idea that the architect should, by definition, identify with the prevailing power or, ultimately, become its operative instrument.

For De Carlo, although many ideas and heroes had been produced by Modern Movement architecture, caught between commitment and performance, it had not answered the question of who its public was: the architects themselves, the clients who commissioned the projects, or the people who used the architecture. If for De Carlo the third hypothesis is true, then architecture continues to operate in a restricted field, limited to relationships with customers, entrepreneurs, owners, and critics.<sup>11</sup>

The Matteotti Village development was a key project in testing this political vision. A strong relationship was established with its inhabitants, introducing them to new kinds of dwellings and new ways of living in them. Documentaries, photographs and architectural plans were produced with Radiotelevisione Italiana RAI and all of “this became an exhibition, to which all the future inhabitants of the future Matteotti Village came.”<sup>12</sup> After one year of meetings and open discussions, the final solution proposed building 8000 houses with 45 different typological solutions. The general layout was based on an elementary grid of parallel housing blocks, overlaid by a complex system of public spaces, pedestrian routes separated by vehicular roads, and linked by a series of ramps, stairs, landings and vertical connections, facilitating good relations between neighbors. One of the key concepts was the extensive provision of green areas and terrace gardens in response to the future inhabitants’ desire for open spaces in which they could cultivate their own gardens, as many had been farmers. Unfortunately, the Terni experiment was unsuccessful, as resistance by residents of the old village prevented its full implementation. Today, only a fragment of the original idea exists, as only a quarter of the village was built, with no amenities or collective facilities, which had been an integral part of the overall project.

For De Carlo, the social mission and response to the “great number” failed. The architecture of the Modern Movement was held hostage by the elite, far from the realities of society and its environmental needs. His criticism is even harsher when considering two mythical examples from the history of Modern Movement architecture. In his analysis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> CIAM, held in Frankfurt in 1929, dedicated to the “*existenzminimum*”, and the CIAM of 1951, held in Hoddesdon under the theme “heart of the city”, De Carlo is implacable, seeing only defeat, capitulation and the death of all hope. In Frankfurt, there was a commitment was to solve, as quickly and efficiently as possible, the great need for housing that had exploded after World War I in every city in the world. Even today, the demand for housing is far from being met, on the contrary, it represents the most serious shortage of our time. In Hoddesdon, showing, in De Carlo’s opinion, even less intelligence than in Frankfurt, the architects thought they had invented the problem of rehabilitating urban centers. Faced with the exponential growth of peripheral neighborhoods and the social dissection caused by the criteria of functional specialization that the architects themselves had instituted through “zoning”, they looked

for ways to bring back to the center the opportunities for interchange, communication, and emotion that the city, in its complexity, had lost, and of transforming it into a beating heart capable of pumping lifeblood through its exhausted and disjointed urban limbs.

## Housing Design and Social Organization

Born from the Portuguese Revolution of April 25, 1974, SAAL [Ambulatory Local Support Service] unleashed one of the most exciting processes of 20<sup>th</sup> century housing architecture and urbanism.<sup>13</sup>

The radical creativity of its program was based on the involvement and direct participation of the population in the process of designing their new homes. This collective adventure came to transform several architects' perception about their professional social role, and initiated a process of intense and profound changes, not only regarding social housing, but also the design process itself. Housing became the main architectural issue during SAAL's brief period of activity. Its complexity was even greater than the meteoric success it achieved in its housing operations conducted by technical brigades who assisted the local population and developed designs on-site. The primary impulse behind SAAL's direction can be broadly attributed to the strident demand for housing after 48 years of a dictatorship branded by an illiteracy rate that hovered around 20% in men and 30% in women, and a housing shortage estimated at around 5 million homes in 1970, with large sections of the population living in substandard conditions.

In Siza's project for the Bouça neighborhood (1975-1977) in Porto, he envisaged a way of intervening in the city using plan forms that also rejected prevailing high-rise solutions. In typological terms, he opted for uniformity, using the single-family terrace house almost exclusively, following models of the 1920s and 1930s from Central European's *Siedlungen*. The use of a process of participation, for which Christopher Alexander's theories in *A Pattern Language* (1977) marked a shift in thinking, revealed how the need for action was prompting a dialogue between users and design professionals.

It is interesting to analyze Siza's text "On the method of work"<sup>14</sup> that the brigade, as a technical group, aimed to employ. "The brigade does not take simplistic positions such as learning from the people or teaching the people. The goal is that the inhabitants can control the run-down areas where they live, in terms of

its ownership and recovery. The technical brigade, together with the group of residents, defines the priorities for each period, and adopts a permanently critical position. The rigor does not limit the dynamics of the process. The rigor does not limit the imagination.”<sup>15</sup>

The Bouça housing complex contains 128 homes arranged in four parallel low-rise blocks four stories high, each consisting of two superimposed rows of duplex apartments with exterior access. A long wall delimits the north side of the building complex, protecting it from the impact of an adjacent railway line, and perpendicularly terminating the parallel layout of the blocks. Both the composition of the facades, resulting from the disposition of the exterior access stairs, and the circulation system interconnecting the complex, maintain a continuity between interior and exterior, and create elongated courtyards between the four blocks with garden spaces that are perceived as public space.

Siza saw the problem of building for those in need in this area, as a challenge to find another way to create housing, facilities, and public spaces. The southern end of each row of buildings contained community facilities, such as laundry, library, and community meeting spaces as part of a strategy that was not only formal but, primarily, social.<sup>16</sup>

In 1987, the fire of Chiado in Lisbon dramatically exposed the deterioration and loss of housing in this area, Siza’s reconstruction plan (1988-2015) focused precisely on improving public space. It did this in two ways: firstly, by designing the whole as a neighborhood and creating new urban paths through interstitial patios in the courtyards; and secondly, by using a repetitive modular facade design that adopted the 18th century Pombaline typology as a central unifying element of the urban space. Furthermore, Siza’s plan sought to programmatically improve this important civic and commercial space of the old city, by reinforcing its housing component.

Restoring the dignity and character of the 1758 Pombaline Plan by Eugénio dos Santos and Manuel da Maia, drawn up after the earthquake of 1755,<sup>17</sup> Siza was able to recognize the modernity of the typological principles of this plan, as well as its uniqueness in terms of the global history of urban planning, as an innovative and a remarkable example of the Enlightenment city whose importance had not yet been properly appreciated. Urban typologies with uniform facades,

incorporating both residential buildings and churches to create coherent urban blocks, formed the units that determined the character of the Baixa-Chiado, its flexibility, and its capacity for transformation and resilience.

The acknowledgement of heritage, and the importance of what already exists, is a twofold concept that has characterized much erudite architectural culture in Portugal. In fact, the idea of pre-existence was key for Siza's practice, not just in his early work, but also in the SAAL projects from the 1970s, the design of the Malagueira Plan in Évora, and his designs to renew the Giudecca neighborhood in Venice (1985), just to mention projects on a city scale.

### **Place Identity and the Creation of a Place of Memory**

The housing developments for Matteotti Village and the Bouça neighborhood represented alternative ways of making the city, in which transitional public open spaces and private outdoor spaces enhanced wellbeing, while respecting their natural organic and urban environments. The usual high-rise buildings which had formed the basis of "the great ensembles" of high-density housing built up until then, were here substituted by low-rise buildings. In spite of using the common post-war reconstruction practice of mass housing based on "build, relocate, and turn peripheral", De Carlos and Siza innovatively used a different urban spatial organization.

The debate on housing led to the promotion of a sense of proximity between architecture and politics, and an effort to make choices informed by multidisciplinary actors. This principle of participation gave form to decisions made in collaboration with users about what to build, and how to build. Finally, the social role of women changed substantially as, through their presence in public discussions, imbued with a kind of ancestral survival energy, they played a pivotal part in the participation process.

As Christopher Alexander argues,<sup>18</sup> users know more about the buildings they need than any architect ever could and sharing this helps normal people reclaim control over their built environments. The great traditional buildings of the past, the villages, tents and temples in which men felt at home, have always been made by people, and human beings can relate to this and the sense of belonging to the place and structure they induced. Heidegger was right to consider "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" as an inseparable trilogy.



Finally, as Giancarlo De Carlo argued, architects should strive to meet one of the great ambitions of the modern architectural debate, and simultaneously address the key issues of habitat and the value of identity. Beyond Urbino and Lisbon, the housing developments at Matteotti and Bouça managed to consolidate and reinvent “a sense of place.”

## Endnotes

1. PREVI, Proyecto Experimental de Vivienda (Experimental Housing Project), was the result of a consultation process initiated in 1965, by the President of Peru, Fernando Belaunde Terry, with the goal of developing a social-housing program to regulate the spread of self-built informal settlements in Lima.
2. Giancarlo De Carlo, “Il pubblico dell’architettura,” lecture held in Liège, October 24-25, 1969: *Parametro*, no. 5 (1970), 4-13.
3. Joaquim Medina Warmburg, “Fantasia, tecnologia y consumo. Arquitectura española en Alemania,” in *Atravesando fronteras. Redes Internacionales de la arquitectura española (1939-1975)*, eds. Antonio Pizza and Enrique Granell, (Madrid: Ediciones Asimétricas, 2021), 165-181.
4. As it was described in 1932 by Hitchcock and Philip Johnson at MoMA and developed in the 1950s in a bureaucratic high-rise version.
5. Medina Warmburg, “Fantasia, tecnologia y consumo. Arquitectura española en Alemania,” 165.
6. Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” lecture held in Darmstadt in 1951, and published in *Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row), 1971.
7. Kenneth Frampton, “On reading Heidegger,” *Oppositions Reader*, ed. K. Michael Hays (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 4.
8. Filippo De Pieri, “Visualizing the historic city: planners and the representation of Italy’s built heritage: Giovanni Astengo and Giancarlo De Carlo in Assisi and Urbino, 1950s-60s,” in *Alternative visions of post-war reconstruction. Creating the modern townscape*, eds. John Pendlebury, Erdem Erten, and Peter J. Larkham, (London/New York: Routledge, 2015), 155.
9. Luca Molinari, “Matteotti Village and Galaratese2: Design Criticism of the Italian Welfare State,” in *Architecture and the Welfare State*, eds. Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete and Dirk van den Heuvel (London/New York: Routledge, 2015), 264.
10. De Carlo, “Il pubblico dell’architettura,” in Filippo De Pieri (ed.), *Giancarlo De Carlo: La piramide rovesciata. Architettura oltre il’68* (Macerata, Quodlibet, 2018), 143.
11. De Carlo, “Il pubblico dell’architettura,” 143.
12. Luca Molinari, “Matteotti Village and Galaratese2: Design Criticism of the Italian Welfare State,” 264.
13. The project (1974, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development by Nuno Portas) was intended to address the demanding housing needs of disadvantaged communities across the country. Active until October 1976, SAAL completed 176 projects that involved more than 40,000 families.

14. Published as a translation of “Linhas de acção dos técnicos enquanto técnicos” (Lines of action for technicians as technicians) from 1976. See Delfim Sardo (ed.), *O Processo SAAL. Arquitectura e Participação 1974-1976* (Porto, Fundação Serralves, 2014), 265.
15. Álvaro Siza Vieira, “L’isola proletária come elemento base del tessuto urbano”, *Lotus International*, no. 13 (1976), 80-93.
16. The Bouça housing complex was built in two phases: the first, consisting of 56 apartments, was partly completed and occupied in 1976. The second phase (2004-2006) providing a total of 72 apartments, took another 30 years to be completed.
17. Following the earthquake of November 1, 1755, the Lisbon reconstruction Plan by Eugénio dos Santos and Manuel da Maia was published in 1758. See Ana Tostões and Walter Rossa (ed.), *The Baixa Plan Today. Lisboa 1758* (Lisbon, CML, 2008).
18. Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, and Murray Silverstein, *A pattern language: towns, buildings, construction* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977).



# THE POWER OF SHADOW, FROM MAGIC TO ILLUSIONISM

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## Abstract

In his 1890 book *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Scottish anthropologist Sir James Frazer reported a ritual related to construction sites: in order to ensure the stability and solidity of a new building, Eastern European builders would sacrifice an animal or a person, and place its body at the level of the foundations. In the chapter “The Soul as a Shadow and Reflection”, Frazer described how shadow was used as a perfect substitute: the exchange would not affect the effectiveness of the ritual, and would therefore spare a life.

As much as this practice belonged to the realm of magical beliefs, such a link between shadow and architecture did appear in the traditional canon. While at a first glance this idea may appear preposterous, on some occasions shadow and its effect on edification were in fact mentioned in prescriptive architectural treatises, such as the *De Architectura* by Vitruvius or the *De Re Aedificatoria* by Alberti, either for the quality it brings to a religious atmosphere or for its impact on the perception of forms – thus acting more as an illusion. Towards the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, the capacity of shadow to interfere with the viewer’s perception was increasingly noticed in European architectural discourses, to the extent that architects had to develop strategies to control its power, and to use it at the advantage of their own compositions.

Through a series of selected examples from written theories, this presentation aims at questioning the power of shadow on architecture, as despite its intangible nature, it seems to be able to modify the very concrete existence of our material world.

## Keywords

Architecture, Shadow, Magic, Illusionism, Solidity.

## The Sacrifice of the Soul

*“There were three brothers, and they were building a tower to serve as a lookout against Turkish robbers. They had undertaken the construction themselves, ... But each time they managed to reach the point where they were able to place a bunch of herbs on the finished roof, the night wind and the mountain witches would topple their tower as God had once felled Babel. There are many reasons why a tower should not stand, and blame can be laid on the workers’ lack of skill, on the unwillingness of the land, or on the insufficient strength of the cement binding the stones. But the Serbian, Albanian, and Bulgarian peasants will admit only one reason for such a disaster: they know that a building will crumble if one has not taken the precaution of walling into the base a man or a woman whose skeleton will support that weighty body of stone until Judgment Day. ... The three brothers began to look at one another with suspicion, and were careful not to cast a shadow on the rising walls, because it is possible, for want of a better thing, to wall up into an unfinished tower that dark extension of a man which is perhaps his soul, and he whose shadow is so imprisoned dies as one suffering from a broken heart.*

*Therefore, in the evening, each of the three brothers would sit as far as possible from the fire, fearing that one of them might approach silently from behind, throw a sack on the shadow, and carry it away, half choking, like a black pigeon.”*

The tale of the three brothers penned by Marguerite Yourcenar in 1938, portrayed the motive of immurement, common in mediaeval Balkan folklore and regarded as an effective construction technique to prevent buildings from collapsing. In various poems and tales, a similar chain of events may be found – after an all-day long painstaking effort, the almost fully erected building is to be demolished at night by malevolent magical forces, and the sole resolution requires a human sacrifice. Most often, the victim is a beloved member of the headbuilder’s own family, and as heart-breaking as this may be for the executioner, the emotional link and the victim’s purity of soul operate even more efficiently. For example, the bridge of Arta, in Greece, whose foundations were collapsing every night, could only be completed once the master-builder had sacrificed and immured his wife. The Serbian song “The Building of Skadar” tells how one of the builders had to wall up his wife within the fortress, a story also known in Albania as the Rozafa Castle. Yourcenar based her short story on this plot and passed on the tale of the three brothers to the 20th century.

What seems to belong exclusively to the realm of superstitious lore had also been the subject of scientific studies. A few decades before Yourcenar's publication, the Scottish anthropologist Sir James Frazer issued a study that collected rituals and myths prescribing sacrifices on construction sites in order to protect the edifice against evil spirits and to maintain its structure through the years by improving its solidity. The 1890 book *The Golden Bough: A study in Magic and Religion* comprises a subchapter entitled "The Soul as a Shadow and Reflection", in which Frazer highlighted the equivalence of the soul and the shadow.<sup>2</sup> The theme also appears in Yourcenar's short story: if the three brothers were so afraid of having their shadow cast by the campfire and captured like "a black pigeon", it was not only because it could be sacrificed instead of themselves, but because this sacrifice would inevitably condemn their soul and lead to their death. Frazer investigated further the role of shadows on construction sites and examined the new practices that branched out from the sacrificial ritual.

*"Nowhere, perhaps, does the equivalence of the shadow to the life or soul come out more clearly than in some customs practised to this day in South-eastern Europe. In modern Greece, when the foundation of a new building is being laid, it is the custom to kill a cock, a ram, or a lamb, and to let its blood flow on the foundation-stone, under which the animal is afterwards buried. The object of the sacrifice is to give strength and stability to the building. But sometimes, instead of killing an animal, the builder entices a man to the foundation-stone, secretly measures his body, or a part of it, or his shadow, and buries the measure under the foundation-stone; or he lays the foundation-stone upon the man's shadow. It is believed that the man will die within the year. The Roumanians of Transylvania think that he whose shadow is thus immured will die within forty days; so persons passing by a building which is in course of erection may hear a warning cry, 'Beware lest they take thy shadow!' Not long ago there were still shadow-traders whose business it was to provide architects with the shadows necessary for securing their walls. In these cases the measure of the shadow is looked on as equivalent to the shadow itself, and to bury it is to bury the life or soul of the man, who, deprived of it, must die. Thus the custom is a substitute for the old practice of immuring a living person in the walls, or crushing him under the foundation-stone of a new building, in order to give strength and durability to the structure, or more definitely in order that the angry ghost may haunt the place and guard it against the intrusion of enemies."*<sup>3</sup>

Either stolen, bought or offered, shadows circulated on a new market, and one single shadow could potentially be laid under the foundation stones of several buildings. The equivalence went further and builders could buy either someone's shadow or even just its measurements. According to this logic, the sacrifice was based on two links of different natures which both guaranteed good construction practices. The first was geometrical and induced a formal similarity between the body and its cast shadow, according to the theory of shadow projection.<sup>4</sup> The second one was of a magical nature and implied that any incident on the shadow would reflect on the body and soul. For instance, when a shadow was buried under foundations, its owner was expected to die shortly after. Shadow may be understood as both the projection of a physical body and as the "reflection of the soul".<sup>5</sup> It is through these geometrical and magical resemblances that shadow was given a fundamental role in the process of edification and that its sacrifice could insure long-lasting solidity to the building.

### **Vitruvian and Albertian Shadows**

In prescriptive architectural treatises, such as the *De Architectura* (1stBC) by Vitruvius or the *De Re Aedificatoria* (1485) by Alberti, the magical power of shadow over solidity did not appear as such. While Alberti lengthily discussed shadow qualities in his *De Pictura* (1435), they appeared of little interest to him regarding the art of building. In books I and III, respectively dedicated to lineamenta and construction, shade was considered as the indoor atmosphere protected from the sun – far from possessing magical powers as in contemporaneous Balkan rituals. In book VII, dedicated to the decoration of sacred buildings, Alberti introduced a profound aesthetical significance by describing the worshiper's religious feeling inspired by the darkness of the temple:

*"The window openings of a temple should have modest dimensions and should be placed high up, where they have a view of nothing but the sky, which will not divert the minds of celebrant or supplicant from divine matters. The awe that is naturally generated by darkness encourages a sense of veneration in the mind; and there is always some austerity about majesty. What is more, the flame, which should burn in a temple, and which is the most divine ornament of religious worship, looks faint in too much light."*<sup>6</sup>

Seemingly distant to Frazer's magical shadow, this kind of obscurity operated however indirectly on solidity: the small windows placed high in the walls left the masonry almost untouched and preserved its massive solidity.

Within the canon, and beside the modest mention by Alberti of the shadow's aesthetical power, the magical function of shadow was utterly uncovered. Although their sacrificial aspect was not on the agenda of prescriptive treatises such as *De Architectura* and *De Re Aedificatoria*, shadows and their effects on edification operated on another level of optical perception, closer to illusionism. Whereas magic results from a supernatural intervention on the material world, illusionism aims at tricking the audience's attention, through techniques of conjuring and *escamotage* for which shadows might be just as important. To deceive the eye of the many, illusionism indeed largely relies on optics and on the perception of forms, usually well indicated by their shadows.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Illusionist Black Shadow**

In canonical architectural history, the very first mention of the sort may be found in Vitruvius' *Ten Books*, where the Roman architect presented the evolution of pteroma, i.e. the colonnade along the building's perimeter. To that end, he introduced the reader to the notion of *asperitas*, a term that he borrowed from pictorial aesthetics and art critics of his time.<sup>8</sup> The general form and majesty of the pteroma, he explained, was justified by the impression of relief, the *asperitas*, that the colonnade seen from the outside would make on the bystander: "For the idea of the pteroma and the arrangement of the columns round a temple were devised in order that the intercolumniations might give the imposing effect of high relief"<sup>9</sup>. Vitruvius used the exact same word to describe the well-executed painted decor by Apaturios of Alabanda for the little theatre of Tralles, in which the architectural motives, from columns to cornices, seemed to detach themselves from the surface of the wall: "The effect of high relief in this scaena was very attractive to all who beheld it"<sup>10</sup>. Vitruvius referred to the effect produced by drawing devices such as color contrast and more particularly to the opposition of light and dark tones, in order to identify what gives the sense of relief to the eye in a two-dimensional work. This effect was well-known of Pliny the Elder, Roman philosopher, which he named *tonos* in his *Natural History* (1stAD).<sup>11</sup> Along with perspective and foreshortening, modelling and contrast



are the main tools to render three dimensions in painting. Those who master them can deceive one's eyes and create the illusion of what is not. Their use is so powerful that it could even fool a painter's critical mind.<sup>12</sup>

To describe the pteroma, Vitruvius translated a pictorial notion into architectural terms and overlapped two aspects: one, rhythmic, of the mass of the columns and the in-between voids, and the other, colorimetric, of the luminous white marble and the dark shadows of intercolumniations. Columns separated with obscurity seemed projected towards the outside and provoked in Vitruvius a sense of *asperitas*. With this semantic overlay, the architect implied a paradoxical understanding of the façade which actual relief was to be read as a two-dimensional work. In fact, *asperitas* appeared as an aesthetical principle that supported the several transformational steps from the periptal – with stand-alone columns –, to the pseudodipteral – with columns closer to the cella wall –, to finally the pseudoperiptal – with its columns engaged into the walls (Fig. 1). The structural system converted into a decorative system maintained, through its plastic, the animation of the façade and the *asperitas*, its aesthetical raison d'être.

The example of the pteroma also demonstrated that shadows could equally convey the perception of relief and that of a void. While these are both necessary in painting to create the illusion of three dimensions, their equivalence might be significantly problematic for architecture in what regards the perception of solidity. For a discipline traditionally relying on proportions defined throughout a long experience of construction, a modification of the ratio mass/void might weaken the reassuring sense of solidity. As explicitly written by Arden Reed in 1990, "It might seem that to talk about architecture and shadows automatically means to talk about solidity and vacuity, or presence and absence".<sup>13</sup> What if shadows instead of conveying the relief, were instead performing an illusion by pretending to be a void? The structural fiction would be shaken up.

This concept has peculiar implications regarding the optical correction operated on the corner columns of a temple. In the exact same book and chapter where Vitruvius translated *asperitas* into architectural terms, he also mentioned the effect of light on the columns' perceived thickness. While he listed the various styles of intercolumniation – i.e. the codification of column spacing – he also raised the issue of the Aereostyle for which the interval equals more than three times the diameter of the shaft and is therefore the widest (Fig. 2). Here, Vitruvius expressed

his concern and invited architects to increase the diameter of corner columns by “a fiftieth of their own diameter” as “the air seems to eat away and diminish the thickness” of their shaft.<sup>14</sup> Although Vitruvius blamed “the air”, Claude Perrault, 17th-century French architect, singled out more precisely the role of shadow in his annotated translation of the *De Architectura* (1673). He documented his disagreement with an engraved figure entitled “How may light and shadows make columns appear thicker or slenderer depending on their spacing; the columns A and B seeming slenderer than columns D and C, even though they are equally thick”<sup>15</sup>. The drawing represents two different intercolumniations with a shaded background intuitively drawn (Fig. 3). Perrault chose to translate “the air” by “l’air & le grand jour”, and then completed Vitruvius’s thought.

*“If air here means light, as there is a great similitude, it seems that columns brought closer to each other, shall provoke an opposite effect to what is said here, that is to say that the closer they are, the slenderer they shall appear, because a column whose neighbors subtract the daylight that would otherwise illuminate its sides if they were further apart; is obscured on the right and left with two shadows that merge with the one behind and which reigns along the portico, which diminishes its apparent thickness, that would seem differently if its sides being illuminated were cutting more sharply the shade behind; as it is seen in Figure 1 of the table XVII where columns A B that are squeezed up seem more slender than columns CD, even though they all have the same thickness. We may then say that the true reason for this seemingly column-thickness diminution when they are distant from each other, is that they do not appear adequate to carry a long entablature; and also that the necessity to thicken the columns as one may move them apart, is based on the fact that a heavy load requires something stronger to support it.”<sup>16</sup>*

In other words, the optical correction of column thickness may be understood as a countermeasure to the shadow illusion, a strategy to control its powerful influence on the perception of architectural masses.

Two centuries later, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, in his “Seventh Discourse on The Principles of Western Architecture in the Middle Ages” (1863), followed up on Perrault’s concern. To illustrate the effect of color on architectural form perception, Viollet-le-Duc represented a Doric portico divided in two parts (Fig. 4). On the A side, metopes and cella wall are colored in black while columns and entablature are left white, and vice-versa on B side. According to his observations, light-toned colors give breadth to forms whereas dark colors shrink

them. Black-colored columns would thus seem meager and consequently less solid. Viollet-le-Duc demonstrated that colors directly affect the perception of solidity and that “a certain order, which seems heavy, may be made to appear light and airy; another, of slender proportions, may be made solid and firm.”<sup>17</sup> The demonstration primarily called for the reexamination of Greek Polychromy according to this principle, but may also apply to the function of shadow as a condition to architectural solidity, as shadow is also traditionally conceived as a color, from the Plinian *tonos* and the Vitruvian *asperitas*, to the article “Black” of Antoine Quatremère de Quincy’s *Encyclopedia* (1825). In this definition, the relation between shadows, their color and the surface they cover on the façade, is explicitly linked to structural matters. An excessive amount of dark shadows would inevitably undermine the appearance of solidity.<sup>18</sup>

### Shadow’s Positive Force

It may seem that shadows can only have a disruptive effect on the structural fiction, and architects ought to be aware of their deceptive impact on solidity. However, shadows could also function as supporting features in the narrative, when used like echoes of the structural forms. Without being magical *per se*, as in Yourcenar’s and Frazer’s texts, the illusionist nature of shadow may be turned at the advantage of the construction, and play a significant role in the perceived solidity. This was for example the case of the gothic arch’s groined ribs whose form was explained by Viollet-le-Duc as the result of a two-folded intention.<sup>19</sup> First, the rib profiles were carved in order to reduce the mass of stone which thus diminished the weight of the structure while maintaining its performance under load. Second, the carving aimed at visually reinforcing the structural strength by drawing thin black lines of vivid shadow in the hollowed moldings, whose nerve manifested the solidity of the arch to the beholder’s eye (Fig. 5). Shadows acted therefore as a positive force in the act of building.

### The Fading of the Shadow

In addition to what has been said so far, it should be underlined that the structural function of shadow was established according to traditional masonry properties. Its function, either related to magic or to illusionism, was thought relevant

with respect to massive bodies of stone. The development of iron and glass in building techniques during the 19th century caused drastic changes, and metallic structures were considered to be unable to cast any shadow. The unease of architects towards iron architecture was somehow similar to the one inspired by Peter Schlemihl, the hero of Von Chamisso's novel: once he had sold his shadow to the devil for a bottomless wallet, his peers rejected him, frightened by the half-ghost he had become.<sup>20</sup> In the same fashion, the shadowless metal architecture seemed to no longer belong to the physical world in which every building must be anchored. Furthermore, large reflective glass surfaces associated with iron architecture were incompatible with the very conditions of existence of shadows and accentuated their disappearance. The 1851 Universal Exhibition in London, with the construction of the Crystal Palace, marked the physical embodiment of a dream of transparency and immateriality that architects had long cherished.

*“The Crystal Palace is a building of glass and iron of the most primitive type that has nevertheless clearly and purely become form. It is a building of glazed iron latticework - a pure pattern of lines and surfaces - that dissolves the structure's true weight. The traditional contrasts of light and shadow that affected proportions of form in past architecture have disappeared here, making way for evenly distributed light and creating a space of shadowless luminosity”.*<sup>21</sup>

Ludwig Hilberseimer's praise of the Palace in 1927 illustrated the Modern wish to definitely ban shadows from architecture, which perhaps needs to be questioned nowadays. This essay simply aimed at opening a new viewpoint on their historical role in edification, and the parallel between the theorization of a discipline with no place for magic and that of the disappearance of shadow should be examined further.

## Endnotes

1. Marguerite Yourcenar, “The Milk of Death,” in *Oriental Tales*, trans. Alberto Manguel, Farrar, Straus and Giroux (New York, 1985), 39–41.
2. Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough; a Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1925).
3. Frazer, 191–92. The book is also quoted by a few researches on shadows; Donald Kunze, “Skiagraphy and the Ipsum of Architecture,” ed. David Murray, *Via 11 : Architecture and Shadow*, no. 11 (1990): 63; Roberto Casati, *La Découverte de l'ombre : de Platon à Galilée, l'histoire d'une énigme qui a fasciné les grands esprits de l'humanité* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), 35.

4. Thomas Da Costa Kaufmann, "The Perspective of Shadows : The History of the Theory of Shadow Projection," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 38 (1975): 258–87; Michael Baxandall, *Shadows and Enlightenment* (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 1995).
5. Victor Stoichita mentioned how European tradition could read in a person's shadow their soul, and saw in their soul their shadow. Victor I. Stoichita, *Brève histoire de l'ombre* (Genève: Droz, 2000), 168.
6. Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), book VII, chapter 12. In French, the text was translated as such: "L'effroi que fait naître l'ombre développe naturellement un sentiment de vénération dans les âmes", Leon Battista Alberti, *L'Art d'édifier*, trans. Françoise Choay and Pierre Caye (Paris: Le Seuil, 2004), 354.
7. Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, "Perceiving Shape from Shading," *Scientific American* 259, no. 2 (1988): 76–83.
8. Pierre Gros, "De la rhétorique à l'architecture : l'ambiguïté de l'asperitas," *Voces* 2 (1991): 73–79.
9. "asperitatem intercolumniorum". Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morgan Morris Hicky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), book III, chapter 3, section 9.
10. "...cum aspectus eius scaenae propter asperitatem eblantdirtur omnium uisus...". Vitruvius, VII-5:9.
11. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 1stAD, XXXV:29.
12. See Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, VI-2; and the story of Parrhasius and Zeuxis in Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, XXXV:65.
13. Arden Reed, "Signifying Shadows," ed. David Murray, *Via 11: Architecture and Shadow*, no. 11 (1990): 15.
14. "For the thickness of the shafts must be enlarged in proportion to the increase of the distance between the columns. In the Aerostyle, for instance, if only a ninth or tenth part is given to the thickness, the column will look thin and mean, because the width of the intercolumniations is such that the air seems to eat away and diminish the thickness of such shafts... We must therefore follow the rules of symmetry required by each kind of building. Then, too, the columns at the corners should be made thicker than the others by a fiftieth of their own diameter, because they are sharply outlined by the unobstructed air round them, and seem to the beholder slenderer than they are. Hence, we must counteract the ocular deception by an adjustment of proportions". Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, III-3.
15. "...comment le jour & l'ombre peuvent faire paroître les colonnes plus grosses ou plus menuës selon qu'elles sont plus ou moins serrées ; les colonnes A & B paroissant plus menuës que les colonnes C & D, quoy qu'elles soient d'une égale grosseur". Claude Perrault, *Les dix livres d'architecture de Vitruve : corrigez et traduits nouvellement en françois, avec des notes & des figures* (Paris: Coignard, 1673), 78. Translated by the author.
16. "Si l'air signifie icy la lumiere, comme il y a une grande apparence, il semble que les Colonnes serrées les unes contre les autres doivent faire un effet contraire à ce qui est dit icy, c'est-à-dire que plus elles sont pressées, plus elles doivent paroistre menuës, parce qu'une Colonne à qui ses voisines dérobent le jour qui illumineroit ses costez, si elles estoient plus éloignées, est obscurcie à droit & à gauche de deux ombrages qui se confondent avec celuy qui est derriere & qui regne le long du Portique, ce qui diminuë l'apparence de sa grosseur, qui paroistroit tout autrement, si ses costez estant illuminez coupoient plus distinctement cette

ombre qui est derriere ; comme il se voit dans la I. Figure de la Planche XVII. où les Colonnes A B, qui sont serrées l'une contre l'autre paroissent plus menuës que les Colonnes CD, quoy qu'elles soient toutes d'une mesme grosseur. On peut donc dire que la veritable raison de cette apparence de la diminution de la grosseur des Colonnes quand elles sont éloignées, est qu'il semble qu'elles ne sont pas suffisantes pour porter un long entablement ; & qu'aussi le necessité de grossir les Colonnes à mesure qu'on les éloigne l'une de l'autre, est fondée sur ce que la plus grande charge qui est soutenuë, demande quelque chose de plus fort qui la soustienne." Claude Perrault, *Les dix livres d'architecture de Vitruve : corrigez et traduits nouvellement en françois, avec des notes & des figures*, 2nd edition (Paris: Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1684). Translated by the author.

17. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Discourses on Architecture*, trans. Henry Van Brunt (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1875), 252.
18. Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, *Encyclopédie méthodique. Architecture.*, vol. 3 (Paris: Agasse, 1825), 20.
19. "Il est facile de reconnaître que ces tracés sont faits en vue de donner aux profils l'aspect léger qui convient à des arcs de voûtes, en laissant à la pierre le plus de résistance possible. [...] pour qui a observé les effets de la lumière sur des cylindres courbés, sans nerfs, il se fait un passage de demi-teintes, de clairs et d'ombres formant une spirale très-allongée, détruisant la forme cylindrique et laissant des surfaces indécises ; de sorte que les moulures secondaires, avec leurs cavets, prenaient plus d'importance à l'œil que le membre principal. Il fallait nerver celui-ci pour lui donner toute sa valeur et le faire paraître résistant, saillant et léger en même temps". Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire Raisoné de l'architecture Française Du XIème Au XVIème Siècle*, vol. 3 (Paris: B. Bance, 1859), 510–11.
20. Adelbert von Chamisso, *Peter Schlemihls Wundersame Geschichte* (Nuremberg: Johann Leonhard Schrag, 1814).
21. Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Metropolisarchitecture*, trans. Richard Anderson and Pier Vittorio Aureli (New York: GSAPP Columbia University, 2014), 220.



# ONE CRITIC, ONE ARCHITECT: THE BIRTH OF THE READER

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## **Abstract**

It is possible to tackle the problem of architectural criticism's history by a means of a monographic approach. But what should the historian of architectural criticism focus on: the text, or the architecture that is its subject? Does the monographic approach in architecture criticism deal with critics, or with architects? In this contribution, both options are examined, by looking back on the editorial process proceeding the publication of two anthologies: a book from 2011 collecting writings by Belgian critic Geert Bekaert (1928–2016) and an anthology from 2019 of critical texts on the work of OMA/Rem Koolhaas.

## **Keywords**

Criticism, OMA/Rem Koolhaas, Postwar Architecture



Constructing a history of architectural criticism requires some kind of demarcation: it is not possible, or at least very difficult, to write *the* history of architectural criticism in general. And even when that would be the aim, no historian can take into account every piece of criticism ever produced in all the languages of the world, if only because every definition of criticism always excludes texts that, in one way or another, do also deal with architecture.

This problem is, of course, a problem of architectural historians too, who inevitably, from the start, have to select a “unit” – a portion of all architecture that exists and has ever existed. “The term ‘unit,’” as Andrew Leach has written in *What is Architectural History?*, “here refers to the way the historian divides into workable portions the ‘total history’ of architecture – the hypothetical but obviously impossible complete past of everything that has happened everywhere at all times as it can be understood from all perspectives. The question of the historian’s approach can also help us to appreciate how he or she deals with the management of architectural history’s apparent demand for infinite relativism, whereby all the knowledge depends on the point of view from which it is generated and represented.”<sup>1</sup> As this last sentence indicates, selecting a “workable” portion does not imply to give in to specialization: the work of every historian intends to end up at findings that, no matter how modestly, claim wider validity. But, again: how to arrive at this point, and what should be selected as material?

To overcome these “epistemological obstacles that do not yet appear to have been removed,” as Hélène Jannièrè wrote in 2010, it is possible to tackle the problem of architectural criticism’s history by a means of a monographic approach.<sup>2</sup> The “workable portion” is in that case one oeuvre, one “author” or one body of work – an apparently self-evident starting point, having its roots in art history, and more specifically in Vasari’s *Vite* from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The difference is that this “unit,” in the case of architectural criticism, immediately deduplicates: are we talking about how the work of one *architect* has been criticized, or about what one *critic* has written about what a number of architects have done? The specificity of criticism (and its histories) is that its “producers,” the critics, are equally important as their subjects, or the work of their subjects – the architects. Authorship, in criticism, can never be completely relegated to the critic, because criticism requires and thrives on the authorship of architects, as suppliers of content, ideas and positions. Suggesting, however, that the authorship of the architect is prevalent,

implies a faint and in the end superfluous position of the critic as a parrot who “translates” or repeats what the architect has done. In other words: what should the historian of architectural criticism focus on: the text, or the architecture that is its subject? Does the monographic approach in architecture criticism deal with critics, or with architects?

While it is common in art history to examine or to anthologize the writings of critics, as well as to collect essays from different periods on the work of key figures (with the series *October Files* as a major example, collecting texts by different authors on the work of artists such Isa Genzken or Sherrie Levine), this is less the case in architecture. Some books and studies do exist, for example on (or with) the work of Reyner Banham, Georg Baird or Colin Rowe on the one hand, or on the critical reception of the Smithsons or MVRDV, on the other hand.<sup>3</sup>

In the past decade, I have tried both options – I have examined, historicized and anthologized the work of one critic, and I have examined, historicized and anthologized the criticism with the work of one architect and his office as its subject. I do not want to suggest that I have done so consciously, as a preparation for this session or for the problems it deals with; both projects are closely connected, and, as these things go, they succeeded each other organically or according to opportunities. But I do think that looking back, retroactively, can be valuable for discussing that particular phenomenon of architectural criticism and its history.

I completed my PhD in 2014 as a study of the work of one architecture critic from Belgium, Geert Bekaert (1928-2016). I edited his (numerous) writings (in Dutch) and published an English anthology in 2011, consisting of four sections: a first part with theoretical essays, a second part with texts on buildings in Europe from the 1980s or 1990s, a third part with essays on Belgian architects, and a final part with essays on international architects, such as Aldo Rossi or Le Corbusier.<sup>4</sup> I also tried to interpret Bekaert’s activities by dividing them into six periods, each period with a thematic emphasis – the fifties devoted to religion, the sixties to dwelling, the seventies to architecture’s relationship to society, the eighties to history, the nineties to the city, and the most recent decade to architecture culture and its success or “promotion.”<sup>5</sup>

Concerning criticism’s history, this research project revealed on the one hand the singularity of Bekaert’s position as a critic, but on the other hand also the

characteristics of an historical period of criticism. Bekaert wrote mainly in Dutch and French; he approached architecture as an autonomous and partly artistic activity, focusing on individual authorship; he was a generalist critic, writing for diverse media and also making documentaries for Belgian television; he had a religious past as a Jesuit – he quit the order in 1974 – but he was open to contemporary developments, often preferring the most recent developments. But reading and interpreting his texts also enables to sketch a specific history of architectural criticism in the Western world from the fifties until the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – a period in which all critics had to deal with similar choices or obstacles, and in which criticism existed and functioned in different kinds of in-between areas that also make up its identity, such as the zone in between academia and general culture; the combinations between history, theory and criticism, based on the at the time still obvious assumption that they cannot be separated; the compromise between the interpretative freedom of the critic and the themes emphasized by the architect; the equilibrium between operative criticism that favours practices or architectures and a more pluralist approach that is interested in, and committed to, a wide variety of positions.

One of the many architects Bekaert wrote about was the Dutchman Rem Koolhaas (born in 1944) and his Office for Metropolitan Architecture. It was most of all because of my study of the work of Bekaert that I developed the project to anthologize existing writings on the work of OMA. The activities of Koolhaas as a writer and a (paper) architect have received quite a lot of reaction, mediation, and interpretation, before the foundation of OMA in January 1975, and continuing up to this day. But although many critics devoted attention to this work, in different languages and contexts, what prevails, in the end, is the voice of Koolhaas, by means of his own writings, but also by means of many interviews, published in for example issues of *El Croquis*. It is the architect himself who has defined the words and the ideas to understand his projects. This is above all visible in *S,M,L,XL* from 1995, a monograph with, as far as texts are concerned (and leaving aside the glossary of quotations running throughout the book) only one author – Koolhaas himself, assisted, as the cover indicates, by graphic designer Bruce Mau.

One of the aims of the anthology, therefore, was to liberate OMA's work from its principal author, and to show, in this case but also in general, that it is not

the architect himself, no matter how eloquent he is, who is best equipped to talk about his work. For practical reasons, but also because the work of OMA elicited the most profound critical response in that period – and lost some of its coherence and focus from the second half of the 1990s onwards – it was decided to limit the selection in the anthology to the period starting in the years just before the publication of *Delirious New York*, and ending with the reception of the other important book by OMA, *S,M,L,XL*, in 1995. The anthology is structured into ten parts, ten groups of texts, devoted to one building or project (The Hague Dance Theater, the Kunsthal in Rotterdam, the Villa dall’Ava in Paris, the project for Euralille), to one of the two books, or to one period of five or six years.<sup>6</sup>

As I have already indicated, Bekaert was one of the first critics to write extensively on the production of OMA in Dutch. It is here that the two monographic approaches intersect and get mixed up: there is a study of the oeuvre of one critic, and then there is a second study of the critical reception of one architectural oeuvre. But what happens when we decide to use two “workable portions” for historicizing criticism *at the same time* – that of the critic and that of the architect? What can we learn from the writings of one critic about one architect, based on a profound knowledge of their respective approaches? What happens, in other words, when Bekaert *meets* Koolhaas, or vice versa?

The work of OMA was, during the 1970s and following the publication of Koolhaas’ book *Delirious New York* in 1978, subjected to a more international or rather American and British reception. Koolhaas was a fellow of the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies in New York, and already in 1975, a thematic issue of *Architectural Design* was devoted to the work of OMA, edited by Charles Jencks, and including essays by Kenneth Frampton, George Baird and Demetri Porphyrios. It was only in the 1980s, when OMA established an office in Rotterdam and began to develop projects for Europe and the Netherlands, that also Dutch-speaking critics like Bekaert started to devote attention to the work of Koolhaas.<sup>7</sup> What is valuable and remarkable, in this case, is that Bekaert did so on a regular basis: his first article on OMA was published in 1982; he co-produced a television documentary on the work of the office in 1985; he wrote newspaper articles in favour of projects by Koolhaas for the City Hall in the Hague and for the Netherlands Architecture institute in Rotterdam; he co-organized the competition for the Sea Trade Center in Zeebrugge, that was won by OMA in 1989;

he remained somewhat silent on the subject during the 1990s; and he returned to the topic of OMA in 2004, reviewing in a long essay the exhibition *Content* on show at the time in Rotterdam and Berlin. Between the publication of Bekaert's first essay from 1982 and his final essay on OMA from 2004, lies a period of 22 years. What a comparison between these two texts can show is a more critical attitude and even a certain disenchantment with the work of OMA, that did not completely, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, lived up to the promises it presented at the beginning of the 1980s. This pair of essays by the same author also reveals a general evolution of architectural criticism at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Bekaert's partial disenchantment is reflected in or by the work of OMA and in the writings of Koolhaas, but also in Western architecture culture in general. His harsh suggestion from 2004 that Koolhaas' "copyrighted concepts ... are beginning to resemble the ravings of a madman"<sup>8</sup> also reflects the evolution of the position of the architect as cultural producer, and the evolution of culture in general, following the turn of the century. What Bekaert writes about OMA's or AMO's contribution to Documenta in Kassel in 2001 – "This daily deluge of images could go on forever, were it not for the fact that they soon cease to have any effect"<sup>9</sup> – seems applicable to the way architecture culture has more or less functioned since then: as an endless stream of production, without ruptures, milestones or renewals. This also, of course, changes the role of the critic, who has to be much more personally selective in the subjects he writes about, and who has to become a kind of specialist – not in architecture at large, but in one of its many subdisciplines, exactly with the danger of no longer reaching a larger audience. This might be an unexpected outcome of the decline of the culture of the so-called starchitect: if today, architects well known by "everyone," or at least by every architect, have become increasingly rare, this also means that it becomes more difficult for a critic to address a general readership. Who reads, in other words, the writings of critics?

This difficult question is a paradoxical outcome of the two monographic projects dealing with the history of architectural criticism that I have described. When selecting, firstly, a critic, secondly, an architect, and thirdly, the combination of both, it is not so much their own authorship that gets squared or reinforced. Thinking about what one critic wrote about one architect is an endeavour worth

pursuing exactly because of the promise it holds that both “authors” neutralize each other, or at least each other’s authorship. Focusing on one critic and one architect at the same time, can therefore lead, to refer to Roland Barthes’ famous essay from 1968, to the death of both authors, and more importantly (because that is what criticism should be all about) to the birth of the reader.

## Endnotes

1. Andrew Leach, *What is Architectural History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 43.
2. Hélène Jannièrè, “Architecture Criticism: Identifying an Object of Study,” *OASE*, no. 81 (2010): 36. In her recent book, Jannièrè effectively removes a lot of the obstacles: Hélène Jannièrè, *Critique et architecture: un état des lieux contemporain* (Paris: Éditions de la Villette, 2019).
3. Todd Gannon, *Reyner Banham and the paradoxes of high tech* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2017); *The architect and the public: on George Baird’s contribution to architecture*, ed. Roberto Damiani (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2020); *Reckoning with Colin Rowe: ten architects take position*, ed. Emmanuel Petit (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2015); *Alison & Peter Smithson: a critical anthology*, ed. Max Risselada (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2011); *Reading MVDREV*, ed. Véronique Patteeuw (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2003).
4. Geert Bekaert. *Rooted in the Real. Writings on Architecture*, ed. Christophe Van Gerrewey (Ghent: WZV, 2011).
5. The PhD was written and published in Dutch; a summary was published as: Christophe Van Gerrewey, “The right to architecture: Geert Bekaert (1928-2016), a critic from Belgium,” *The Journal of Architecture*, no. 4 (2020), 444–471, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2020.1767175>.
6. OMA/Rem Koolhaas. *A Critical Reader from Delirious New York to S,M,L,XL*, ed. Christophe Van Gerrewey (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2019).
7. On this critical reception, see: Christophe Van Gerrewey, “Hope has returned. The glorious reception of OMA/Rem Koolhaas in the Dutch-speaking world,” *Architectural Theory Review*, no. 3 (2013), 356–371, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13264826.2013.875615>
8. Geert Bekaert, “Dealing with Koolhaas,” in Geert Bekaert. *Rooted in the Real*, 497.
9. *Idem*.



# **ERSKINEAN ISOMORPHISMS. THE TRANSFORMATION OF BYKER UNDER THE MICROSCOPE (1969-1982)**

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## **Abstract**

This paper focus on the development of marginal urbanization studies Urbanism Laboratory of Catalunya Polytechnic University (LUB/UPC) led by Manuel de Solà-Morales and Joan Busquets. It aims to demonstrate that the borrowing from Latin American slum and squatters settlements managing and planning experiences not only supported LUB in its discovery of marginal urbanizations in Barcelona and Mediterranean Europe but also has helped this research group to build a pioneer Ibero-American approach and construct its distinctive contribution to typomorphology studies: the greater emphasis on urban form as a process and on the role played by urban infrastructure networks in it. In order to do that we analyze the ensemble LUB researchers' publications on this subject between 1971 and 1976 through this double key: the quest for proximity to the Latin American context and innovations in typomorphology studies.

## **Keywords**

Marginal Urbanization, Barcelona's Neighborhood of Corea, Typomorphology Studies, Latin American Cities



This paper discusses how preexisting social and material conditions influenced Ralph Erskine's project for the redevelopment of the Byker area in Newcastle. It contends that Erskine and his design team deployed an unusual combination of modernist policies of urban renewal, affiliations with pre-modern urban traditions, and, most significantly, a conscious attempt to create complex isomorphic relations between the new material organization and the established community that it was meant to re-house. From those three factors, the first one dictated an almost complete clearing of the site, preserving only a few structures and thoroughfares. This process was traumatic given that the new dwellings were destined to replace old ones, but not its inhabitants. The members of the Byker community had to endure the uncertainties of relocation and the potential destruction of their communities, conducting their daily lives in a stressful construction site over the course of a decade. If today it may not come as a surprise that the design strategy was intended to counteract the destructive effects of the proposed site clearance, such propositions constituted a novel approach to urban redevelopment at the time of their implementation and have been appropriated by numerous practitioners and administrative bodies worldwide ever since.

### **Preliminary actions**

Erskine had immigrated to Sweden in 1939, disillusioned by "British conservatism" and motivated by an interest in the Swedish socialist experience. Setting up his office in the small town of Drottningholm, on the outskirts of Stockholm, after a period of acclimatization, Erskine managed to forge a reputation as a socially committed architect by the mid 1950's. Toward the late 1950's his name would acquire greater recognition through his participation in the CIAM congress in Otterlo and through his attendance to the meetings of Team 10. His career in the UK would take off in the late 1960's, when he was able to design and build his first two projects in England, Clare Hall -a student residence built in Cambridge in 1968/69-, and a small housing estate in the New Town of Killingworth, north of Newcastle, obtained in 1969 through an invited competition. These projects received positive reviews, opening the path to the much larger challenge in Byker. With such image of trustworthiness, Erskine was able to approach the situation in Newcastle with greater autonomy and a certain leeway in establishing the terms under which he would take up the commission.<sup>1</sup>

Submitted at the end of 1968, Erskine's initial proposal involved a series of priorities and operational conditions -a rare occurrence in the British context, which was focused on formal rather than procedural issues- such as the establishment of an office in the area, the need to hold meetings in the office rather than at the Town Hall, and the preservation of a number of existing buildings deemed of value for the community, such as baths, churches, a bowling green, pubs, and community centers. The document proposed the preservation of the community structure as physical units, a "rolling program of building demolitions and handovers" meant not to force anybody away from the site, consultation, and participation processes.

By September 1969, Erskine had set up shop at a former funeral parlor located in the middle of the area to be cleared and redeveloped.<sup>2</sup> Vernon Gracie, his associate and site architect, moved into the flat above the office thus establishing a permanent presence in the area, which would last until the project was prematurely finished in 1982.<sup>3</sup> The Plan of Intent (PI) was presented to the Newcastle Corporation in early 1970, and work on the 81 hectare site commenced shortly thereafter, carrying on almost uninterruptedly for twelve years. As a planning instrument, the PI was not a "master plan, but rather a means of providing a sufficiently flexible framework for the redevelopment, so that early experiences could be used to develop later stages, both in terms of observed changes in people's ambitions, changes in needs and therefore changes in physical planning decisions."<sup>4</sup> The Plan stated that the general programmatic goal was the provision of 2500 to 3000 dwelling units and community facilities, and suggested a complex phasing strategy. Approximately 80% of the dwellings would be built as low-rise terraces or semi-detached houses, while the rest, mostly smaller apartments, would be piled along the edge of the site, creating a visual and sound-insulating building. The latter would shelter the low-rise areas, creating a social and environmental microclimate, building upon Erskine's earlier studies for high-latitude cities. The possibility of revitalization -as opposed to clearance- was considered but was ultimately dropped due to the poor site planning and material conditions of the existing terraces, which dated back to the 1860's. A tentative layout and phasing strategy attached to the PI broke down the redevelopment site into twelve autonomous areas.

## Innovations in Management Practices

Erskine often explained his conception of participation as being primarily that of a tool to bridge the distance between architects' views on habitation (inevitably influenced by their being "part of the establishment") and those of the users. He viewed participatory processes as a means by which "information, though not necessarily power," could be moved across the societal divide separating the architect from the working class tenant.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the 1970's, this *ethos* was sustained by the office, even at the expense that "community participation work [had to be] subsidized from the architectural fees, helped by the low overheads of the on-site office."<sup>6</sup> In sum, while the pursuit of heterogeneity was seen during the 1960's as a necessary response to the image of a society requiring greater opportunities for individualization and identification, Byker inverted the relationship between user participation and architectural form that was characteristic of the utopian architectures of its time: instead of thinking that participation would foster architectural complexity and social legitimacy -as did the likes of Yona Friedman and Lucien Kroll-, Byker utilized complexity to instill user involvement and raise public interest in the project.

## Retroactive *Tabula Rasa*

An assessment of largescale planning and organization in Byker reveals the strategies by means of which a heterogeneous environment was produced. The comparison between the preexisting pattern of streets and built fabric, and the new one drawn up by Erskine provides a key to understand how the project sought to buttress the reputation of the architecture of social housing in the face of discredit that had been mounting during the 1960's.<sup>7</sup> The perception that the demolition and clearing of the site of Byker would pave the way to a "Brasilia of the north" -as T. Dan Smith would have it- would need to be set in reverse to understand the operation. Indeed, the massive clearings of existing housing that began in the late 1960's were not targeted against a pre-modern, inefficient, or labyrinthine urban fabric, for those were not the characteristics of the old Byker. Erskine's proposal was set in opposition to all forms of serial production in housing: both the suspect high-rise schemes of the 1960's, and the *fordism avant-la-lettre* of 1870's Byker.

The rows of terraced houses that had to come down for new Byker to be erected had been catered to the growing class of industrial workers employed in Newcastle's shipbuilding yards since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The accelerated wave of urbanization that accompanied England's industrial revolution since the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century had left little room for anything but the well-known back-to-back typology, at least until the housing movement broke out in the 1840's.<sup>8</sup> In Byker, however, the prevailing house type was the Tyneside flat, which consisted of two stacked apartments with paired doors opening onto the sidewalk. This housing type was laid out in old Byker along narrow blocks and streets running approximately parallel to the contour lines of the site. The main thoroughfares would run north south, across the contour lines, and would be crossed every 50 meters by narrower east-west roads that gave access to most houses. Having no front yard, their backs were separated by an alley that provided access to a small backyard. After almost a century, the quality of old Byker was not only regarded as poor in its material and sanitary conditions, but also as a dry, monotonous architectural pattern. As shown by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's famous pictures, old Byker was, strictly speaking, a modern urban fabric where everyone's houses looked alike, and every street looked like most other streets.

### **Continuity and Disjunction**

Erskine's intervention stemmed from urban traditions that sprang from the critique of the industrial city and advocated a formal return to even earlier sources. His recovery of utopian socialism's speculations on ideal towns is evident in the implementation of enclosed pedestrianized urban precincts. The fractured geometries also manifest an interest in vernacular, pre-modern sceneries akin to those admired by the British Townscape movement.<sup>9</sup> But the sentimentalism conveyed by such images could hardly be reconciled with the brute fact that, aside from salvaging a handful of meaningful buildings, the project erased an entire section of the city. Only a few north-south thoroughfares survived, laying the basis for the geometry of the dwellings adjacent to them or in their vicinity. Emerging from this strategy of organization are *fault-lines* separating areas of coherent geometry. These *fault-lines* are materialized by streets or pedestrian pathways, and at times acquire a greater width, functioning as irregularly shaped communal greens, play areas, or green buffer zones. Within areas of consistent geometry, building layou-

ts are neither in the manner of *Zeilenbauten*, superblocks, or detached houses, but as terraces, U-shape and L-shape blocks usually forming courtyards and providing continuous street frontages. The complexity of the scheme is augmented by the iconic one-mile-long Perimeter Block on the north, and part of the east, and west, edges of the site. Here, the orthogonal, gridded spaces meet an autonomous linear element whose system of continuous geometric regulation allows it to shift repeatedly between straight and curved conditions. This encounter between a vertical and a series of horizontal surfaces is not left to chance or conflict but is mediated by open buffer zones that prevent a violent clash of scales. Despite this, the perimeter block and the gridded low-rise neighborhoods do come into contact at certain points, their juxtaposition formally resolved by the introduction of a transitional building called Link Block. Decreasing in height from five to two levels, Link Blocks are linear structures that insert themselves smoothly within the low-rise areas, bending in plan whenever necessary to remain geometrically consistent, either by being tangent or perpendicular to the Perimeter Block at points where they visually and functionally connect. The combined effect of these integrated systems lends the project its image as a collection of individually recognizable urban fragments. And while this strategy of subdivision was pivotal in allowing the project to be phased over several years, its relevance lies not just on this practical advantage, but also in the complex effects and possibilities it generates at the level of identification, orientation, and integration. In formal terms, the interest of the subdivision strategy applied at Byker lies on the ambiguity between a logic of association among building types of similar scale and footprint, and that of the dialectic among different housing types. This ambiguity affords a continuous character for Byker, despite its broad spectrum of scales, materials, and configurations.

Dunn Terrace—one of the latest areas to be built—exemplifies the effort made to formally integrate a series of individual houses, the curvaceous Perimeter Block, three Link Blocks, and the 40-meter-high Point Block located at the easternmost area of the site. Worth noticing here is the fact that, while this integration creates a cohesive relationship among the various buildings and spaces of Byker, the relationship between Byker as a whole and its outlying neighborhoods transitions from a smooth continuity on the south side, to an abrupt detachment on the north side. Often presented as a pragmatic response to environmental conditions

(a planned motorway on the north and the unfavorable orientation) this uneven consolidation of the border is, perhaps, the single most decisive identity-constructing operation carried out at the scale of the estate. Beyond pragmatic and metaphorical interpretations, the sharp definition of the north border is consistent with the overall purpose of creating various degrees and modes of formal differentiation in the goal of translating the singularity and complexity of the structure (real or imagined) of the existing community into a new material organization. The effects of the operation remain ambiguous, however, insofar as the Perimeter Block works both as an isomorphic emblem of the community as a whole, and as a device that consolidates and segregates specific groups of user-residents, differentiating the community from within. The fact that the definition of the border becomes fuzzy on the south edge of Byker, where the Perimeter Block typology is absent, must be interpreted both in light of the internal logic of the project, and as the mapping of a condition of the field. On one hand, it suggests that the balance of the scheme had to be tipped so that different densities and boundary conditions on the ground would be generated, which would then provide better orientation and diverse social atmospheres. On the other, the new material identity of the community could not ignore the continuity of the pre-existing urban and social fabric, i.e., the fact that it had external functional and symbolic links. In sum, the massing strategy of Byker conveys the notion that both continuity and local disjunction are positive conditions of the existing community that needed to be captured, and perhaps exacerbated, by the new configuration.

### **Plot Unveiled**

In closing, the articulation between the goals of the design, and the techniques by which they were pursued, involved two complementary sets of decisions, one belonging to the realm of spatial planning (dimensional coordination, layout, massing and circulation) and another one aimed at choking the visual field in order to dilute the deterministic effects of the previous set. Communities sanctioned by the architects' initial planning decisions would be opened to chance encounters, fostering the emergence of unplanned, *eventual* communities. Leaving behind the image of a homogeneous working-class community, they would be ready to recast themselves into a new state of balanced social differentiation. This was the plot behind Byker's initiative of radical architectural heterogeneity, at the boundary

between the end of welfare state policies and the beginning of globalization and Thatcherist neoliberalization.

This paper is an excerpt from my PhD dissertation, “In the Name of the User. Public Housing and the Agenda of Architectural Heterogeneity”, (PUC, 2016). I wish to acknowledge the generous financial support provided by Elemental Chile throughout this project.

## Endnotes

1. . Importantly, the point of departure carried the blueprint of labor-party leader T. Dan Smith and Arthur Grey -his conservative successor-, who was responsible for inviting Erskine in September of 1968 to submit a reappraisal of the proposals that had been put forward by the Housing Architect’s Department in March 1967.
2. .Michael Drage, “Byker: Surprising the Colleagues for 35 Years. A Social History of Ralph Erskine’s Arkitektkontor AB in Newcastle”, in *Twentieth Century Architecture 9: Housing the Twentieth Century Nation*. Edited by Elaine Harwood and Alan Powers (London: Twentieth Century Society, 2008).
3. .“The main reasons really for establishing the office within Byker were, firstly that it would enable us to get to know the user client at first hand and secondly to try and demystify the architects’ role. Thirdly, [...] formed a point at which the local authority could come down into the area; officers could also operate from within the area and the office could form a pressure center where people would come to express their opinions and enable us to determine more accurately the nature of their requirements.” See: Vernon Gracie, “Pitfalls in Participation: A cautionary tale (of success)”, in Richard Hatch, *The Scope of Social Architecture* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984): 196.
4. . See: *Housing Review* (11-12/1974): 152.
5. .See: “Erskine talks to the AJ”, *The Architects’ Journal* (3/3/1976): 417.
6. .Drage (2008): 153.
7. .Suspicion was aimed primarily at high-density schemes based on the tower block typology, the production of which peaked in 1966. Studies denouncing their negative influence on health and social conduct, coupled with decreasing quality in construction standards (exposed by the explosion and collapse of Ronan Point tower in London in 1968) contributed significantly to this perception. See: Pearl Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats: Some of the Human Problems Involved in Multi-story Housing* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1971). For a recent commentary and interpretation of Jephcott’s work see: Ignaz Strebel and Jane M. Jacobs, “People and Buildings: Pearl Jephcott and Science of Life in High Flats”, in *Candide. Journal for Architectural Knowledge* No. 7 (2013).
8. . Back-to-back houses were typically single aspect, two-story boxes opening onto a small front yard, or directly onto the street, and lacked facilities such as a WC or running water, the privies usually being located at the end of a shared alleyway or courtyard.
9. . According to Erskine himself, the character of Byker was that of “participation, cluster-grouping, human scale, and an almost medieval strategy of jumble and irregularity”. See: *The Architects’ Journal* (3/3/1976).

# MARINA WAISMAN'S SUMMARIOS (1976-1991): HERALDING THE LAST QUARTER OF 20TH CENTURY ARCHITECTURAL DEBATES

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## **Abstract**

Marina Waisman (1920-1997) was a most important historian, critic, and professor of architecture in Latin America in the 20th century. In addition to her research and teaching academic activities Waisman developed an intense editorial career at the Summa/Nueva Visión editorial, having created and directed the thematic collection Summarios. Despite her international recognition as an architect, historian, specialized journalist, and architectural critic, her complete work is still little known in Brazil and outside the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America. This paper is an advance of ongoing research surveying the complete content of the Summarios collection. The collected data will provide a basis to carry out quantitative and qualitative analyses on the geographic and generational distribution of the authors, the typological scope of the themes covered, the more frequent words and expressions, and other themes that would stand out by the critical analysis of the material. This article also briefly discusses the importance of architectural journals as vectors of cultural dissemination and presents some considerations about the contents of Summarios' first five issues.

## **Keywords**

Marina Waisman; architectural criticism; architectural journals; text mining



## Introduction

A graduate of the National University of Cordoba, Argentina (1945), architect Marina Waisman (1920-1997) was the most important historian, critic, and professor of architecture in Latin America in the 20th century. In addition to her research and teaching academic activities beginning in 1948, Waisman developed an intense editorial career at the *Summa/Nueva Visión* editorial after 1970, having created and directed the thematic collection *Summarios*. This paper is an advance of an ongoing research<sup>1</sup> surveying the complete content of that collection, comprising the 135 issues published between 1976 and 1991. It was organized in thematic issues dealing with Argentinian, Latin American, and international debates of the 1970s to the 1990s, including around 500 articles authored by a wide variety of international contributors, from renowned masters to young generations of architects, historians, and critics. The research aims to highlight the significant role of the *Summarios* collection among Latin American professionals, both in the educational and professional realms, as a very important source for the dissemination and the critical debate of then-contemporary architectural trends in architecture.

Despite Marina Waisman's international recognition as an architect, historian, specialized journalist, and architectural critic, her complete work is still little known in Brazil and outside the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America. There has been a discreet increase in the number of research studies and events examining her professional contribution<sup>2</sup> in the last ten years. Yet, we have no notice at the present<sup>3</sup> of any comprehensive study focusing on Waisman's editorial/journalistic performance. It is not a simple task, since it is a legacy of the great amplitude, including dozens of articles published over four decades in *Summa* and other local and international journals plus her editorials, articles, and coordination of the *Summarios* collection.

By examining the published content of the complete collection of the thematic journal *Summarios* we hope to contribute to discussing its importance among several generations of Latin American architects, in the dissemination and the critical debate on architecture in the last quarter of the 20th century. A debate that was not limited to local and regional themes but included the construction of a critical instance about contemporary trends of architecture, urbanism, landscape

architecture, ecology, heritage, history, and theory of architecture, considering the international panorama of that time.

The collected data of the complete content of the *Summarios* collection will also provide a basis to carry out quantitative and qualitative analyses on the geographic and generational distribution of the authors, the geographic and typological scope of the themes covered, and the more frequent words and expressions and other themes that would stand out by the critical analysis of that material.

### **Journals as architectural culture vectors**

In his book “*Revistas, Arquitectura y Ciudad. Representaciones en la Cultura Moderna*” Horacio Torrent, affirms that:

*Architectural magazines were fundamental in the constitution of the world of ideas of modern architecture and urbanism. During the twentieth century periodicals assumed in part the role that treatises had for classical architecture: to be diffusers of concepts, images, and forms; but, at the same time, they were constituent elements of the disciplinary field, by their initial yearnings and their later impacts.*<sup>4</sup>

The role of architectural magazines in the diffusion and debates of local and international themes is also addressed by Ana Estebán Maluenda’s doctoral thesis<sup>5</sup>, demonstrating the importance of these sources as expressive documents in the formation of mentalities within the academic and professional environment of architecture. Her research on architectural publications was supported by quantitative data parameters analysis, adopting the “mining” methodological approach, that she and her team have been developing in other studies<sup>6</sup>. This systematic data treatment has proven to be able to subsidize both objective and quantitative conclusions and support qualitative inferences and conclusions.

The foundations of this quantitative/comparative approach applied to the architectural field were initially announced in the articles published in *Summa* and *Summarios* in the 1970s by Argentinian architect and critic Juan Pablo Bonta. He pioneeringly proposed the possibility of using computer systems to measure and quantify the frequency of terms, as a way of unraveling or dismantling the plots and structures of the texts under study, especially when the sources under consideration are varied and extensive in textual length and dispersed over time. This

subject appears, for example, in Bonta's book "*Anatomía de la interpretación Arquitectónica*" (1975)<sup>7</sup>, and was cited by the author in the article "*Arquitectura hablada*", published in the *Summarios* #5 issue (1977).<sup>8</sup>

Latin American architectural journals of the 20th century have been systematically studied by the academic field; most studies focus on the editorial panorama until the 1960s. Coincidentally, the architectural publications scene in Brazil shrank in the 1970s, with the ending of the activities of *Módulo* (interrupted in 1964) and *Acrópole* (interrupted in 1971) and before the emergence of *Pampulha* (beginning in 1979), *Projeto* (beginning in 1979), *AU* (beginning in 1985), and the new phase of *Módulo* (beginning in 1975). By then, Argentinean architecture magazine *Summa* (beginning in 1968) was one of the few sources of architectural debates available in Brazil, along with European and North American journals.

The *Summarios* collection appeared at that moment (1976), as an offshoot of *Summa*. It was welcomed not only in Argentina: the collection had some dissemination in Brazil and can be found in the university libraries of architecture courses in effect during those decades (the 1980s); something similar most probably happened in other Latin and Ibero-American countries<sup>9</sup>. However, the importance and pertinence of the *Summarios* collection in the Argentinean, Spanish-speaking, and Portuguese-speaking professional and academic contexts in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have not yet been systematically considered.

To address this issue, the present ongoing research will follow the methodological framework of previous studies conducted by the author and her research team<sup>10</sup>. This systematic analysis that has been applied to panoramic books dealing with Modern Architecture history can also be applied to collections of architectural journals. Taken as a whole, i.e., as an assortment of great breadth and variation, they allow a fruitful quantitative systematization of data and the gathering of enough research material to make a wide range and breadth of well-grounded qualitative inferences.

The quantitative results are highly relevant for the ongoing research's grounding, yet they are not its ultimate purpose. Once the information is systematized, the research will proceed into the qualitative analysis, of varied scopes: textual, visual, graphic. Other creative and innovative ways will be used to study how the arguments and narratives are explicitly displayed or implicitly arranged; how the themes and authors presented in the collection are distributed, temporally,

geographically, and quantitatively; how connections, interlacements, and impacts among texts and authors seem to occur, emphasizing the importance of comparing the dates to check the consistency of the analysis about the arrangements, plots, and narrative structures<sup>11</sup>.

### **The first five issues: building a critical approach**

The themes chosen for each issue of *Summarios* are quite varied, not only along its 25 years of existence but at every step of the way. The constant among all the issues is not their subjects, but how any topic was treated: not as a reproduction of a novelty coming from the outside, but as an inside opportunity to examine “profoundly significant aspects of the current historical conjuncture”<sup>12</sup>. Marina Waisman’s writings always considered the present not as a counterfeit future, in the avant-garde tradition of idealized utopias, but as a dense and complex historical moment, never dissociating history, theory, criticism, and praxis. The contents of the *Summarios* issues included both theoretical and/or critical texts and design projects, all of them presented not as isolated features but as inseparable parts of the architectural debate at hand. As she would later summarize, in her book “El Interior de la Historia” (1990):

*History, theory, and criticism are three ways of reflecting on architecture, and their close relationship to the reality of architectural production has already been highlighted. [...] The praxis provides the objects of reflection; reflection, in turn, provides the concepts that will guide the praxis*<sup>13</sup>.

*Summarios*’ first issue title was “Trends in American architecture. Charles Moore or inclusivity”. Waisman’s justification for this choice, to open the collection, shows her desire to create a critical approach to whatever the theme at hand. An attitude that will prevail throughout the 25 years duration of the collection:

*After the rise and fall of utopias; after the methodological fever and its subsequent disenchantment; after the siren song of indeterminacy and total flexibility had lost its first fascination, we are inclined to appreciate seemingly modest and anachronistic achievements, which bring us closer to the common man again, and which recognize certain forgotten needs - among them, that of nurturing roots. Perhaps that is why the time seems to have come to fully appreciate Charles Moore and his attitude to architecture. In the face of pure theory, Moore proposes*

*practice as the essential foundation of his process; in the face of abstraction, the world of concrete facts; in the face of mathematics, fantasy, intuition, and human desires; in the face of logic, all the richness of history*<sup>14</sup>.

This statement was about Charles Moore, but it may be considered as also about how she proposed to deal, in the *Summarios* collection, with the concrete reality of the architectural panorama, and how she was going to organize the selection of the themes of a serialized architectural publication. Whose goal was to be consolidated as an “indispensable synthetic library for the architect and the student of architecture, a library that will help them to maintain a demanding level of information”<sup>15</sup>.

The five first issues of *Summarios* show a notable amplitude of subjects and include a variety of authors. Most of the articles were originals, written by order for that issue, by authors ranging from practice architects to university researchers, suggesting a complex dynamic editorial activity to organize them.

Issue #1 (November 1976, 32 pages) is about Charles Moore and the “crisis of the International Style and the post-kahnian space: the United States in search of its identity”, with articles by Moore, Claudio D’Amato, and Bernard Wauthier. Issue #2 (December 1976, 36 pages) is about “Architecture + Solar energy”; it was prepared by Italian-Argentinian architect Enrico Tedeschi with articles by Carlos de Rosa, mentioning the contribution of the “Solar Energy Research Group” at the University of Salta, Argentina, and the “Housing Research Group” at the IADIZA<sup>16</sup> (Argentine Dryland Research Institute, in Mendoza). Issue #3 (December 1973, 36 pages) is titled “Moshe Safdie, or the anti-utopia”, with projects and texts by him and including a final article by Waisman, “From megastructure to hilltop village” where she states:

*Moshe Safdie is not an avant-garde architect. [...] However, we have pointed out here some valuable critical instances in his work: the critique of the ways of life in North America; that of the production of the habitat, both in the constructive as well as in the financial and legal aspects; the critique of the loss of the values of vernacular architecture; to confront which he proposes a method of recovery of the management of the codes of the habitat, etcetera*<sup>17</sup>.

Issue #4 (January 1977, 32 pages) title is “Cesar Pelli/Transparencies and Reflexes”, fully dedicated to the Argentinean architect living in the United States,

with final critical comments from Fumihiko Maki, Esther Mc Coy, and Arthur Golding. Issue #5 title is “Architecture and Criticism”, with articles by Reyner Banham, Juan Pablo Bonta, Bruno Zevi, Renato de Fusco, and (in Marina’s words in her editorial) “one of the most outstanding critics of the younger generation”, namely, Manfredo Tafuri; ending with an article by Waisman, where she proposes

*a method for the critical-historical analysis of architectural works, based on the communicational model, to offer a possible guide for that experience - or should we say that adventure? - which is the search for the meaning of architectural work.*<sup>18</sup>

An endeavor she was working on for some time and was the subject of her first book “*La estructura histórica del entorno*” (1972)<sup>19</sup>.

It is interesting to note that issue #5’s cover sports the name of all the authors prominently, and it may be that it was the first time they were all sharing the same publication. It also shows a drawing by Leonardo da Vinci (~1490), somehow similar to the Church of S.Maria degli Angeli in Florence (Filippo Brunelleschi, around 1434), or a drawing by Louis Kahn in his studies for the National Assembly in Dacca. The cover somehow epitomizes the overlaying of tradition and innovation, in a take that suggests the anxieties, and hopes of the 1970-80s mood.

This short commentary about the first five issues of the *Summarios* shows the depth and richness of the collection. Its examination goes beyond the critical knowledge of the collection itself, as it opens a necessary debate, from a contemporary viewpoint, about the trends, debates, authors, and buildings of the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Endnotes

1. This case study is part of the research project “Modern Architecture in Brazil and Latin America: critical and historiographic revisions” (CNPq Research Productivity Grant 1-C, 2022-5), whose aim is to produce systematic “mined” information on the history of architecture comprehensive books and architectural journals of the modern period (20th century) in Brazil and Latin America, to enable critical studies based on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative information, with emphasis on understanding and deconstructing their structural narratives. Undergraduate student Eloah Maria Coelho Rosa, from Mackenzie Presbyterian University Faculty of Architecture, is currently collaborating on the research of this specific study.

2. Marina Waisman’s book “O Interior da História. Historiografia Arquitetônica para uso de Latino-Americanos” was recently published (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2013); before that, there were only a few of her articles published in the Portuguese language, mostly in Projeto magazine, in the 1980 and 90s. In the Spanish language, in addition to the republication of her book “La Estructura Histórica del Entorno” (Córdoba:

Editorial de la Universidad Católica de Córdoba, 2013), on the 40th anniversary of its original edition (1973), there happened the “I Seminario Workshop Reinventar la Crítica” (2013), held at the Catholic University of Córdoba, Argentina; the seminar contributions by several Ibero-American scholars were reunited in a digital book (Ines Moisset (ed). Buenos Aires: Un Día una Arquitecta, 2018). A brief biography of Marina Waisman written by Inés Moisset was published on the website “Un Día Una Arquitecta” (2015); Moisset also published other critical texts about her work. Mexican historian and critic Louise Noelle has recently written the article, “Marina Waisman and the decentering of the discipline” ([in] Fernando Lara, Felipe Hernandez (ed). Decolonizing the Spatial History of the Americas. Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, 201, p.58-75), with a critical overview of Marina Waisman’s last book, “La Arquitectura Descentrada” (Bogotá: Escala, 1995). Other recent studies focus on Marina Waisman’s books; some articles comment on her work as a contributor to Summa/Nueva Visión editorial (

3. Maria Laura Giorgiotti; Roberto Javier Martín; Paola Andrea Sarbag. *Lecturas de la Crítica Arquitectónica en Argentina*

4. Colección Summarios 1976-1991 2016. Córdoba: Repositório Digital UNC, 2016, available at <<https://rdu.unc.edu.ar/handle/11086/18803>>, accessed on April 7th, 2022), or her seminal role in the Seminars on Latin American Architecture (SAL) held between 1985 and 1995.

5. (2022) We have done some systematic searches looking for other studies on the subject of Waisman’s contributions on academic websites. We apologize if we have missed any important information, and we’d be very grateful to receive any updates on the subject.

6. Horacio Torrent (ed). *Revistas, Arquitectura y Ciudad. Representaciones en la Cultura Moderna*. Pamplona: T6 Ediciones, 2013, p.7 (our translation).

7. Ana Estebán Maluenda. *La modernidad importada : Madrid 1949-1968 : cauces de difusión de la arquitectura extranjera*. Doctoral Thesis presented at the Escuela Superior de Arquitectura, Polytechnic University of Madrid, 2007. Available at <https://oa.upm.es/45735/>, accessed on April 7th, 2022.

8. Ana Esteban-Maluenda; Luis San Pablo. *ArchiteXt Mining*. Taking advantages of periodical as an architectural database. ‘ArchiteXt Mining: Taking advantage of periodicals as an architectural data base’. CIRAS discussion paper No.81: Architectural and Planning Cultures Across Regions. Digital Humanities Collaboration Towards Knowledge Integration [Kyoto, Japan], 2018, 101-105.). Other developments of this research can be found on their website <<https://www.architextmining.es/>>, where all the “mined” information of the studied texts, coming from various architectural journals, can be accessed simply and directly by any researchers anywhere in the world.

9. Juan Pablo Bonta. *Anatomía de la Interpretación Arquitectónica*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1975.

10. Juan Pablo Bonta. *Arquitectura Hablada. Summarios #5*, (Buenos Aires: Summa/Nueva Vision, March 1977, p.6-8). The book is more extensively known for its English version, “Architecture and its interpretation, A study of expressive systems in architecture” (Rizzoli, 1977).

11. The ongoing research will also try to confirm that hypothesis.

12. Some results have already been published in academic articles and books, like Ruth Verde Zein. The meaningful void of the canon. *VIRUS*, São Carlos, n. 20, 2020. [online] Available at:

13. <<http://www.nomads.usp.br/virus/virus20/?sec=4&item=1&lang=en>>. [Accessed: 08 April 2022]; and Ruth Verde Zein (ed). *Historiographic Revisions: Modern Architecture in Brazil*. Rio de Janeiro: Riobooks, 2022 (also available in digital format).

14. Cf. Ruth Verde Zein. "When documenting is not enough." [in] Zein, R.V. *Critical Readings*. Austin: Nhamérica, 2018, p.104-12.
15. Marina Waisman. Editorial. *Summarios #1*, December 1976, p.2 (my translation).
16. Marina Waisman. *O Interior da História. Historiografia Arquitetônica para uso de Latino-Americanos*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2013, p.39 (my translation).
17. Marina Waisman. Editorial. *Summarios #1*, December 1976, p.2 (my translation).
18. (Idem, *ibidem*).
19. IADIZA stands for "Instituto Argentino de Investigaciones de Zonas Aridas", an executive unit of the CONICET - National Council for Scientific and Technical Research.
20. Marina Waisman. *De la mega-estructura al pueblo en la colina*. *Summarios #3*, December 1976b, p.36.
21. Marina Waisman. Editorial. *Summarios #5*, March 1977, p.2.
22. Marina Waisman. *La estructura histórica del entorno*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1985 (3rd edition).





# **A MAGAZINE OF ONE'S OWN: SOHEILA BESKI AND ARCHITECTURE WRITING IN IRAN**

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## **Abstract**

Due to the 1979 revolution, Iran experienced political repression that excluded non-revolutionary figures from academic activities and controlled all cultural production. Breaking through the repression in architectural discourse, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development invited experts to establish a research center in 1984. Soheila Beski joined the center as an editor and researcher in 1984 and left as the editor-in-chief of *Abadi*, the first post-revolutionary architecture magazine. In 1997, different occurrences discouraged her from continuing her job inside the governmental structure. Then she founded *Memar & Shahr* in 1998-1999: two magazines, each reflecting one aspect of her struggling character in architectural discourse. Based on Discourse Theory, the present text analyses the discursive elements of Beski's texts in three magazines to reveal how she struggled against patriarchal systems of control and how it directed her towards articulating specific meanings of architecture

## **Keywords**

Soheila Beski, discourse theory, architecture magazine, architecture writing, Iran

## Architecture Writing Inside The Government

Four years after the 1979 Iranian revolution the Ministry of Culture urged all publication centers to refrain from publishing unlicensed newspapers and magazines.<sup>1</sup> The government took control over producing content in every field including architecture<sup>2</sup>. In 1983, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development accepted Seyyed Hashemi's<sup>3</sup> proposal to establish a Research Center for Urban/Architecture Studies. Funded by the state,<sup>4</sup> the research center provided the opportunity for some excluded figures of the academy -including Soheila Beski- to enter the post-revisionary era of text production in Iranian architecture. The center hosted meetings and lectures and established *Abadi* magazine after a decade of silence in Iranian architecture writing.<sup>5</sup> As a novelist and translator who had never studied or practiced architecture, Beski quickly became renowned among architecture and urban researchers for her extraordinary mind and exceptional management skills. At the end of the 1980s, she was Hashemi's main collaborator in creating *Abadi* as the first architecture magazine after the revolution.

## Who Was Soheila Beski?

Soheila Beski (Fig.1) was born in 1953 and spent most of her childhood in Gonbad. As she and her sisters were raised in a family with both parents as medical doctors, they benefited from an upper-middle-class lifestyle during an economic boost in the country. Although her secondary education happened when the Pahlavi regime introduced a measure of equality for women,<sup>6</sup> they still only accounted for a third of college enrolments in 1971<sup>7</sup> when she entered Gilan Management Academy. Three years later, she registered at Michigan State University in Economics. Before graduation in 1976, she met Reza Amirrahimi, with whom she decided to go back to Iran, or the nest as she used to call it.<sup>8</sup> With Iran being involved in political struggles, she refused to pick any specific orientation. Instead, she continued her academic path at the Bu-Ali University by teaching economics.<sup>9</sup> In 1980, when the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution issued an official order to close all the academic centers<sup>10</sup> and forced academics to leave their careers, Soheila left the university and married Reza Amirrahimi. Two years later, she signed a contract with Niloufar publications to begin the translation of *Living my Life* by Emma Goldman<sup>11</sup> and started working on a translation

of Virginia Woolf's biography.<sup>12</sup> As Beski "was not the type of person to sit idle or the type to live on someone else's income,"<sup>13</sup> in 1984, she also accepted Majid Ghamami's<sup>14</sup> offer to work with a newly established Research Center inside the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

Beski's family situation in Iran could portray a privileged figure. However, some stories of her life indicate that she was still not entirely free from the patriarchal system on both a personal and professional level. The first example happened one night when her well-educated father caught the teenager Soheila reading a book by Simone de Beauvoir using a flashlight under the blanket and rebuked her for wasting time on pointless and misleading writings.<sup>15</sup> Then in 1997, she was questioned about her dress and personal belongings while trying to enter her workplace at the Ministry.<sup>16</sup> Later in this article, we will see that on a professional scale, she tried to find her way out of such a confining system while seeking the freedom of writing inside the discourse of architecture.

### First Experience of Architecture Writing

*Abadi* was funded by an annual budget from the Iranian Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.<sup>17</sup> The Party of Sazandegi that previously supported the Research Centre in 1984, also sponsored *Abadi* from the first volume in the Summer 1991. Although the distribution of *Abadi* could identify it as a magazine for the general public, the entire content was a product of the lectures and discussions by architects and urban planners, as well as by academics on economics, geography, history, and philosophy.<sup>18</sup> After eleven years of dealing with editorial tasks and translations,<sup>19</sup> Beski published her first article "Informal Housing",<sup>20</sup> where she placed "house" in the center of the discourse, while using a wide range of other ideas to expand vocabulary of the field based on an urban, and economic discursive field (Fig.2). She wrote:

*"Houses built on the outskirts of big cities are informal settlements.<sup>21</sup> [...] Whoever is unable to afford housing lives informally on the outskirts of the city.<sup>22</sup> [...] Informal Settlement goes back to economic and social reasons. [...] Direct production of housing by the government will not solve this problem. [...] Complex economic and political factors affect the price of houses".<sup>23</sup>*

As discourse is formed by the partial fixation of meaning around certain nodal points,<sup>24</sup> here we assume house/housing as the nodal point that strives to fix the meaning of architecture by juxtaposing it with “city”, “settlement”, “economy”, “society” and “politics”. Beski’s text takes two critical steps in the process of meaning production. At first, it places “house” - as the nodal point - in the context of city and provides a meaning of such a phenomenon that is not limited to the borders of a building. Then, by placing it next to the words “settlement,” and “city” as social/economic concepts, it becomes able to ask an important political question: to what extent and how the government should intervene in housing. (Fig.3) While expanding the discourse of architecture in a social/economic context, here Beski shows her first criticism against a state-based system that could interfere and make decisions for architecture. Less than a year later, the security department of the Ministry tried to interfere in her life as a woman by checking her personal belongings and dress. While she was criticising the economic interference of the government in architecture, the interference of the same system in her personal life gave her the second reason to take the first step out of that patriarchal system.

### **A New Path After 1997**

Along with the change of government in the summer of 1997, Reza Hashemi and other members of *Abadi* editorial board left their ministry-supported positions and founded another platform to pursue architecture writing.<sup>25</sup> Establishing the new magazine *Memar*, Beski took two critical steps: first, she vacated their apartment in Tehran and set it up as an office for the new publication house *Memarnashr*;<sup>26</sup> and second, she collected investments from Iranian architects, architectural practices, and other companies.<sup>27</sup> By that time, she had gained sufficient trust and prestige for architects to respect her as a professional editor in Iranian architecture. However, she was aware that she needed money and a room of her own to produce text, or as Woolf wrote, to give full expression to her creativity and imagination!<sup>28</sup> The primary problem was not that she should appropriate a physical space, but that her new private publication house should be conceived in terms of a psychological space, free from the government’s patriarchal power.

Along with all the architects supporting the magazine, a strong voice on the editorial board always stated that “our experience in *Abadi* fails to cultivate a pure

architectural language”.<sup>29</sup> The new private magazine found it necessary to establish a pure discourse of architecture distinct from *Abadi*’s social, economic, or even urban fields of discursivity. Beski’s first text in *Memar* entitled “Reviewing the Iranian experience in [architecture] competitions”<sup>30</sup> also indicates that her ideas in the new magazine were articulated in terms of a different system of meaning production. There she tried to fill in the empty sign of “architecture” by relying on the nodal point ‘competition’, while juxtaposing it with concepts such as “profession”, “professional”, “art”, “product”, “talent” and “architect”. She wrote:

*“The society [of architecture] needs the method of competition. [...] The society of architecture has the right to use the method of competition. [...] [Architecture] competition has always been there, even from the beginning of architectural experience.[...] There should be a professional system for architectural competitions in the current situation of Iran. [...] In contrast with engineering, design fields need a competition system to improve creativity. [...] The goal of the competition is to encourage artistic creativity. [...] The main product of competitions is discovering and raising [new] talents”.*<sup>31</sup>

She attempts to portray the competition as a natural element of architecture and articulates it as a necessity in the country’s current situation. Her text in this privately supported discourse focuses on discovering talents and fostering artistic creativity – two concepts on which *Memar* magazine promotes creative “architects” and their “worthy” and “prominent” works.<sup>32</sup> Beski’s text tries to articulate architecture as a profession that is different from other academically taught sciences of building such as engineering and one which needs to become an artistic phenomenon in a competitive environment. The purpose of such texts by Beski and other authors was to provide a legitimate discourse for establishing the first professional and systematic architectural competition in post-revolutionary Iran. Thanks to his strong connections with the government, in 1995, Hashemi was able to propose an annual competition for the Tehran Municipality.<sup>33</sup> But, as the mayor of Tehran finished his tenure the following year, the competition never happened in that system. Instead, the same idea was transferred to the newly established magazine of *Memar*. Then, product manufacturers such as Behrizan and Superpipe<sup>34</sup> sponsored the new competition and helped the editorial board announce the first *Memar* Award in the 15th volume of Summer 2001. Benefiting from the financial support of architectural firms and an annual architecture award,

the discourse of *Memar* took a more architectural approach excluding the social approach of her previous years in the government-supported magazine *Abadi*. It was not surprising that Beski's texts were also affected by such discursive alterations, focusing on more 'purely architectural' keywords rather than borrowing ones from other discursive fields. (Fig.4) Her first attempt to bring architecture writing out the confining state-based system resulted in a discursive limitation that deprived architecture from the previous social / economic meanings.

### A Discursive U-Turn

As Beski's colleagues believed -and as observed in her first text- an essential part of her need for architecture writing could not be met in the purely architectural discourse of *Memar* magazine.<sup>35</sup> Before juxtaposing 'architecture' with 'competition', she was forming the meaning of architecture as a concept that could only be understood when connected to its urban and an economic context. Although the institution of *Memarnashr* and the private support behind it were supposed to provide Beski with a room of her own, the editorial team's strong demand for creating a pure language of architecture did not allow her to continue with her social ideas in this field. A year after establishing *Memar* magazine, she founded another small private publication to make another escape from a confining system and also to compensate for the magazine's discursive deficiencies in the social, economic, and urban spheres. Entirely funded through the profits of *Memar*,<sup>36</sup> the new magazine *Shabr* did not aim to make a profit. Instead, it focused on an artificial repetition of *Abadi's* previous discourse<sup>37</sup> to keep readers involved with a broader discourse of architecture writing. This approach helped Beski have a significant amount of freedom to produce her own ideas in this field. However, it was also the reason the publication had an insufficient circulation and it was closed after only four years (25 volumes). Beski produced most of her texts in *Shabr*, which finally seemed to be providing her with the personal space to communicate a social definition of city and architecture to the public, a space that was initially supposed to be provided by the non-governmental magazine *Memar*. However, its dependence on private capital and its competition-oriented approach made it move away from social concerns and not meet Beski's own needs in architecture writing. A glance at some of her most essential statements in *Shabr* Magazine also indicates that she believed in the need for a social viewpoint on this field and the expansion of meaning around architecture/city. She wrote:

*“It is better to finance the construction of houses from non-governmental sources.<sup>38</sup> [...] An important issue in the Iranian society is housing for the ones with low income.<sup>39</sup> [...] Housing has become the main area of investment in Iran.<sup>40</sup> [...] Building complexes belonging to the army are eating up the city.<sup>41</sup> [...] Historically, the residential complexes have been shaping our city.<sup>42</sup> [...] The policy of privatisation could have been a positive change by the Ministry of Housing. [...] The Ministry of Housing could not manage to do the privatisation in its true way. [...] A right way of privatisation could have attracted capital in housing and construction”<sup>43</sup>*

Similar to the discourse of *Abadi*, again Beski articulates housing, building, and construction in economic and political contexts, while relating them to “finance”, “investment”, “society”, “privatization”, and “capital”. Asking similar questions to those she asked in *Abadi*, she attempted to clarify to what extent the government should be involved in housing and urban development. However, the critical point in the texts in *Shahr* is that Beski supported the matter of privatization more explicitly than ever. Despite her criticism of the Ministry’s way of privatizing in the 1990s, she portrayed such economic and political actions as a necessary solution to the issue of housing and as a proper way to improve the housing market in Iran. In all three magazines, she expressed her opposition to a confining state-based system and any governmental interference in housing/architecture, while believing that the answers to architectural issues existed within the field’s own boundaries. Such an approach could be observed in *Shahr* and *Abadi* more explicitly, while in *Memar*, it stays hidden under professional nodal points such as competition, award, art, and creativity.

## Conclusion

In the winter of 1996, a woman went on a podium to silence the noisy crowd of architecture students and remind them how polite and professional young architects should behave.<sup>44</sup> Beski always used her charisma and ability to organize words and people and shape architectural discourse in post-revolutionary Iran. Being involved with the translation of that book on Virginia Woolf, it was not surprising to her to be considered as a thinker close to feminist ideas. However, she usually abhorred being labelled a feminist. Going more in-depth into her views, it is clear that she always tried to define her individual ideas while confronting such labels:



as an independent charismatic woman, there is no doubt that she always believed in gender equality. However, she was entirely against concepts such as “negative discrimination” as a social act favouring women. Instead, she firmly believed that every woman should resist the system for her own success and freedom.<sup>45</sup> Undoubtedly, this idea is related to her social class and family situation, which always provided her with the opportunity to stand up for herself as an equal individual. Her professional life indicates that she took a similar individual path of resistance herself: during the 1980s, when almost any public challenge to the patriarchal system seemed impossible, women like Soheila Beski tended to develop their individual ways of challenge. Although many authors have clearly shown that there was powerful structuralized resistance to the whole patriarchal system in Iran at that time, Soheila Beski defined a struggling figure against the systems that were constantly confining her and the discourse of architecture; a constant struggle that initially provided her with relatively free space on a personal level but also created a discursive limit on the borders of Iranian architecture writing. Such a great experience of struggle indicates that patriarchal systems work on different levels. As a woman from an upper-middle-class family in modern Iran, Soheila Beski needed a constant struggle to find a room of her own room both on a personal and professional level.

## Endnotes

1. Seyyed Farid Ghasemi, *Tarikh-e Matbouat-e Iran (The History of Iranian Journals)*, (Sanieh Publications, 2011), 23.
2. Ghasemi, 25.
3. Seyyed Reza Hashemi (1941 - ), an Iranian architect graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in 1965. Based on his close friendships with the Minister of Housing and Construction (Serajaddin Kazeruni), he also entered the Ministry in the early 1980s, where he founded the Research Center for Urban/Architecture Studies and Research.
4. Seyyed Reza Hashemi, “Personal Interview with Sina Zarei,” Spring 2019.
5. Hamidreza Pishvaii and others, “Analyzing Key Categories in the Literature of Contemporary Iranian Architecture (1946 – 2016),” *Soffeh*, 89 (Summer 2020): 18.
6. Guity Nashat, “Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 13, n°1-4 (1): 165.
7. Nashat, “Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran.”
8. Reza Amirrahimi, “Personal Interview with Sina Zarei,” (January-February 2022).
9. Amirrahimi, “Personal Interview with Sina Zarei.”

10. Nikkie Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2003), 290.
11. Emma Goldman, *Living My Life 1*, (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc), 1931. / Emma Goldman, *Living My Life 2*. (Garden City Publishing Co), 1934.
12. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (Mariner Books), 1971.
13. Reza Amirrahimi, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei," January-February 2022.
14. Majid Ghamami, born in 1948 in Tehran, graduated from the University of Tehran with a master's degree in architecture (1975) and a master's degree in urban planning (1979).
15. Amirrahimi, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei."
16. Soheila Beski, "Personal Interview with Memarnet", (17.2.2013); Reza Amirrahimi, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei."
17. Hashemi, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei," Spring 2019.
18. Some of the authors in the first year of *Abadi* were: Dr. Mohammad Karim Pirnia (Honorary Professor of Tehran University in History of Architecture), Dr. Mohammad Taghi Rahnamaei (Professor of Geography in Tehran University), Dr. Habibollah Zanjani (Professor of Demography and Sociology in Tehran University), Farrokh Mohammadzadeh (Architect - Tehran University), Dr. Firouz Towfigh (Economist), Dr. Reza Davari Ardakani (Professor of Philosophy in Tehran University).
19. In the first volume of *Abadi*, Soheila Bski translated an article, written by Per Holm on Urban Planning in Sweden. See: Per Holm, "Planning in Sweden: 1945-1985, Ideologies, Methodologies and Results," Translated by: Soheila Beski, *Abadi 1* (Summer 1991): 31-38.
20. Soheila Beski, "Informal Housing (Maskan-e-gheir-e Rasmi)," *Abadi*, 23 (Winter 1996): 84-89.
21. Beski, "Informal Housing (Maskan-e-gheir-e Rasmi)," 85.
22. Beski, "Informal Housing (Maskan-e-gheir-e Rasmi)," 86.
23. Beski, "Informal Housing (Maskan-e-gheir-e Rasmi)," 87.
24. Jorgensen, M and Phillips L.J, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, Sage, 26.
25. Hashemi, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei."
26. Abtin Golkar, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei," November 14, 2021.
27. "Gratitude", *Memar 1* (Summer 1998): 2.
28. Andrea Hajek, "A Room of One's Own. Feminist Intersections between Space, Women's Writing and Radical Bookselling in Milan (1968–1986)," *Italian Studies* 71: 82.
29. Seyyed Reza Hashemi, "Request For a Revival in Iranian Architecture," *Abadi 4* (Spring 1992): 2-3.
30. . Soheila Beski, "Reviewing the Experience of Iran in [architecture] Competitions," *Memar 1* (Summer 1998): 32-37.
31. Beski, "Reviewing the Experience of Iran in [architecture] Competitions," 32.
32. Kamran Afshar Naderi, "From Idea to Form," *Memar 4* (Spring 1999): 3-6; Kamran Afshar Nader, "Creativity," *Memar 7* (Winter 1999): 3-8.

33. Soheila Beski, "Personal Interview with Memarnet," February 17, 2013; Hashemi, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei."
34. . Behrizan Industrial Group (founded in 1976) is involved with designing and producing door handles, door knobs and locks; and Super Pipe Co. (founded in 1997) is the most famous Iranian company in building plumbing industry. Both groups have been of the primary sponsors of Memar Award since 2001.
35. . Mohammadreza Ghoddousi, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei", December 23, 2021; Zahra Taraneh Yalda, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei", April 2020.
36. Reza Amirrahimi, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei," January-February 2022.
37. At that time, Abadi was still being published, but with a different editorial board. That is why here the term 'Abadi's previous discourse' is used to refer to Abadi's discourse in the era of Soheila Beski and Seyyed Reza Hashemi.
38. Soheila Beski, "From Economy to Urban Management," Shahr 1 (October 1999): 3.
39. Soheila Beski, "Renovation of a Problematised Area," Shahr 4, 5, 6 (Winter 1999): 73.
40. Soheila Beski, "Settlement of the Low-income people," Shahr 19 (Autumn 2001): 7.
41. Soheila Beski, "Borders of Tehran," Shahr 20 (Winter 2001): 11.
42. Soheila Beski, "Incantation of Earth," Shahr 18 (Summer 2001): 2.
43. Beski, "From Economy to Urban Management," 14.
44. Ghoddousi, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei."
45. Amirrahimi, "Personal Interview with Sina Zarei."

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## Notas al final

- 1 Jorge Figueira, *A Periferia Perfeita. Pós-modernidade na Arquitetura Portuguesa, anos 60 – anos 80* (Casal de Cambra: Caleidoscópio, 2014), 13-14.
- 2 Manuel Villaverde Cabral, *Relatório profissão: Arquitecto/a* (Lisboa: Universidade de Lisboa; Instituto de Ciências Sociais, 2006).
- 3 Hilde Heynen, “The Gender of Genius,” *The Architectural Review*, March 26, 2020, <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/the-gender-of-genius>
- 4 Hilde Heynen, “Genius, Gender and Architecture: The Star System as Exemplified in the Pritzker Prize”, *Architectural Theory Review*, 17:2-3 (August 2012): 338, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13264826.2012.727443>
- 5 Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (London: Yale University Press, 1983), 1-18.
- 6 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.
- 7 *Idem*, 141.
- 8 *Idem*, 136.
- 9 “A construction is, after all, not the same as an artifice. On the contrary, constructivism needs to take account of the domain of constrains without which a certain living and desiring cannot make is way.” Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 59.
- 10 Judith Butler, *op cit*, 1990, 17.
- 1 Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (New York; Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1967), 14–15.
- 2 Term coined by Henry-Russel Hitchcock in 1929, who highlighted the rise of a “consciously modernized historicist style,” the so-called “New Tradition,” outside the main line of the Modern Movement. The New Tradition provided a generic style for the establishment. See: Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration* (New York: Payson & Clark Ltd., 1929).
- 3 Early in 1938, a group composed mostly of modern architects, yet including Beaux-Arts architects such as the French-American architect Paul Philippe Cret (1876–1945), formed a National Commission Committee (an outgrowth of the modernist League for Architectural Progress).
- 4 Carroll L. V. Meeks, *The Railroad Station: An Architectural History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2013).
- 5 For a detailed history of the D.C. Metro, see: Zachary M. Schrag, *A History of the Washington Metro* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2014).
- 6 In a letter to John Calbreath Burdis, Director of Planning in Nassau County, Weese said that the former should contact Stanley Allen, “our man in the transit scene,” who was working in the Harry Weese Associates Washington office at that time. Letter to John Calbreath Burdis from Harry Weese, Feb. 14, 1968. Source: Abakanowicz Research Center, Chicago History Museum, Harry Weese Associates Architectural Drawings and Records, 1952–78, #612, folder “Miscellaneous, Papers, and Correspondence.”
- 7 *Architectural Forum* (Jan 1959), 67–68.
- 8 Draft letter from Harry Weese, unspecified destination, undated. Source: Abakanowicz Research Center, Chi-