

# APPROACHES TO MODERNITY

Maria Helena Maia  
Mariann Simon  
Editors









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Maria Helena Maia and Mariann Simon

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# APPROACHES TO MODERNITY



# FOREWORD

ANDRÁS FERKAI

## **Preface**

Conferences and symposia are for us, scholars and academic people, an occasion to meet and change ideas. These professional meetings, especially international ones, force us to make a balance of our research and summarize what we have reached. They are an opportunity to present a statement and put it to the test of a wider community. Whether a progress report or the final reports of a longer study, these presentations disclose new achievements and personal views and thus necessarily provoke reactions. The most amazing and fertile in the discussion is the experience of different ways of thinking and the remarks of an external viewer may break the brilliant logic we thought to build up when working in the solitude of our study room. At other times, however, our hypothesis may be approved and even, we may discover similar problems and propositions at far-away places.

The 2010 autumn conference ‘Approaches to modernity’ at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, with Portuguese, Spanish, French and Hungarian participants, was such an opportunity. With the double aim of surveying works and principles of the second/third phases of modernity in architecture and recent architectural trends, this meeting provided us with

different interpretations of modernity as well as critical evaluation of current architectural discourses. We heard presentations of a general nature, that is, about the role of shape & beauty as well as structure in modern architecture, slightly detached from the politico-economical background of the succeeding periods, and an ambitious theoretical construction regarding the phases of modernity from the 15<sup>th</sup> century up to 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the other hand, several contributors chose the form of case-studies to examine contemporary practices or thought. La Tourette and Chandigar, Weak architecture and Cool discipline, various interpretations of Mies and the fate of Zalotay's revolt against the establishment, all were suitable for adding some new aspects to the well-known concept of modernity or presenting a new method of historiography. The papers were grouped in three thematic sections but did not relate to each other too much, not even within the respective sections. Sometimes, it is regrettable. A missed opportunity is, for instance, the question of modernity and national/regional character raised by the Portuguese part without any reaction from the other parts involved. Of course, Critical Regionalism is somewhat outmoded by now, but the role of popular tradition in the formation of modern architecture all over 20<sup>th</sup> century (especially on the peripheries of Europe) could be an issue for comparative studies. We consider recently Modern Movement in a wider sense, accepting its plural character but we are rather far from Siegfried Kracauer's notion of history as up and down moving waves of phenomena that do not belong to the same time. We usually focus on progressive (upward) tendencies and disregard what does not seem to belong to the mainstream. Parallel and even downward sloping waves, as the reverse of the same coin, also may give insight into the history of modernity.

As the moderator of this conference, I retain very good memories of the day we spent together, both of the official and unofficial part of it. I hope that the cooperation of the involved schools and study centres will continue for the benefit of every contributor.

SHAPE  
& SPACE



# FROM THE CITY TO THE BUILDING *APPROACHES TO MODERNITY - LA TOURETTE AS A LANDMARK*

ANA LÍDIA VIRTUDES

## **1. La Tourette: a new approach towards modernity**

### **1.1 Inspiration of Le Corbusier reinterpreting architecture**

The products of architectural and urbanistic practices have always been linked with society and the epoch in which they occur.

In this sense, two new approaches can be identified with the arrival of modernism and the changes that it brought in terms of architecture and spatial planning practices and, in the manner in which architects and urban planners started to design their projects; the buildings or the cities. On the one hand, building practices changed due to the introduction of new construction features such as the concrete and pillar, the cross-beam and the slab system.

These construction tools became an omnipresent duality i.e. architecture vs. structure in modernist architecture. On the other hand, the meaning of space and nature gained new dimensions in terms of urbanistic practices, and the way of thinking the city, with the Charter of Athens, the main issues being the housing question and the collective role of space.

The medieval monastic heritage inspired not only artists but also architects to produce new works re-interpreting the old types. One example of this influence

is the medieval stone work serving to find the missing link between the truth that its use represents and the modernist concrete work, in its most straightforward way, the apparent concrete.

The new approach that characterized the modern architecture and spatial planning didn't mean that everything was new and different from the past and the previous practices. In this context, a new approach could mean a different i.e. new interpretation of the building or the space, using an existing type and not necessarily a new type and "Le Corbusier's monastery of La Tourette (...) is an illuminating example of such approach" (Leupen et al., 1997: 143).

In the convent of La Tourette there are multiple perspectives of reinterpretation of spaces and a multiplicity of looks. It should not be seen as a manifest but rather as an elaborated work for architectural meditation and studying. Consequently, La Tourette could be seen as a landmark of the modernism tendency, of re-interpreting the types from the past, designing new projects.

## **1.2 Assumptions of the project of La Tourette**

The project of the Dominican Convent of Sainte Marie de La Tourette, Éveux-sur-Arbresle, in France, by the architect Le Corbusier was inspired by his visits in 1907 to the Charterhouse of Ema, in Italy; and in 1953 to the Cistercian monastery of Le Thoronet, in France. This project was proposed to him, representing the opportunity for Le Corbusier to put in practice a new approach to modernity based on the idea of collective forms of life.

The project of La Tourette was born from a meeting in 1952 between the Dominican Marie-Alain Couturier and Le Corbusier. In this epoch there was an exchange of correspondence between the two of them about the ideas that should be present in this convent project.

Marie-Alain Couturier was the promoter of the movement of sacred art and dedicated his work to the renovation of liturgical art with a particular attention given to modern art. It was in this context that he contacted Le Corbusier as an expert on modern architecture, in order to be the author of the new convent.

From the meeting between these two, there arose an architectural, philosophical and spiritual dialogue, resulting in the assumptions of the project of La Tourette. In this dialogue, Couturier played the role of being mentor of modernity in the church, and a defender of a renovated faith by means of contemporary art. Le Corbusier was seeking to renew values in the spirit of modernity, through the architectonic project.

In the process of defining the assumptions for La Tourette, Couturier and Le Corbusier were like two opposing personalities confronting each other on a single project view and interpretations. Marie-Alain Couturier represented the spiritual view, sought spirituality by architecture and Le Corbusier represented the spatial and architectonic view, sought architecture by means of spirituality. The inspiration of Le Thoronet; a Romanesque religious complex built in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, in southern France near Toulon; was present in La Tourette in the pure volume of 'béton brut' remembering asceticism, and as a consequence, the inevitable re-encounter with the sacred. Just like the stone of Le Thoronet, the concrete of La Tourette shows the true reality.

The significant influence of Le Thoronet upon Le Corbusier can be seen in his opinion about this building, representing a witness of the truth, using the stone, and where the "sharp edge enforces clarity of outline and roughness of surface (...). Light and shade are the loudspeakers of this architecture of truth, tranquillity and strength. Nothing further could add to it" (Le Corbusier in Hervé, 2001). This idea shows a new approach to modernity in architecture in which light and shadow are understood as being the loudspeakers of truth.

## **2. From the city to the building of La Tourette**

### **2.1 Charter of Athens rules on the building scale**

In Europe, the bad conditions of living in the industrial city brought about spatial planning as a discipline and modern architecture focused on the question of housing and urban regeneration, not only in spatial terms but also in social terms.

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the spatial planning domain, the garden city became a very popular model to follow, based on the single house. In the domain of architecture, in the decade of 1920, the idea of rationalization not only in terms of housing but also in economic terms resulted in a strong importance given to collective forms of life i.e. collective dwellings as a model to follow in architecture, and the work of Le Corbusier is not an exception (Stanislaus, 2009: 135). Consequently, the building process should be quicker and cheaper. In this context, the project of La Tourette represented for Le Corbusier an opportunity to design a building, putting in practice his concern with the 'collective forms of life'. In this domain the project is characterized by the importance of the collective spaces such as the refectory, the church or the meeting halls. The private spaces are confined to the individual cells of the friars i.e. the dwelling units. Private cells and collective spaces were designed to permit meditation, reflection and studying.

The convent of La Tourette functions as a micro-city which inserts within modernism.

Actually some authors suggest about this matter that the final solution of La Tourette is based upon the idea of an urban mega-structure (Stanislaus, 2009: 168). There is a strong parallel between the lives in the city of men (occurring at the city scale) and the lives in the city of friars (occurring at the building scale). Such as in the real city, in this micro-city i.e. the convent of La Tourette, everything is functional, self-sufficient and according to cyclical movements.

As such, it must respect certain rules i.e. the rules that were defined in the Charter of Athens in 1933 having as the main mentor Le Corbusier. These rules identified four aspects proposed as elements of the city's organization: living, working, physical and mental recreation and circulation.

This classification of city elements and their functions are not only the keys of spatial planning but also of the modern architecture of buildings and they are present in the project of La Tourette: the living function corresponds to the individual cells of friars; the working function corresponds to the classroom for



Figure 1. Charterhouse of Ema, Italy.  
Google maps.

intellectual work and study; the physical and mental recreation corresponds to the church and to the refectory; and the circulation function is present in the interconnecting corridors and footbridges of La Tourette.

In summary, it can be said that in La Tourette project Le Corbusier has the opportunity to put into practice in a building the rules that in the Charter of Athens were defined for the city as a whole. La Tourette could be considered a landmark of the application of the rules of the city planning defined in the Charter of Athens on the building scale.

## **2.2 Modern architecture in the project of La Tourette**

### **‘Béton brut’**

The project of La Tourette reflects modern architectural ideas and construction processes in which the result is shown through the use of ‘béton brut’, the absolute fidelity to the model and a perfect reproduction of the mould.

In this pattern, concrete is seen as a construction material that “does not cheat; it replaces; it cuts out the need for that trickster – coating.” (Potié, 2001: 102).

### **Church**

The religious buildings such as monasteries or convents are founded on the basic principle of architectural centrality with their epicentre in the cloister. Cloister means something closed or able to be closed-off.

The cloister of La Tourette is unusual and doesn't have the characteristics of its predecessors which follow a 'promenade', interconnecting the structure and the building in order to understand the simplicity of the plan. In this sense could be said that La Tourette is a reinterpretation of traditional medieval monastery types, built around a cloister (Leupen, 1997: 143). However, the central point of spiritual functionality of La Tourette is found within the church, which is the most significant place of the entire building. The church is the epicentre of the building and for Le Corbusier its proportions should provoke enthusiasm. The church means the place of the centre of the Dominican spirituality, that is the celebration of the Eucharist, and its main altar represents the most relevant sacred place for the religious community.

### **Unit cell**

About fifty years separate Le Corbusier's visit to the Charterhouse of Ema and its project of La Tourette. However, just like in the case of Charterhouse of Ema, the convent of La Tourette allows individual and collective experiences; time for individual working, relaxing and meditation in the unit of the cell and time for collective work, relaxing and meditation in the refectory or the church.

Just as in the concept of the 'units of habitation', the cells for friars were inspired in the model of the smallest living space which was to become a symbolic figure of connection between the internal space i.e. the inside (the private space of the friars) and the external space i.e. the outside (the exterior of the building) through the facade.

## **Simplicity**

The sequence of cells would permit the study of a portion of facade which would be applied with rhythmic repetition. This fact gives through the simplicity of the image of the facade (the visible skin of the building), the perception of lack of comfort and a certain sense of poverty.

All these characteristics are according to the modern way of building (quickly and cheap) and to the way of living of a religious community (the relevance of the spirituality to the detriment of the materiality). Despite huge amount of money financed by gifts, the building of La Tourette not only looks cheap because of the use of 'béton brut' but also gives a perception of lack of the most primitive comfort (Stanislaus, 2009: 168).

### **2.3 Justifications and annotations of the project**

Since the 13<sup>th</sup> century that Dominican convents gained fame and became very popular for their theological and philosophical ways of thinking. After the Second World War, the regional government of Lyon decided to build a convent has a school and research institution of the Dominicans and by the year of 1960 the construction of Sainte Marie de La Tourette was nearly complete.

The extreme simplicity of this project could be characterized by the combination of two aspects: a reinterpretation of ancient monastic architecture of medieval abbeys with a particular focus on the abbey of Le Thoronet; and the sobriety offered by a modernist architecture language, consisting of elements such as 'pilotis', stairs or ramps, which contradicts somewhat the former static spirit of the Dominican order.

Though humanism for Le Corbusier meant something independent of the Dominicans' faith, it could be said that for him, the architect is inseparable from the humanist i.e. the regeneration of the society through architecture. In this way, his work is marked by the effort of shaping a better social order through functionalist architecture forms and construction techniques. Consequently, the architect is open to spiritual values in the sense of the mystery of being. His defi-

nition of soul allowed him to make a convent suitable for its function, respecting certain architectural rules previously established by conventional practice i.e. by the lifestyle of Dominicans, putting in practice in La Tourette the architecture gifted with a spirit.

The poverty of the materials, the brightness of colours, and the majesty of volumes, all lead towards an architectural expression which would enable the friars to understand the ascetic life, the spiritual joy, and the most solemn of silences. In fact, the project of this convent has as much grandeur as it does simplicity with especially evident in the church. Le Corbusier did not just create a living space for the religious community but also a church where the mystery of the Eucharist could be celebrated in a perfect match between the container (the building) and the contained (the friars).

La Tourette shows that the action of praying and religious life is not only linked with conventional forms of architecture such as the medieval convents, but could also happen in a modern architecture building. Knowing the work of Le Corbusier designing the religious building of Chapel Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp, in France, completed in 1955, and his inspiration, the project of La Tourette doesn't mean faith for him but rather an understanding of what architectural terms would provide in terms of conditions for faith. In fact, La Tourette shows that Le Corbusier was sufficiently open mind faced to the notion of the sacred.

The understanding of Le Corbusier about the architecture of a religious building is present in his own expression: "my profession is to shelter men, by giving them an envelope of concrete which allows them to have a human life (...) to build a church as a place of habitation (...) would make sense to me" (Petit, 1961: 17-18). By being asked to build the convent of La Tourette, not only was Le Corbusier requested to provide shelter for hundreds of men, but also a place which would afford them silence.

The site where the convent was built is on a deep slope, ending on a plain and being partially surrounded by forest, localized in the countryside.



Figure 2. Localization in the countryside. La Tourette.  
Google earth.

The building is designed starting from the top to the bottom, and its composition began by the line of the covering; a great horizontal ending with the accentuated downwards slope where the building rested by means of 'pilotis'. In a word, the architecture of this building is organized in terms of descent.

In terms of architectonic composition, this project represents an answer to the requested program, organized following a descending vertical. Each architectural body of the building touches the ground in distinctive ways.

The church, the chapel and the sacristy are anchored in the hillside. The other three wings of the building corresponding to the unit cells i.e. to the space of single dwellings are localized above the ground supported by 'pilotis' of several shapes. This organization allows the catching of glimpses of the central open space which contains the cloister, functioning as an open space, so characteristic of this type of religious buildings.

### 3. Conclusions

This article has aimed to show the work of Le Corbusier in the project of La Tourette has a great influence in the medieval architecture of religious monasteries and convents.

On the one hand, his visits to the Charterhouse of Ema and to the monastery of Le Thoronet come to confirm that in doing the project of La Tourette, Le Corbusier had had a way to compensate many years of work, in order to achieve a reinterpretation of the medieval architecture of religious buildings, rather than to create new types or meanings for these buildings. On the other hand, his humanistic concerns resulted in the project of Sainte Marie de La Tourette as a place of meditation, search for God, and of prayer for the Dominican community.

In summary, the humanism presented in the architectonic program of La Tourette guided his work can be seen as an adventure in which he imagined the shapes and the circuits that would be necessary for prayer, liturgy, meditation and study. The collective spaces such as the refectory, the church or the meeting halls; and the single dwellings i.e. the unit cells of Dominicans friars, were perfectly proportioned for what this religious community most needed: silence and peace.

In this sense, Sainte Marie de La Tourette is a silent dwelling place for one hundred bodies and hearts (Potié, 2001: 7). The role of the religious community lifestyle, inside this silence, was to worship God and this convent of 'béton brut' is considered a labour of love. Consequently, for Le Corbusier there is no need to speculate about it, because its life happens inside.

Sainte Marie de La Tourette represents a micro-city i.e. an example of a parallel between the lives occurring at the city scale and the lives occurring at the building scale, where everything is functional and self-sufficient, just like in the principles of city planning of Charter of Athens.

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# NOTES ON THE POTENCY OF ARCHITECTURE<sup>1</sup>

JOSEFINA GONZÁLEZ CUBERO  
AND NOEMÍ VICENTE MARTÍN

Rather than aiming to be a structured study, this article offers a compendium of notes as food for thought on the extent to which architecture's 'potency' is independent from the material building of walls.

Since the modern age, 'potency' has been an attribute associated with the notion of beauty sought by certain architects, that is, a value underlying the aspirations of certain architects during that period. Potency is understood as clear and resounding, geometrically dominant, and prevailing over its surroundings. This attribute has carried down to the present as an end in and of itself in works that continued in the tradition of modernist architectural conception and that purport to define contemporary architectural design. However, there are several factors in the present that have varied and prevented ideas of the past from being carbon copied. These factors have to do with the form's material and therefore with the appearance and spatial perception of architecture.

First of all, as stated by Enrico Tedeschi, architecture's form is understood "*as an*

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: Beth Gelb.

*objective fact, regardless of what its value as an expression or symbol may be*<sup>2</sup>. Art theorists understood the issue of form as purely visual and *Gestalt* psychology attempted to systematise the principles of visual perception, including the law of pregnancy (*prägnanz*), also known as the principle of grouping or the law of good form.

This fundamental law of *prägnanz* asserts human beings' tendency to be selective and perceive the simplest or most homogeneous configuration possible, that is, what is most regular, uniform, symmetrical, orderly, stable or balanced, understandable and memorisable. In other words, the tendency is towards the best *gestalt*. When referring to the degree in which it is perceived quickly with the human eye, a configuration can be 'pregnant' due to its form, size, colour, directionality, movement, texture, and so forth.

Neuropsychologist D. O. Hebb relates perception to learning and asserts that *gestalt* is a learned experience that is not innate, but is a product of education and the individual's experience. In this sense, the perception of form undergoes a subsequent process of interpretation and recognition by the individual who then once again feeds into the generation of this perception through works in any given culture. All of this is a propos to indicate certain characteristics encompassed by the term 'potency' although I cannot go into further detail on these issues given the length of this article, because one needs to take into account the cultural tradition in which they are set (Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, Wolfgang Köhler, Rudolf Arnheim).

To speak of "potency" in architecture is to make reference to the specific aspects of its configuration or form, as it is or as it is perceived. Yet different meanings related to time and culture are assigned to the adjective 'potent'. Some are explained below.

The elementary geometry of forms and pure volumes has been present through-

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2 Enrico Tedeschi. *Teoría de la Arquitectura*. Nueva Visión, Buenos Aires 1976, p. 206.

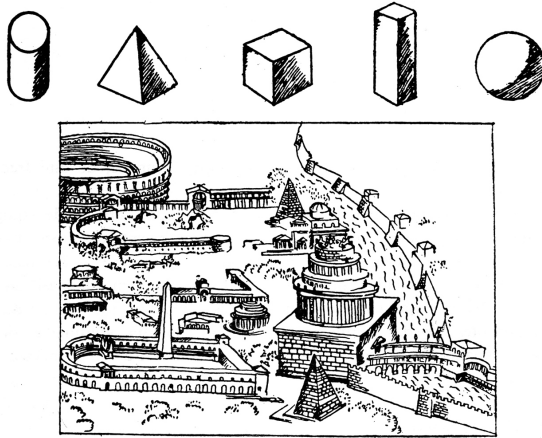


Figure 1. Le Corbusier. "The lesson of Rome".

In Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (*Vers une architecture*, 1923), Dover Publications, New York 1986.

hout the history of architecture. But it is as of revolutionary neoclassicism that they consciously seek beauty as an ideal, i.e. clean-cut architecture devoid of any cluttered ornamentation, delineated by the light and shadows and able to move people. In the purest tradition of French exponents of the enlightenment, Le Corbusier declared:

*"Architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light. Our eyes are made to see forms in light; light and shade reveal these forms; cubes, cones, spheres, cylinders or pyramids are the great primary forms which light reveals to advantage; the image of these is distinct and tangible within us and without ambiguity. It is for that reason that these are beautiful forms, the most beautiful"*<sup>3</sup>.

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3 "Three reminders to architects, I. Volume", Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (*Vers une architecture*, 1923), Dover Publications, New York 1986, p. 29.



Figure 2. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Alumni Memorial Hall (1945-46), IIT, Chicago.  
Photography Carlos Labarta.

For Le Corbusier, as it was for his revolutionary predecessors, pure forms are architecture's basis and essence, meaning they are also its perfection and beauty. This implies that geometrical clarity, concentration and unity of form have been understood as qualities inherent to beauty in architecture, since they are the forms that are perceived unambiguously under light.

But how can one speak of powerful architecture only because pure volumes are used? Obviously, the use of geometry does not suffice by itself. As has been mentioned, over history, countless buildings can be found for which it would be odd to apply this designation. We understand that there needs to be a certain amount of formal abstraction, including a stark lack of embellishment and lack of references to scale.

When analysing masters of modernity, Paul Rudolph sets beauty and potency on an equivalent level and considers that both are attained thanks to architects' selective attitude regarding what architecture needs to solve:



Figure 3. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. New National Gallery (1962-68), Berlin.  
Photography Pedro I. Ramos.

*“One even addresses oneself to certain problems in one building and others in the next. All problems can never be solved, indeed it is a characteristic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that architects are highly selective in determining which problems they want to solve. Mies, for instance, makes wonderful buildings only because he ignores many aspects of a building. If he solved more problems his buildings would be far less potent”<sup>4</sup>.*

The selectivity that Mies van der Rohe developed over his German period gave way to geometry in its pure form in his American period. Yet at the same time as the unity of prisms was consolidated, right angles were on their way to being utterly diffused. In the Alumni Memorial Hall (1945) at Chicago’s IIT, corners are multiple, blurred into a host of parallel edges perceived through the use of a compound, grooved pillar.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Rudolph, *Perspecta 7*, The Yale Architectural Journal, New Haven 1961, p. 51.

Another offshoot of this same approach to volume can be perceived when corners are left without being formally defined in the construction. Pillars are shifted in from the corners and find their place along the volume's sides. This occurs in the Farnsworth House (1945-51) in Plano and in Berlin's New National Gallery (1962-68). This is how Mies builds a virtual volume made of prevailing horizontal planes. In other words, he dismantles boxes to highlight planes. Potency, then, is no longer to be found in the unitary volume, but rather in the visual weight attached to the horizontal plane based on its position relative to the pillars.

According to Reyner Banham, it is paradoxical that the first building to be termed "New Brutalist", the Hunstanton Secondary School (1949-54) by Alison and Peter Smithson, was inspired by the Mies' Illinois Institute of Technology and not the *béton brut* works by Le Corbusier, the author he cited at the beginning of his article "The New Brutalism". Published in 1955, rather than demonstrating Hunstanton's actual links with this new aesthetic, it aims to justify evolution towards the organic in the Smithsons' career. In his article, Banham establishes the school's qualities:

*"1, Formal legibility of plan; 2, Clear exhibition of structure, and 3, valuation of materials for their inherent qualities 'as found'"*<sup>5</sup>.

After analysing the Smithson's design for the University of Sheffield Extension competition, Banham includes Hunstanton's first quality, "*formal legibility of plan*", in a broader quality at the end of the article, "*memorability as an image*". He concludes that Mies' geometry is not an integral part of New Brutalist architecture but merely a device for realizing images, just as topology is a device for The University of Sheffield.

While Le Corbusier's Jaoul houses were a benchmark of New Brutalism due to their materials' earnest, potent manifestation, Banham was determined at all

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5 Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism", *Architectural Review*, December 1955, London, p. 357.



Figure 4. Alison and Peter Smithson. Hunstanton Secondary School (1949-54), Norfolk. In Reyner Banham. *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*. Reynold, New York 1966.

costs to make Hunstaton's removed, technological school the example of New Brutalist orthodoxy.

This is why a conscious effort was made to avoid making reference to buildings with robust techtonics and manifest expressions of resistance to gravity. Their very material constitution affords them the solidness and consistence that characterise potency in the sense of mass. When we turn to other buildings whose material consistency is more succinct and which rely more heavily on technology, we attempt to see how the buildings that assert themselves in their indoor-outdoor relationship, often through transparency clearly inspired by Mies van der Rohe's architecture, also reflect a quest for qualities to express their potency. A decade later, following in Mies's footsteps, Sverre Fehn built the Norwegian pavilion (1958) at the Brussels International Exhibition. The square main volume leaves the cross-shaped pillar at the corner, but a step is taken in another direction by the choice of material. The pillars and walls become transparent



Figure 5. Sverre Fehn. Nordic Pavilion (1958), Brussels Expo.  
In Per Olaf Fjeld, *Sverre Fehn: the pattern of thoughts*, The Monacelli Press, New York, 2009.

thanks to the use of Plexiglas, and the indoor space is visually extended out to the wall along the premises' outer perimeter encompassing the building's ethereality. The large roof is not supported in the same way as in the Berlin National Gallery's cross-shaped pillar-caryatids, but instead seems to levitate over phantasmagorical pillars that are also cross-shaped. Of course, the roof does indeed rest on nearby beams extending out on three sides up to the wall around the perimeter. Because it seems weightless, the roof's potency is therefore not gravitational.

Fehn also addressed the dissipation of material on the corners in the architecture of the walls. The main pavilion of the Bøler Centre (1962-72) in Oslo vertically scratches the corner out from the walls and uses glass to enclose the portion where the wall is interrupted. Two materials are therefore used for the walls, but the edge lines are maintained, unlike neo-plasticism.

The previously mentioned works espouse the volume's integrity yet also challen-



Figure 6. Sverre Fehn. Bøler Community Center (1962-72), Oslo.  
Photography Iván Rincón.

ge it to the extent that they do not always provide clear legibility of the edges. Both in permeable architecture and wall-based architecture, the lack of corners, due to the indoor-outdoor relationship generated by partial or total transparency, achieves flowing space that is not attributable to the undifferentiated spatial continuity used by some architects of the modernist movement.

As stated back in time by Fehn, what we currently see is both continuity with modernism insofar as the adoption of an elemental volume is concerned, and rupture because this elemental volume is subverted. The subversion arises when space is modified by changing the volume's material and treatment.

The quest for the specific as opposed to what is universal has led many architects to criticise modernism. Certain others consider that the abstraction, geometry, and the aesthetics of machines and technical reproducibility that were defended need not be rejected all together in a single package. Currently, just as others have done in the past, certain architects such as Toyo Ito and Kazuyo Sejima de-



Figure 7. Toyo Ito. Mediatheque (1994-2001), Sendai.  
In *GA Architect 17*, ADAD Edita, Tokyo 2001.

fend both of these stances partially.

Ito declares himself an heir of modern architecture and sustains that good architecture is both simple and abstract. Yet he disagrees that this can be generalised because one has to seek specific, unique solutions for each given location, what he terms “creating places”.

To configure the specific, the Sendai Mediatheque’s (1994-2001) prism-shaped glass enveloping accommodates an expressive structure ambling within it. Because the structure yields at the corners of the prism-shaped volume, or at least near them, the glass is what delineates the perimeter. The transparent glass of the boulevard façade becomes opaque on the other façades, leading to the disaggregation of the volume, and is only grouped together by the presence of each of the floor structures intercepting the continuity of the vertical edges. In order to provide continuity along the boulevard, the architect uses a second screen of transparent glass.



Figure 8. Toyo Ito. Serpentine Gallery (2002), London.  
In *EL Croquis* N° 123, 2001-2005, Madrid 2006.

While in other buildings, the structural system, be it abstract or figurative, provides support for both the building and its enclosure, here the prism-shaped glass volume is wrapped in a structural amalgam that seemingly aims to break with the resounding clarity. London's Serpentine Gallery (2002) and Tokyo's TOD's store (2004) stand as good examples. While the mediatheque uses the floor structures to rhythmically cut the edges in the latter two examples, the exterior façades lack both relief and depth. There the architect highlights the edges through the unitary glass volume's geometry, and blurs them through the graphic pattern that the structure acquires. In the Serpentine Gallery, he uses geometrical decomposition while in the TOD's store he does so with the nearby zelkova trees. Despite the dialectics defining the structural enveloping, Ito says



Figure 9. SANAA: Kazuyo Sejima+Ryue Nishizawa. Zollverein School of Management and Design (2005), Essen.  
In *EL Croquis* N° 139, 2004-2008, Madrid 2008.

regarding the store “*we gave the building a potent, unique presence*”<sup>6</sup>.

SAANA’s formal delvings are similar. The work of its female member, Kazuyo Sejima, heir to Ito’s teachings, continues to move prevalingly in the sphere of a play on elemental bodies oscillating between the walls’ techtonics and the glass enclosures. Examples to be cited are the cube-shaped Zollverein School (2005) in Essen and the great cylindrical 21<sup>st</sup> Century Contemporary Art museum (1999-2004) in Kanazawa. A later work, the Glass Pavilion (2001-2006) at the Museum of Modern Art in Toledo, Ohio, moves from the circle on to a combined geometry including both straight lines and curves.

The space traditionally taken up by the mass of the walls in the architecture seems to have been emptied in the Museum’s Glass Pavilion, and a glass dia-

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<sup>6</sup> Toyo Ito. *Conversaciones con estudiantes*. Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 2005, p. 40.



Figure 10. SANAA: Kazuyo Sejima+Ryue Nishizawa. Glass Pavillion, Toledo Museum of Art (2001-06), Ohio.

In *EL Croquis* N° 139, 2004-2008, Madrid 2008.

phragm stands as the vestige of its outer boundaries. The roof seems to float as the edge is rounded off the corner, while the pillars are virtually made to disappear through propagation and a reduction in their cross measures. Ceiling and floor alike package together a space permeated by gleam. On the outdoors, the curved corners foster a gentle orthogonal transition from the roof's perimeter, and the viewer's eyes are drawn to the volume's skin making itself visible through the host of reflections from its surroundings. Here, potency comes not from the solidity of the walls or from the emblematic channelling of the load through the pillars. Nor does it come from the geometric rays of shadows, but rather from the terse rock or glass veil, as we can see in the Kanazawa Museum. The lack of relief on the enveloping of Ito and SAANA's buildings make them monoliths. Their architecture, as has been indicated once and again by other authors, is diagrammatic and mass disappears, anchored in pure volumes with no bodily solidity. In other words, their architecture replaces the physical weight of

the walls with the terseness of the skin.

Potency as a quality in architecture has gradually filtered into the ideal of beauty to such an extent that it has even virtually come to replace it. As we have already indicated, Toyo Ito takes note of this concern to obtain potent presence from form, while Kazuyo Sejima establishes the qualities of the buildings of our time: “*We live in a world of uncertainty, the world is moving towards a necessary coexistence of very different ideas, people and customs, and in this context, architecture cannot be inflexible. It has to be adaptable, uncertain, and dynamic. All in all, powerful ideas are also needed to be able to rebuild chaotic cities. Architects must work to produce these two types of buildings: changing and potent*”<sup>7</sup>.

While changing buildings do not seem to abound much in the specialised media nowadays, potent buildings certainly seem to proliferate. In principle, it is the potent buildings that prevail because they provide a resounding, unitary image reflected in their volumes’ photogenics and elaborate boundaries. But are all of these buildings actually potent? Clearly not. Direct experience with their architecture is enough to tell that. Devoid in extremis of their physical materiality, in these buildings, potency seems to be conferred to the exterior while melting away completely in a diffuse space in the building’s interior.

Interestingly, modern sensibility has integrated the apprehension of space and depth by going beyond the gestalt concept of sheer visibility, and subsequently, so-called New Brutalism came to be characterised by “*Memorability as an image*”. This contemporary dichotomy of space and image generates questions about what currently underpins architecture, whether it is unity of form or unity of image? In short, does potency belong to the building itself as the object represented, or is potency the result of a photographic selection of the building’s exterior and subsequent interiorisation through photography?

The recognition attained of late by architecture photographers may owe to just

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7 Kazuyo Sejima. ‘La casa es un refugio para la mente’, *El País*, 15 June 2002, p. 20.

this, since part of the merit of making a given intention visible has been attributed to them. In other words, these photographers are able to make buildings speak, perhaps even beyond what their actual essence.

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# PERMANENCE AND EXPERIMENTATION IN THE STRUCTURE OF MODERN SPACE

IVÁN I. RINCÓN BORREGO

## 1.

The critic and historian Vincent Scully refers in his book “*Modern Architecture - The Architecture of Democracy*” (1961) to two initial works of Le Corbusier, the *Dom-ino* house of 1914 and the *Citrohan* house of 1920, in order to identify both inherent types of space of the modern architecture: the *sandwich* spaces and the *megaron* spaces. While the first one refers the space stratified conception of horizontal bands obtained from the revolutionary constructive method presented by Le Corbusier, the second uses the terminology of the ancient palatial rooms of Micenic civilization to refer to an interior defined essentially by walls.

On the one hand, Scully identifies both floor and roof of the *Dom-ino* house as the limits that accentuate the *sandwich* space. Its construction in the shape of a cage of floors springs from the overlap of building frames and slabs. With the help of light walls, the vertical supports delimit areas but they do not close enclosures, leaving the façades completely open and without load. As a result, the space leads to the maximum horizontal isotropy, to the clearest lightness and to the highest formal autonomy of the support.

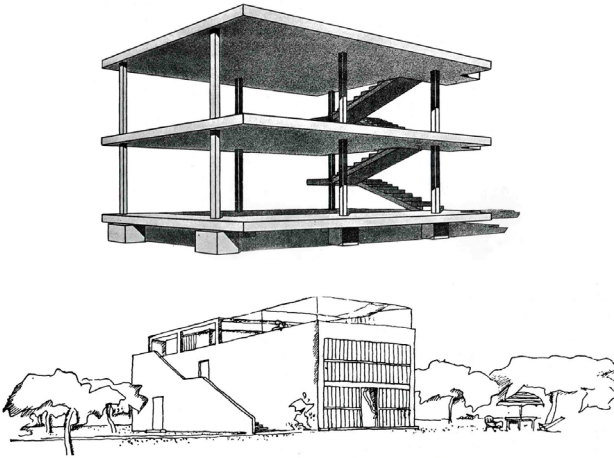


Figure 1. Modern spatial prototypes. *Dom-ino* house, 1914, and *Citrohan* house, 1920. 'Le Corbusier'. W. Boesiger (ed.), Le Corbusier & P. Jeanneret. *Oeuvre Complète*, Les Editions d'Architecture, Zurich, 1985.

On the other hand, Scully says that the vertical direction of the walls is emphasized by the *megaron* space and by its referent, the *Citrohan* house. The traditional system of structural walls is the base for this spatial configuration because it makes large openings on the non-structural façades easier and it produces double spaces which connect vertically different floors. As it was in the Micenic interiors, the *megaron* space has the shape of a tunnel with a double spatial component; a longitudinal one, which is parallel to the frame of the walls, and a vertical one, which is provoked by their free height.

The same year that Vincent Scully publishes his text, Colin Rowe also delves into the knowledge of both prototypes as conceptual structures using them to explain the Monastery of La Tourette of 1957-60, among other works of Le Corbusier, as if the building were a hybrid of both spatial models.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C Rowe, 'Monasterio dominicano de La Tourette, Eveux – sur – Arbresle, Lyon', quoted in C Rowe, *Manierismo y arquitectura moderna y otros ensayos*. Barcelona, Gustavo Gili, 1978, pp. 179-195.

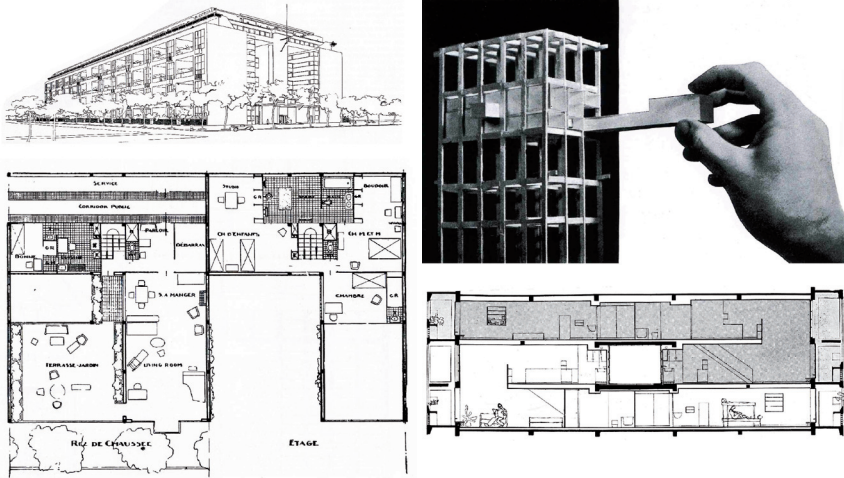


Figure 2. Hybrid spatial prototype. Perspective and plant of the Inmuebles Villa, 1922. 'Le Corbusier'.  
 Figure 3. Hybrid spatial prototype. Model and section of the Unités d'habitation, 1952. 'Le Corbusier'.  
 W. Boesiger (ed.), Le Corbusier & P. Jeanneret. *Oeuvre Complète*, Les Editions d'Architecture, Zurich, 1985.

It would be obvious and simplistic to think that Le Corbusier designs with only these two spatial methods. Nevertheless, both are instruments of structural and compositive order that appear combined in some of his most relevant works, especially, as an internal logic of his dwellings. That is the case of the Inmuebles Villa, 1922, or of the Unités d'habitation, 1952, where it is possible to go through each dwelling from *sandwich* spaces to *megaron* spaces, feeling alternatively the accent on the horizontal and vertical directions of its interiors. According to José M<sup>a</sup> Montaner, it is possible to find the same characteristic types of modern space in Mies van der Rohe's buildings but, in this occasion, they are linked to the improvement of pavilions and skyscrapers typologies. Mies van der Rohe combines both quoted systems in the Barcelona Pavilion in 1929 and in his courtyard houses, going ahead with his own search of a platonic space

made by two symmetric planes and an ideal horizon placed at eye level.<sup>2</sup> He puts *sandwich* spaces, that are restrained between floor and roof, inside *megaron* ones, that are identified with the courtyards where the interior escapes vertically from the pressure of the horizontal planes underlining the direction of the walls that surround the building.

In this sense, the structure of the modern space has undoubtedly evolved during the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the impulse of social, economical, technological and cultural transformations. The sensibility of architects toward these changes has provoked new ways of understanding the architectural space. An eloquent example is the variety of proposals that coincide in the fifties during the *third generation* of architects quoted by Philip Drew<sup>3</sup>; their shared architectonic concerns take the form of innovative and heterogeneous solutions. However, it is also possible to think about architectonic genealogies that coexist under a common law not chronological but immanent. Therefore, we can understand their different shapes through a same creative reasoning. Using Sigfried Giedion's methodology developed in "*Space, time and architecture. The future of a new tradition*" (1941), this is the case of the prototypes quoted by Vincent Scully and employees for Colin Rowe. The horizontal system *Dom-ino* and the vertical system *Citrohan* are the point of departure of a family of projects whose ethos resides in the idea that the space *order* proceeds from the structure *order*, which is understood as the material of constructive support and in its most conceptual sense of basic formal rule.

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2 Robin Evans explains the universality of Mies van de Rohe's spaces analysing the Barcelona Pavilion in this sense, as an ideal platonic building. R Evans, 'Mies van der Rohe's Paradoxical Symmetries', *AA Files. Annals of the Architectural Association School of Architecture*, no. 19, 1990, pp. 56-68.

3 We refer to the generation of architects that are born between 1915 and 1925. They started their relevant activities at 1945, just after Second World War. Philip Drew mentions Jørn Utzon, Moshe Safdie, Noriaki Kurokawa, Arata Isozaki, Archigram, Frei Otto, James Stirling, Alison & Peter Smithson, Aldo van Eyck, among others, as members of the third generation. P. Drew, *Tercera generación: la significación cambiante de la arquitectura*. Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 1973. Also A.A.V.V. 'La tercera Generación (II)', *El croquis*, nº 36, November, 1988, pp. 3-29.



Figure 4. Detail of the combination of *sandwich* and *megaron* spaces in the Barcelona Pavilion, 1929. 'Mies van der Rohe'. Author's archives.

## 2.

The modernity of Le Corbusier and Mies obtained '*universal*' status in the exhibition *International Style* that Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock organized in MOMA in 1932, where the architectonic objects were shown as entities considered from the *continuum* modern space. The event reinforced the rational conception of modern architecture as a style. But it also generates buildings based essentially on the certain knowledge of the free plant structure and of the independent façade, in order to create open atmospheres around vertical supports; *pilotis*, in the case of Le Corbusier, and cross-plant steel sections, in the case of Mies. After the Second World War, the architects of the third generation experimented with the universal character of the modern prototypes of the International Style giving them continuity from a critical position and adapting them to their own specific locations. The idea that the rational structure is the definitional framework of the modern space was essentially valid, although it

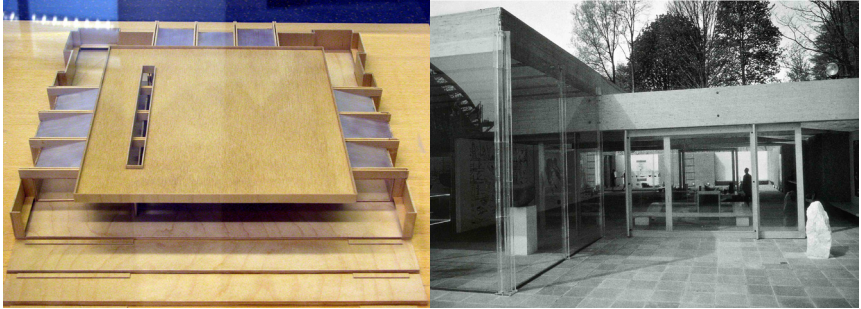


Figure 5. Model of the Norwegian Pavilion for the Universal Exhibition of Brussels, 1958. 'Sverre Fehn'. Author's archives.

Figure 6. Detail of glazing courtyard of the Norwegian Pavilion for the Universal Exhibition of Brussels, 1958. 'Sverre Fehn'.

did not stop the post-war consent on the insufficiency of the modern language undermining the faith in technology. For this reason, the popular references were an initial field of study for these architects, as a way to understand how the essence and the traditional technical details give renewed '*expressive character*' and '*constructive sense*' to the modern paradigms.

The architect Sverre Fehn and his proposal for the Norwegian Pavilion in the Universal Exhibition of Brussels in 1958 shows this tendency clearly. On the one hand, the whole structure of the building uses Mies van der Rohe's designs from the thirties. Sverre Fehn proposes a horizontal space completely opened and contained between a podium and a flat roof that is surrounded with a prefabricated zigzag concrete wall. The several openings that appear between the square roof and the irregular perimeter create different areas with the help of light walls that do not touch the roof and glass walls that define two glazed courtyards at the back of the building. On the other hand, the mechanism that activates

the project is the creation of a horizontal space that changes according to the sunlight for the incidence of the sun, which attributes new formal qualities to the roof: '*the idea of the Pavilion is very simple (...) a little building with different kinds of light in the shape of construction*',<sup>4</sup> as Sverre Fehn says. So he chooses for the roof three different plastic materials in order to filter the natural light and to create singular bright atmospheres, as if he were designing enclosures marked off by limits of corporeal light. The result maintains the predominant horizontality of the *sandwich* space, but in harmony with the vertical direction of the megaron space, which is now not only present in the courtyards, but also in the covered interior, emphasizing the direction of the natural events from above and below the building, from the sky and the earth.

Sverre Fehn and his fellow countryman Geir Grung have a common interest in the combination of modernity and tradition which stems from their early career. In the first building they designed together, the Craft Museum in Lillehammer in 1949, they adapted a space contained between two horizontal planes to a gentle slope. The floor and the roof descend unevenly over the lower slope of a hill, as if the initiation walk of the museum were a rationalist waterfall that is sensitive to the location. The proposed experience is a kind of descent through the art, a *promenade* that adds the variable of the place and the implantation to the abstract character of the above-mentioned modern prototypes. In addition, during a journey to Morocco in 1951, Fehn draws the Arab courtyards of Biogra as *megaron* interiors opened towards the sky, remembering with his sketches the ones of Le Corbusier for the Beistegui apartment, 1929-31. So the visit to the architectonic landscapes of the primitive cultures of north Africa and Orient is also a clear influence in their project of the retirement home Okern in Oslo of 1952-55; a building based on the overlap of weightless structural slabs that rest carefully on the ground, just as it is in Japanese traditional houses.

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4 S. Fehn, 'The Skin, the Cut & the Bandage', in S Anderson (ed.), *The Pietro Belluschi Lectures*, The MIT Press, Boston 1994, p. 7.

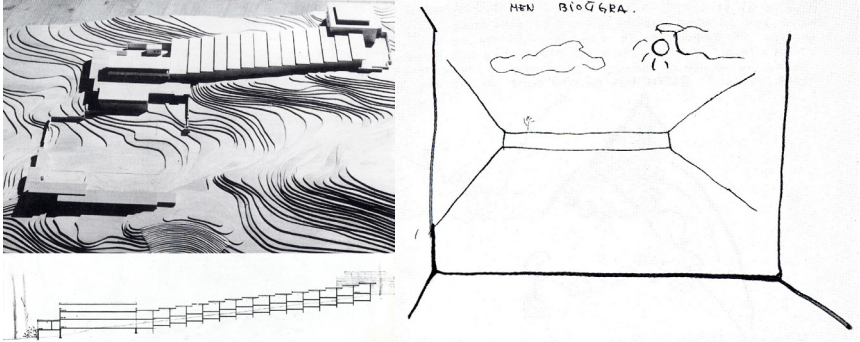


Figure 7. Model and longitudinal section of the Craft Museum in Lillehammer, 1949. 'Sverre Fehn and Geir Grung'.

Figure 8. Sketch of an Arab courtyard in Biogra, Morocco, 1951. 'Sverre Fehn'.

C. Norberg Schulz, G. Postiglione, *Sverre Fehn: Works, Projects, Writings, 1949-1996*. The Monacelli Press, Milan, 1997.

Fehn's and Grung's attitude is conciliatory and critical in relation to the models inherited from the masters of modernity, and it produces a positive syncretism that identifies with a lot of members of the third generation.

At the beginnings of the fifties Sverre Fehn and Geir Grung collaborate with Jørn Utzon being all together members of PAGON (*Progressive Architects' Group of Oslo, Norway*). At that time, Jørn Utzon also designs in a way that makes suitable the spatial patterns of the Modern Movement to specific situations and to extreme conditions, his proposal for a paper mill drawn during his second stay in Morocco in 1947 is a good example of this. The factory is homage to the cellulose production process by gravity. Jørn Utzon makes a diagram of it using curved stripes that descend organizing the section of the building. As if it were an enormous *megaron* rested on a topographic accident, two enormous parallel and polygonal outlined walls rest over the ground keeping its gradient. Over them, there is a roof consisting of V-shaped beams that filter the natural



Figure 9. Sketch of the Beistegui apartment, 1929-31. 'Le Corbusier'.

W. Boesiger (ed.), Le Corbusier & P. Jeanneret. *Oeuvre Complète*, Les Editions d'Architecture, Zurich, 1985.

Figure 10. Façade detail of the Retirement Home Okern in Oslo, 1952-55. 'Sverre Fehn and Geir Grung'. Author's archives.

light, emphasizing the internal terraced order. So the plant is just composed by two opaque walls with buttresses and by the abstract symbols of the industrial machinery, whose logic is shown as a printed digital circuit.

The project for the paper mill releases compositive analyses referred to the quoted structure *megaron*, analyses that are later used by Utzon in his design for the Melli Bank in Teheran in 1959-60 and in the Bagsvaerd church in 1968. In the first example he builds again an arrangement of skylight beams that covers a unitary space leaving the main room of the bank free of obstacles due to the versatile profile of the roof whose form represents the name of the bank entity in Arab characters. In the second one he recovers the idea of natural analogy, and combines prefabricated walls with curved surfaces in order to create an interior architectonic landscape covered by imaginary clouds. Both buildings emphasize the importance of the modern space structure, that is, of its clear programmatic rationality. They are clever examples of the renewed value of the

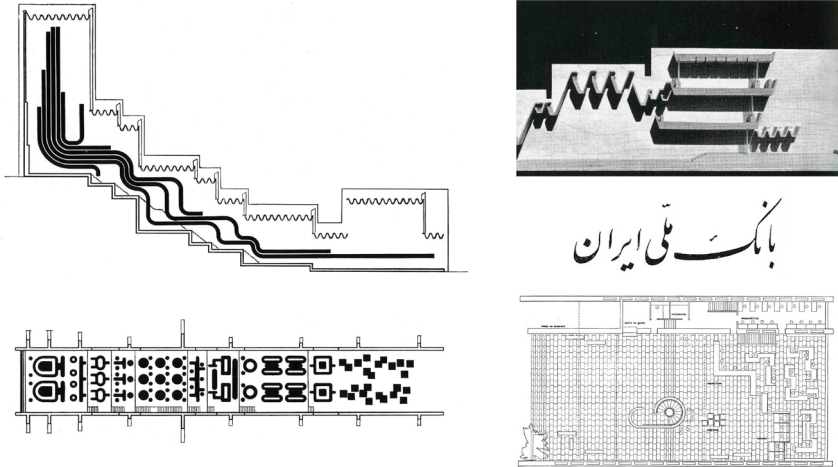


Figure 11. Plant and section of a paper mill design, Morocco, 1947. 'Jørn Utzon'.

Figure 12. Plant, section and Arab name of the Melli Bank in Teheran, 1959-60. 'Jørn Utzon'.

J. J. Ferrer Forés, *Jørn Utzon. Obras y proyectos*. Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 2006.

contextual references for the architecture of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Italian architect Lina Bo Bardi is another prominent exponent that breaks the moulds of the International Style without infringing on its basic principles. Her work, developed essentially in Brazil, synthesizes the structures of Mies van der Rohe with the materiality of the *brut* concrete. Mies had insisted on the constructive perfection of the modern space during his American period. He looked for the most transparency of the space and for the visual disappearance of the columns putting them outside the building. The exterior supports of the Farnsworth house, 1945-50, the accent over the immaterial corner of the Fifty by Fifty Feet house, 1950-52, or the powerful floating slabs of the Crown Hall, 1950-56 not only prove Mies van der Rohe's interest for the horizontal continuity of the space, but also consolidate the bases for Lina Bo Bardi's creative mimicry which provides the modern universality of those buildings with expressive values attributed to the popular culture.

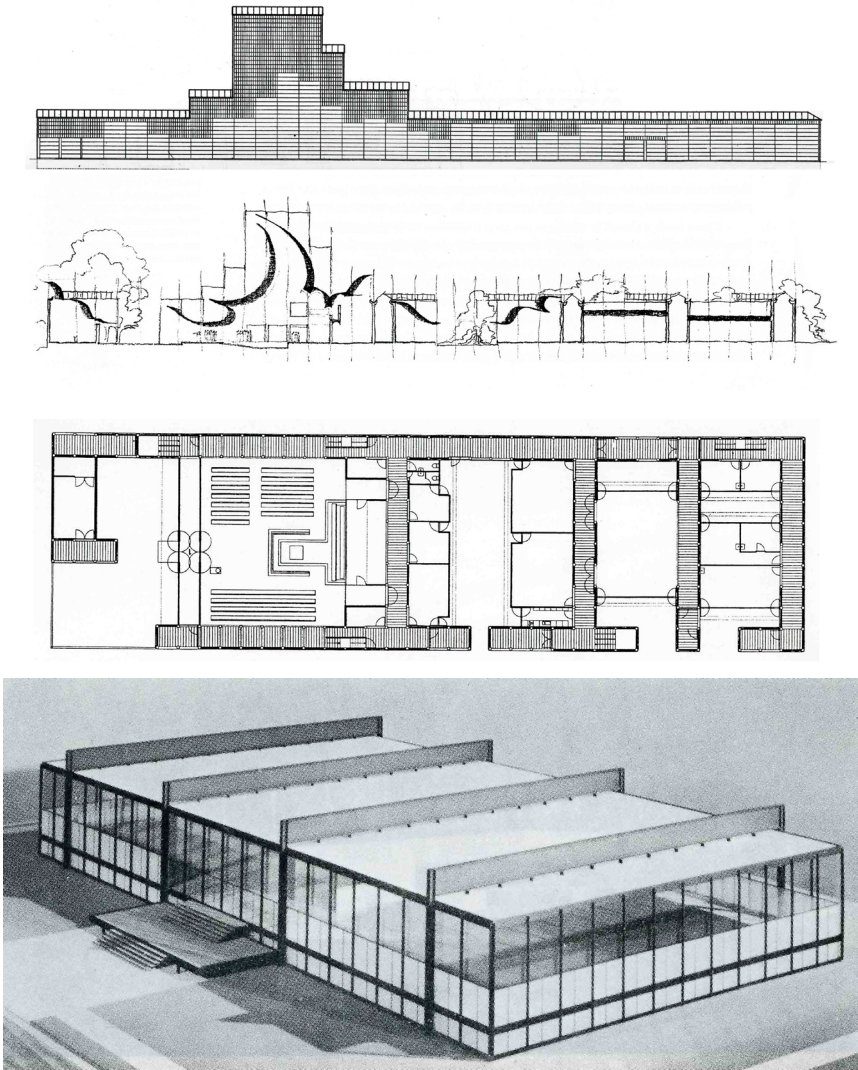


Figure 13. Plant, section and façade of the Bagsvaerd church, 1968. 'Jørn Utzon'.

Figure 14. Model of the Crown Hall, IIT, Illinois, 1950-56. 'Mies van der Rohe'.

T. Riely, B. Bergdoll, *Mies in Berlin*. MOMA, New York, 2001.

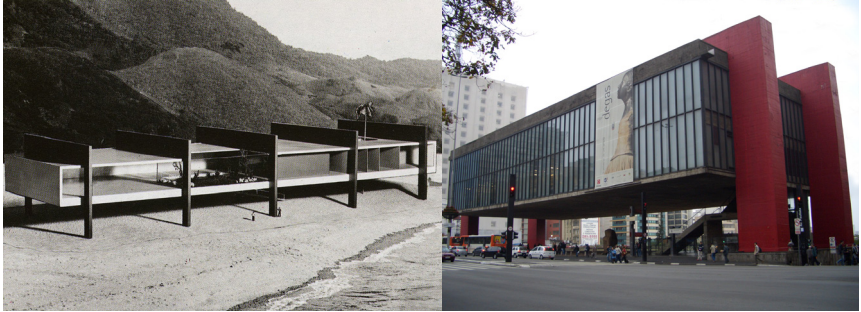


Figure 15. Model for a Museum by the side of the Atlantic in Beira do Oceano, 1951. 'Lina Bo Bardi'. Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz (ed.), *Lina Bo Bardi*, Charta, Milano, 1994.

Figure 16. Urban view of the Museum of Contemporary Art of São Paulo (MASP), 1957-68 'Lina Bo Bardi'.

In Bo Bardi's project for a museum facing the Atlantic in Beira do Oceano, São Vicente, in 1951, the weightlessness of the Crown Hall influences her designed considerably. Five striking red frames built in reinforced concrete hold up in the air an impenetrable box that contains a large open-plan exhibition room. The objects exhibited into the museum and the light walls that divide its interior hang between the floor and the roof. Likewise, the structure is very tight around the volume like a skeleton framed by the only opened façade that looks toward sea. In spite of its abstract and powerful volume, the building integrates the natural environment and the light into its own built shape. It stands over the beach, it closes toward the mountains and it opens toward the ocean with great sensibility, overcoming the schematic isotropy of the modern prototypes from which it draws inspiration.

Lina Bo Bardi achieves a most spectacular development of the examples of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe in the Museum of Contemporary Art of São

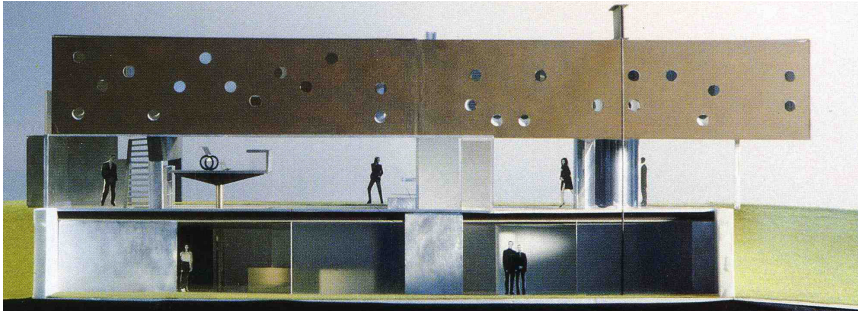


Figure 17. Model of the House in Bordeaux, 1994-98. 'OMA/Rem Koolhaas'.  
A.A.V.V., *El Croquis*, n° 53+79, 1998.

Paulo (MASP) in 1957-68. Two huge concrete frames hold again a weightless museum, leaving the space underneath completely free for a public square. The author radicalizes the idea of open-plan and modern continuum space with an expressionist gesture of structural brutalism toward the Paulista Avenue. Her intention is to link the urban surroundings and the building through the disappearance of the concept of front in favor of the one of volumetry. Due to the lack of a monumental emphatic entrance and because there is just a domestic stairs in a lateral position, the visual weight of the volume and the huge horizontal hollow play the leading role in the design. The roots of the eloquent architectonic vocabulary of Lina Bo Bardi lie in the rhetoric of the modern paradigms, the simple essence of what is primitive and the majesty sheer strength of Brazilian nature.

Authors of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Jørn Utzon, Sverre Fehn or Lina Bo Bardi, among others, look at the architecture of the past at the same

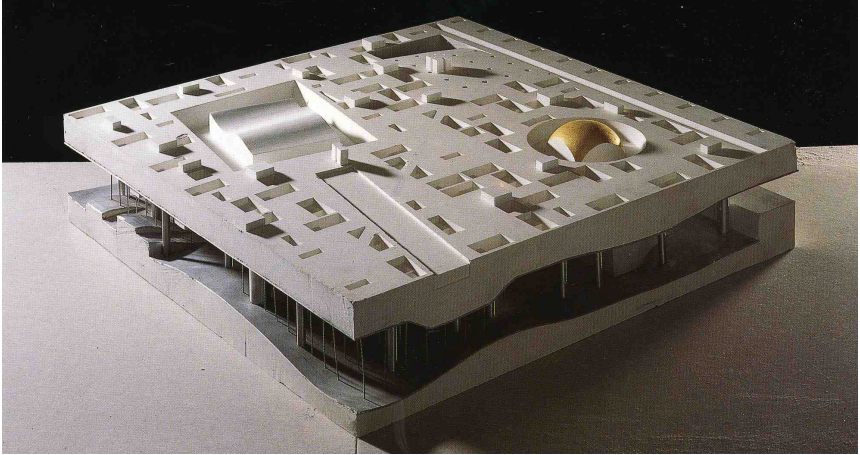


Figure 18. Model of a Hotel and a Congress Palace in Agadir, 1990. 'OMA/Rem Koolhaas'. A.A.V.V., *El Croquis*, nº 53+79, 1998.

time as they develop a space genealogy based on the work of the masters of the Modern Movement. They consider the language of nature, the characteristics of every context and the expressive capacity of the material to enrich the universality of the rationalist architecture. As if they were looking for the essence of the modern design, they go back constantly to the ideas that emanate from that architecture in order to venture into contemporary architecture, an attitude that is common nowadays among many vanguard architects.

### 3.

During the last decades, several buildings such as the house designed by OMA/ Rem Koolhaas in Bordeaux in 1994-98 propose new structures of modern space with the intent of using it as a vehicle to express the *Zeitgeist* and as a field of architectonic thought. This project combines a megaron-courtyard house and a rectangular concrete box that seems to levitate over an open space delimited



Figure 19. Interior view of the Rolex Learning Center in Lausanne. 'SANAA/ Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa'.  
Author's archives.

only by glazed planes. The only component that connects vertically the entire house is an elevator, a mechanic platform which makes the core of the dwelling equal to that of a skyscraper. This decision is a surrealist critique of the Villa Savoye, whose ramp is replaced by this industrial device. The supports make up a collage of heterogeneous parts that seem to be in unstable equilibrium. First, the columns are placed in an asymmetrical way. Then, the main beam of the higher volume is pierced. And finally, the cylinder that supports half of the building is made with a mirror aspect in order to dissolve its presence in the reflections of the landscape. The structure does not answer to the order of the framed spaces, moreover, it ignores its horizontal and vertical directions, showing the formal and surrealist autonomy of an acrobatic tectonic shape. OMA/Rem Koolhaas transcends the rationalism of the initial modern structures, but at the same time he preserves the memory of those. The importance of the structure underlines the *leitmotiv* of the house.



Figure 20. Façade of the Mediatec of Sendai, Miyagi, 1997-2000. 'Toyo Ito'.  
R. Witte, H Kobayashi (ed.), *Toyo Ito: Sendai Mediathèque*, Prestel, Munich, 2002.

Koolhaas develops similar intentions in his design for a Hotel and a Congress Palace in Agadir in 1990, identifying the building with a horizontal unitarian hall of brutalist scale whose limits are topographical surfaces. The office SANAA managed by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa completed recently the Rolex Learning Centre in Lausanne using the same idea of a huge horizontal space that seems to be a liquid topography. Both buildings work with the visual disappearance of the columns due to their multiplicity and their extreme thickness, in order to emphasize the horizontal slabs.

To sum up, some architecture of the last decades; OMA's proposal for the National Library of France, 1989; Peter Zumthor's Kunsthau in Bregenz, 1997; SANNA's Contemporary Art Museum for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Kanazawa, 1999-2004; among many others, imply an architectural way of thinking based in the structure of the modern space as if it were an eloquent tool capable of providing the most intelligent architectonic paradoxes. They evoke, at the same

time, the important inheritance of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, and the continuity with the work of the third generation of architects. In this sense, Toyo Ito explains this path of ideas clearly when he comments on Sendai's Mediatec: '*without the tubes [therefore, without the structure] the space would have been just a Mies Van Der Rohe's homogeneous space*'.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing largely the importance of the combination of modern structural ideas in his design, among other resources.

#### 4.

In conclusion, from the previous examples can be established an open genealogy of projects with common formal and structural strategies. This family of projects draws on the masterworks of the systems *Dom-ino* and *Citrohan* as a shared point of departure, but each project is not only linked with those masterworks, but also with each family spatial patterns into a fruitful creative process that reaches our days. In this process we can recognize the structure understood as essence of space, as a creative tool and framework of order. From it, we can detect how the successive generations of architects have focused their attention on design with the idea of the structure, exemplifying the constant process of renewal of modern architectural conception. A process of change that is nowadays in force in contemporary architecture, in which we highlight the permanence and experimentation rooted in the memory of the Modern Movement.

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5 T. Ito, Toyo Ito. *Conversaciones con estudiantes*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 2005, p. 29.

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TIME  
& INTERPRETATION



# CHANDIGARH, THE INDIAN CITY OF LE CORBUSIER AND THE NOTION OF TIME

RÉMI PAPILLAUT

This article will explore Le Corbusier's assimilation of time as an essential dimension - and constraint - in his town-planning for Chandigarh, the new capital of Punjab, between 1951, the year in which he started to work on the project, and 1965, the year of his death. It will pose the question, how did the architects who were to design this new city - in fact not only Le Corbusier but also P. Jeanneret, M. Fry and J. Drew - "position" themselves with respect to time? And furthermore, how did they define and respond to the constraints imposed by time - past, present, future - and its rhythms, from its more or less long durations to its brief "moments"? Taking up an idea expressed by Georges Kubler (1962) with reference to art, I would like to argue that the number of temporalities affecting the urban project is perhaps as great as the number of ways in which space (Papillault, 1994) is occupied.

It is possible to identify a number of temporalities which come into play in the creation of a new town. Different actors - politicians, administrators, engineers, architects - all have their own perceived relation to time and their own ways of dealing with the constraints it imposes. In this context, I will limit myself to the exploration of the time-factor by the architect in the process of conceiving the urban project.



Figure 1. Kiran Cinema.  
Author's archives.

### Defining “Useful Past”

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, H. Wölfflin stated that the historian had to realize this about his science:

*“A past era is like a mirror which reflects only the features of the person who looks into it. Each generation observes, chooses, uses the past in terms of itself.”*

We know that the “past” was important for Le Corbusier. P. Saddy has demonstrated how freely the architect approached history during his years of training (Le Corbusier, 1988). The “White Cathedrals” are an example of the mirror effect. Wölfflin’s mirror allows the historian to transform at will the image of an era through his analysis of it (Le Corbusier, 1937) That is how Le Corbusier sees the Middle Ages, “living past” as opposed “dead past”, a new period, a model of which the cathedral, seen as a concretization of the “human genius”, is the reflection:

*“Some pasts are the most vigorous instigators of the present and the best springboards*

*to the future”.*

For him, the present holds the same stakes at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only the programme is different. Even though the past seems evacuated from the Athens Charter, it and a certain definition of its role still subsist in the work of Le Corbusier.

In 1935, the text on the invitation card for “Primitive Art in Today’s House”, an exhibition which Le Corbusier organized with Louis Carré in his atelier, expresses how the past drives contemporary design:

*“The works of the spirit do not age. By periods, by cycles, in series, things come back: the same hours pass, once again, into minutes of concordance. Thus are related, are one, the works driven by the same potential energy. Unity is not found in uniformity of style; it is in an equivalence in potential. The contemporary is rooted in the depths of time”* (Le Corbusier, 1988).

Le Corbusier goes to museums and draws. Works from the past are examined not for beauty of form or colour but for latent energy, the brutalism, “primary inspiration” which they can convey to the creative artist. He adopts an attitude to the past which is close to that of the “eternal present” defined by Siegfried Giedion as early as the 1940’s. For him, there are transhistoric elements in architecture and urbanism which serve as sources from which architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can draw, a “useful past”.

For many of the first architects of the Modern Movement, past, present and future merge in what Giedion terms the “eternal present”. Their artistic activity as a whole is based on a system of intemporal references, which tends toward a sense of simultaneity and a spirit of abstraction. The past cannot be a lexicon of forms from which to choose, as it often was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Le Corbusier’s relation to the history of architecture is like his relation to his own history. It is interesting to note that Le Corbusier never wrote his memoirs, in the literary sense of the term. Often an author will preface his memoirs with an explanation of why he is writing them. Reading such prefaces by authors



Figure 2. Square on linear park.  
Author's archives.

who have made attempts in the genre, we find different motivations: to transmit knowledge of one's era and experience to future generations, to situate one's work in relation to one's life, to engage in reflection at a time in one's life when it becomes difficult to act.

For his part, Le Corbusier is constantly sketching, annotating, striking over, in his sketchbooks and on corners of tablecloths. His least idea is compiled. From what moment is he conscious that he is building an *oeuvre*? Very early it would seem, perhaps even as early as his first trips in 1907 - 1908, or as early as his first work on the building of cities, which he never published.<sup>1</sup> All of his sketches, shown in parallel to his projects, built or unbuilt, are published in the *Œuvres Complètes*.

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<sup>1</sup> See the analysis in the exhibition catalogue for the Hotel de Sully, especially in Chapter I "Le Passe", the translation of the lecture by Julius Posener (1988).



Figure 3. Entry village group.  
Author's archives.

And so he constitutes his written memoirs day by day. In publishing his sketches, he wished to leave to posterity a lexicon, a sort of modernist's catalogue from which others could draw and for which chronology was of little importance: in a certain sense, what is said in 1920 still holds true in 1960. But there is also in his memoirs the desire to demonstrate the coherence and the evolution of his reflection over the whole course of his activities: a coherence which is anticipated from the very beginning of the work.

Both Le Corbusier's conception of the history of architecture, and of his own personal history as an architect, reflect the concept of the eternal present which in itself might be considered to render pointless the very idea of the written memoir. The architect uses his own work in the same way that he uses the history of architecture generally: at any moment such a theme of the past may be reinjected into the present but never in a literal way. To a certain extent the architect 're-synthesizes' within the framework of each new project. The

continuity of Le Corbusier's research is such that speaking of style seems irrelevant.

In July 1965, in his last letter (Le Corbusier, 1970:168), the architect does not divide his career into periods. He opens the *Œuvre Complètes* with the Fallet house at La Chaux de Fonds, built when he was 17 years old, and he closes with the Open Hand Monument at Chandigarh, to which he refers as "the end of the race". The notion of a useful past in the history of architecture and in architecture itself confronts Indian culture in a particular way.

Three years before being invited to Chandigarh, Le Corbusier gave his impressions of India in an article entitled "Past, Present and Tomorrow":

*"In this India which has come through the dark period of the first machine age undamaged, there seems to exist the basis for expansion, that is: permanent and human, eternal factors, maintained throughout the ages, in the essential and the transcendent, irrefutable powers of modern techniques, transient but constantly improved. The continuity of yesterday - today - tomorrow, (and I take as witness the persistence of the hindu woman's garment), brings forward from the ages the most brilliant beauty and grace and perpetuates them without anachronism into the present day, "a raison d'être" reaffirmed"* (Le Corbusier, 1948).

The search for a "hindu style" (Le Corbusier, 1950), while explicit in intention is not obvious in fact. In Le Corbusier's library there are few books about India.<sup>2</sup> He does not seem to want to develop a documented knowledge of the country but rather a knowledge based on visual intuition. The same can be said for his travels. From February of 1951 until his death, Le Corbusier travelled 23 times to India. In spite of his sketchbooks and other documents, we know very little about his interest in Indian architectural culture. Women in saris, sacred cows, the royal bath at Fort Rouge, a view of Patiala at nightfall, the gardens of Pinjore, a few quotations about the Delhi observatory in his various sketchbooks: the

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<sup>2</sup> See the inventory of V. Portefaix, 1995-96.

explicit traces of that vision of India are finally quite tenuous when compared to the work being done at the same period by Weiner and Sert in South America or by Candilis and Woods in Morocco.

The project for Chandigarh is fed by a globalist vision whose references are in the modernity of the tarmac of an American airport, a concrete parapet in Switzerland, a view of the pyramids in Cairo, etc. This vision seems to be at the root of the modernity of the city. If the drawings of Albert Mayer and Matthew Nowicki reflect a certain culturalism, one might say that the Corbusian design for Chandigarh is “a-cultural”, a universalism in which Le Corbusier anchors his vision of the modernity of India, echoing Nehru’s wish for a city or a modern building which is neither European nor Indian “but something fitting in with the general structure of society, technological advance, climate, functions, ...etc”.<sup>3</sup> The historical elements of the site which are maintained in the plan of the new town are for the most part those which refer to the long term :

*“the site is totally empty, a limitless plain leaning up against hills and a background of Himalayas”* (Le Corbusier, 1951).

By ignoring the traces of the past, Le Corbusier is applying to the site his notion of the *tabula rasa*. Chandigarh’s grid-plan is broken only by those lines which are a result of natural erosion over a long period, the course of the river and the relief. Man’s age-old occupation of the site is erased when we look at the map at the scale of the territory. But if we look at smaller scale maps of the sections finalized in 1952-53 by Jeanneret, Fry and Drew, we see that the lines of mango trees which bordered the old roads are kept and that they direct the new division of the land, which is different from that of V2 and V3, rooting the whole in the territory and in time. As early as 1952 in the treatment of all the urban scales down to that of the individual parcel, there is conflict or contradiction between the city-plan and the site’s past, between the *tabula rasa* and the palimpsest,

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3 Nehru, speech in New Delhi, March 1959, in *Annual of architecture, structure and town planning*, Pub. Corporation of India, Calcutta, 1960.



Figure 4. Walls on square.  
Author's archives.

between the modernity of the Athens Charter and the contextualism of the New Regionalism defined by Giedion.

### **The “Burning Present”**

*“Life is beautiful because we do not intend nor pretend to determine a fixed and eternal destiny for all things in the future. Each thing at every moment is but a participant in the present” (Le Corbusier, 1937:10).*

In defining urbanism, awareness of the present thus appears as a necessary tool. When we build the city, this critical awareness permits us to make up for shortcomings and to retain those qualities which should endure. For Le Corbusier, to be of one's time and one's era is to be at the edge at the limit, sensitive to all signs of modernity in the contemporary situation. He defines the present as a “burning today”, a “line of fire”(Le Corbusier, 1948). For him

the present is characterized by a delicate equilibrium that the metaphor of the acrobat can help to explain:

*“An acrobat is not a puppet, he consecrates his activity for which he is constantly in danger of death, he accomplishes feats never-before performed, at the limits of difficulty and with rigour, precision and timing..., at the risk of breaking his bones, of knocking himself out”.*

As early as 1924, in the foreword to *Urbanisme*, Le Corbusier places his city in the present by saying to those who accuse him of planning for the year 2000 that he is not building a “city of the future” but a “contemporary city”, “contemporary, because tomorrow belongs to no one” (Le Corbusier, 1925).

*“I am tired of forever describing, like some minor prophet, this ambrosian asylum of the future. I believe I have become a futurist, which does not thrill me; I feel that I am leaving aside those raw truths of existence to give myself over to wild imaginings.”* (Le Corbusier, 1925:184)

He describes a “contemporary city” not in the future tense but in the present, and this despite the statistics presented which reveal aspects of its development<sup>4</sup>. It is conceived as a finished project, where all the parts must fit into the volumetric envelopes fixed by the architect. In this respect it resembles Tony Garnier’s industrial city of 1901-1917, the first example of progressive contemporary urbanism. In the *ville radieuse*, at Rio de Janeiro, Algiers or even Saint Die, Le Corbusier lays out an urban project as in fact a defined, architectural one. Everything is drawn: roads, residential buildings, industrial buildings, public buildings... The city is represented as a formally defined object.

However at Chandigarh this fusion of architecture and urbanism is called into question.

After the success of the *ville radieuse* and the commission for Chandigarh, after

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<sup>4</sup> See the chapter on statistics, Le Corbusier (1925:99). See also the chapter “La Prévision” in *Le Corbusier, Sur les 4 routes*, 1939, Paris.



Figure 5. Appropriation before.  
Author's archives.

years of stubborn persistence, Le Corbusier had been able to convince as many of his architectural colleagues as certain historians and a few politicians: more than the politician, the architect is the one who can best “foresee” the present. And for Le Corbusier, in India, and perhaps nowhere else, was there a politician who himself had some of this kind of clairvoyance: Jawaharlal Nehru.

*“Today, India is made up of millions of men and women, each one different, living in his own particular world of thoughts and feelings. If such is the present, how difficult it must be to understand one’s past with its generations of human beings. Something, however, has bound them together and binds them still. India is a geographical and economic entity, a cultural unity of great diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by invisible ties”*(Nehru, 1986).

For Le Corbusier this awareness of the present is central to his work on the design of the city

*“Dear friends Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry, the problem is magnificent. At this*



Figure 6. Appropriation.  
Author's archives.

*moment in the evolution of modern civilisation, India represents a nobility of spirit which is particularly endearing. Our task is to come up with the urbanism and architecture which reaches the very lifeblood of this deep and powerful civilisation and gives it the modern equipment which will help place it in the present. That is a task for thinkers and for technicians.”(Le Corbusier:1950).*

He sees this modernity of India, as does Nehru, in industrialisation and mechanization, but along with the preservation of its originality which he feels derives from its relationship with consumption and monetary exchange, its social organization, its relationship with nature and especially its relationship with time, with the long term. Various factors, philosophical, cultural and demographic, give India a particular fixity when faced with modernity and this puts the human factor at the centre of the system:

*“Nothing is easier than to use the architectural stock of the white race. And nothing exists here, in the Indies, which corresponds to modern work, modern life. We must*



Figure 7. Appropriation.  
Author's archives.

*therefore leave our stock at home, and examine the tasks before us, invent and think in human terms first, foremost and only*" (Le Corbusier, 1952).

In a letter to the CIAM conference in Dubrovnik in 1956, Le Corbusier asks the generation of architects born between 1916 and 1930 to be alert to the present situation. He even admits that the "old guard" is no longer able to understand it. For him it is the young, perched on the shoulders of their elders, who are most able to capture the tensions in the contemporary reality. Defining what is burning, what is violently alive today would allow architecture to attain its goal: "the ordering of the present", of the burning today.

### **Urbanistic Tools for a "Promising Future"**

*"New Delhi is not an attractive place. This is not so because of the buildings. Now you can not develop the right atmosphere in a city too quickly. But at any rate, you can lay the foundation for it. You can help that atmosphere to grow"* (Nehru, 1952).



Figure 8. Microcentrality.  
Author's archives.

While Le Corbusier does not incorporate the dimension of the future into his urban projects from before the war and perhaps also into those for La Rochelle or Saint Die, this is not the case for Chandigarh. Apart from the Capital, he did not show any definitive images for the city. It would seem that all the plans or models produced show only the urban system and hardly any architectural forms. As Le Corbusier wrote in 1948, in his article for *Marg*, after 40 years of research, theory collapses in the face of the “torrent of instinct”. This realisation can be found also among some of the participants in the CIAM congress. Giedeon, in the fifth edition of *Space Time and Architecture*, completely revised in 1966, adds two chapters which I feel are crucial to understanding the evolution of the perceived temporalities of the city in the decade from 1950 to 1960.

In the introduction entitled “Architecture around 1960: hopes and fears” and in the last chapter “Space-time in urbanism” he highlights, particularly through the metabolic projects of Kenzo Tange and Fumihiko Maki, a new relation of

architecture and urbanism to time. His reply to the antagonism between those who believe in the city as capable of being transformed and those who are anti-urban comes in the form of a question:

*“Is the city an evolving entity whose difficulties we have conquered definitively through technical invention such as radio, television and the automobile? Or is it an eternal phenomenon which is based on human interaction, in spite of the intrusion of mechanization?”* (Giedion, 1966).

The new aesthetic and functionalism of the “parkway system” was for Giedeon a revelation of the new dimensions of urbanism:

*“It’s like the feeling of a skier barrelling down fresh snowy hills..., it’s at the wheel of a car, driving uphill and down, through tunnels or on ramps and giant bridges, that we experience the most intense space-time phenomenon of our time.”* (Giedion, 1966).

According to him, the advantages of the parkway for the city are several: separation of car and pedestrian; separation of residence and road; elimination of the street as corridor; the possibility of building higher; point of consensus between the anti-urban and those who believe in the transformable city. The stakes are high: the city must become a “dynamic field of correlative and interdependent forces”. Giedion paraphrases a text by Shadrach Woods written when the project for the Berlin Free University was published. For Giedeon that building represents, on an architectural scale, the space-time of the city:

*“Urbanism requires at the present time a flexible general programme, able to take into account temporal changes, that is to leave room for chance.”*

The “open planning” which Giedeon presages corresponds to a three-dimensional urbanism which incorporates, “as if it were a natural phenomenon”, almost biological, the notions of dynamism, of circulation and of change. It is my hypothesis that Le Corbusier, without having formulated it as a theory,

foresees for Chandigarh as early as 1951 a system of “open planning” based on several urbanistic tools which should guarantee the coherence of the city in the future. This open planning may seem archaic when compared from a historian’s perspective to the biological or metabolist ideas which emerge at the end of the 1950’s, but in hindsight it seems to me to be more effective.

At the 7<sup>th</sup> CIAM congress in Bergamo in 1949, Le Corbusier outlines the “CIAM Grid”, designed by the Ascoral in December 1947, describing it as a tool for working out plans but also as a tool to present or transmit them (Le Corbusier, 1953:40; See also Cincai, 1987:88). This grid starts with the four functions of the Athens Charter: to live, to work, to cultivate the body and the mind, and to circulate. These are crossed with nine themes: 1) environment, 2) zoning, 3) built volume, 4) facilities, 5) ethics and aesthetics, 6) economic and social factors, 7) legislation, 8) stages in building, 9) miscellaneous.

Two spaces at the end of the grid are left for rational reactions and for emotional reactions. The whole is to allow for a “harmonisation of the present time”. Chandigarh is a product of this grid but as modified and completed by other elements in the course of the project. From a tool for design and demonstration, the CIAM grid was to become at Chandigarh a way of projecting the city forward in time by means of certain tools:<sup>5</sup>

- **The zoning** which came out of the four functions of CIAM was used in an anthropomorphic fashion closer to that of the Renaissance than of the Indian *Vastu Shastra*. At the head is the Capitol, the place of power; in the middle the “stomach”, the commercial area; on either side are the “arms” formed by the university and the industrial zone; the valley of recreation constitutes the “lungs”, and the whole is “irrigated” by the “arteries” of roads for circulation. The anthropomorphic form is thus that of a seated man, arms outspread, which corresponds to the cross in the *Poem of the Right Angle* and the swastika which

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<sup>5</sup> This analysis is the result of a research project in a post-graduate seminar at the Ecole d'Architecture de Paris la Defense.



Figure 9. Street.  
Author's archives.

appears as a sign of good fortune in various places in the city.

- **The hierarchical organisation of the “7V”**

The road system for Chandigarh is an application of the “theory of the 7V” developed in 1948 in a research project for UNESCO and applied in the projects for Bogota in 1950 and for South Marseille in 1951 and finally at Chandigarh as early as the April 1951 plan. The system is comprised of eight types of routes forming a hierarchical system, each of which is bordered with different types of trees according to the status of the road in question and its direction. A series of transversal sections defines particular relationships between each type of road and the buildings bordering them. All of these road-types are homogeneous throughout their course. Only the two big V2 which cross at right angles change as they go from the material - the industrial zone or the markets - to the spiritual - the university of the Capital.

- **The tree-plantings of 1952**

Starting in 1952, Le Corbusier worked with German Samper, a young Columbian architect from the rue de Sevres office, on the tree-plantings for Chandigarh. His visits to New Delhi and to Cairo, but mainly his 40 years' experience in research about the city had convinced him of the necessity of using vegetation as an essential element in the image of the city by playing on a paradox: the sensation of urbanity in the modern city comes from the way in which the built disappears into the vegetation. Ideally, one could cross the city as one crosses a park, without seeing a single building, an idea which is in line with the "park system" of the beginning of the century and with the parkways described by Giedeon: high-speed movement amid nature in the centre of the city.

This tree plan gives coherence to the city even before any of its buildings and is thus one of the most important planning elements for the city's form at that time. Different trees are planted along the roads, around the Capitol, the University, the commercial centre and the free spaces in the different sectors. The types of trees are chosen for their shape, height and growth, for their flowers or foliage, deciduous or permanent, dense or sparse, forming rows, groves or woods. To the existing trees such as mangos and ficus which are designated as to be kept in the zoning plan, are added a great number of local or imported varieties in order to "give the residents some elements of classification", landmarks in the city (See Le Corbusier, 1953; Chbatar, Wattas and Dhillon, 1998).

A landscape Advisory Committee is created in 1953 under the direction of the botanist, Dr. Randhawa.

- **Construction regulations:**

From 1952 on, three types of rules are defined to control construction, another essential tool in the management of the city over time.

On the territorial scale, the "Punjab New Capital Periphery Control Act" established a zone of 10 kilometres around the city where no building was permitted (later increased to 16 kilometres), leaving this area for agriculture.

The idea was: “There can be no suburbs around Chandigarh” (Le Corbusier, 1951).

At the scale of the city, Jeanneret, Fry and Drew co-signed with Thapar “zoning plans” which, sector by sector, defined the roads, the free spaces, the lots, the use, the built form, the maximum height, the type and height of enclosures. Along with these zoning plans are 119 regulations, signed by Thapar, the government’s secretary. They set up a very strict framework: the requirement for a building permit, minimum standards of hygiene (for one house: one kitchen, one indoor or outdoor bathroom and one toilet), minimum ceiling heights, construction materials with minimum dimensions, regulation of the architecture profession, etc.

The precision of the regulations coupled with the zoning plan shows how narrow a margin was defined for those who wished to build in Chandigarh. This perhaps explains the success of the governmental models refined by Jeanneret, Fry and Drew.

- **The climatic grid, 1952**

Created around 1952 by M. Missenard, the climatic grid allowed for the placing of buildings through site analysis. The intense heat and monsoon rains in Chandigarh lead to architectural solutions such as the sun break in its single or double version, and the parasol or umbrella roof which is used mainly for large public buildings. Variations on these themes were tried out by Jeanneret, Fry and Drew for residences and public buildings: a single, thick skin, a double skin, galleries, verandas, etc...

- **The Modulor and the *Purusha* of the Brahmins**

*“The new Capital of the Punjab is thus the first city which will be entirely ordered by a harmonic measure”* (Le Corbusier, 1951).

Finalized in 1943, the Modulor is shown to the public for the first time in 1947, and a work is published in 1950 which explains Le Corbusier’s 7 years

of research.<sup>6</sup> It was while working in the Mazarine library in December 1950 that Le Corbusier discovered the *purusha* of the Brahmins, a unity of dimension which corresponds to “a man stretched out, with his arms extending above his body” (Le Corbusier, 1955:83), an Indian echo of the Modulor. The challenge is to make the Modulor into a transgeographical and transtemporal instrument, a kind of Esperanto of measurement. The harmonisation of Chandigarh also comes from the Modulor as a system of proportion, at the scale of the general plan for the city as well as at the scale of the Capitol and the various buildings. The Modulor also has the advantage of corresponding to the proportion between the British inch and foot. It thus becomes the common language for the architects in the Paris office and the senior architects in Chandigarh.

Pierre Jeanneret developed a conversion table for metric and imperial measures for the architects and engineers, which was then distributed to all the technicians. In December 1952 he wrote:

*“It is thanks to the Modulor that we are able to work in an orderly way and successfully draw up the mass of plans, and that not only our work but also our draftsmen are in accord”* (Le Corbusier, 1953:113).

All of the architect’s temporal categories applied to the city of Chandigarh show the distance covered since the abstraction of the *Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants*. What is surprising is the rapidity with which Le Corbusier realizes that he must integrate these dimensions into his project. It is a striking departure from his previous projects, even if most of the elements can be traced back to early works.

The Capital seems to be a carefully constructed system of oppositions, a semiotic synthesis of the temporal dimension of the city and, perhaps, the ultimate synthesis of the *Œuvre complete*.

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<sup>6</sup> Le Corbusier, *Le Modulor, Essai sur une mesure harmonique à l'échelle humaine applicable universellement à l'architecture et à la mécanique* (1950). Followed by Le Corbusier, *Modulor 2: La parole est aux usagers* (1955). About these works see: Matteoni (1987:259).

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# POST-MODERNITY AS A CULTURAL WEAPON

PEDRO VIEIRA DE ALMEIDA

1)-Today's idea of a cultural "Globalisation" represents a concept mainly coined with in a network of strong political interests aimed at the effective cultural control of the entire planet.

Though seldom avowed, nevertheless we could easily gather some sound statements that seem to confirm of the validity of this interpretation (Jameson; Leach; Argan; Said; Maalouf).

2)-Particularly in the architectural fields, a skilful stratagem underlying the reasoning that supports the idea of a "Globalisation", is the ambiguous way of understanding the historical periods considered, and the designations employed.

Therefore, I think it is useful to reorganise them all, in order to do away with much of the ambiguity (Le Goff; Nesbit; Eisenman; Betts).

3)- Especially with some designations like "Modern Movement" which covers different things, and which has been already recognised as being an "ambiguous umbrella", allowing every interpretation and sustains every conclusion (Nesbit).

4)-So concretely, I am proposing the need to read the evolution from the 15<sup>th</sup> century until 20<sup>th</sup> century, divided in two main modernities, which I believe to be better than others because they are settled mainly in social-economic fields.

5)-The first one to be considered covers all the period from the Renaissance until the end of the last century, and it is considered the **Macro Paradigm of Anthropological Modernity**.

6)-It includes the **Minor Paradigm of Sociological Modernity** which is more specific and comes with peculiar problems implied by the Industrial Revolution.

7)-They both include several main periods and some other micro periods like modernism and post-modernism which are precisely that: movements totally integrated on the Great Paradigms considered before.

8)-Nevertheless the 21<sup>th</sup> century assists to the birth of **Post Modernity**, which corresponds to another **Macro**

*Paradigm, that splits out all principles structuring the Paradigms existent until then.*

9) Besides, **Post Modernity** implies a new cultural consciousness merged with a strong political consciousness spread all over the world.

10)- *Trying to be aware of this new demanding era is perhaps the first step, a big one, in order to oppose the idea of a procrustean and sterilising “Globalisation”.*

1)- Today we can easily find almost everywhere texts referring to a “Globalisation” as a notion that is self-evident and in some way ineluctable.

However, I am convinced that this is not an naïf concept but it corresponds to an idea mainly coined in a network of very strong and well-defined political interests.

As such, “Globalisation” corresponds to an aggressive weapon in the field of culture.

Of course this is my own view on the matter but we could find many other opinions supporting that statement.

We could quote from Edward Said who in 78 underlies “that political imperialism tries to control all academic research, all imaginative studies”, or expresses the idea that we lack a general study about “imperialism and culture” (Said, 2004:15).

We could quote as well from Fredric Jameson who in 84 writes that Post-modern culture in fact corresponds to a new effort of the United States to rule the planet economically and militarily (Jameson, 1991[1984]:19).

We could quote from Montaner who more recently underlined that since the thirties, North American cultural politics has tried to control the cultural and artistic production all over the world (Montaner, 2001:13).

And so on.

Had we time enough we could quote as well from Neil Leach (2005), from Amin Maalouf (2002) and many others.

2)- Specifically in the architectural fields, a skilful stratagem is used to support

the idea of an unavoidable “Globalisation”, trying to transform History into a futile exercise, as the historian Jacques Le Goff (1982:72) refers, or changing as far as possible cultural references, blurring the borders between periods of evolution in history and rendering ambiguous or senseless all periods previously defined.

Of course this can be used as a tool for an improved historical understanding as Jacques Le Goff has done by proposing to extend the Middle Ages until the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a continuous evolution.

It is easy to understand how this corresponds to a proposition that determines new paths of research and new global interpretations in the ways of considering History.

Nevertheless today’s pseudo “arguments” are used as an opportunistic tool twisting and perverting any interpretation, in order to reach certain political objectives.

Neil Leach adverts that we are living in a time when it is possible to frame and distort “truth” in order to validate the myths of History (Leach, 2005[1999]:40). Finally we learn from Paul Betts how far certain circles and interests are decided to go just to reach that aim of twisting History (Betts, 2009: 200).

3)- This is especially so with certain designations such as “Modern Movement” which covers different things, what has been already recognised as being an “ambiguous umbrella”, allows every interpretation and sustains every conclusion (Nesbit, 1996: 12).

Charles Jenks in 85 had denounced the lack of critical reliability of these kinds of designations (Jenks, 1985:11).

4)- That’s the reason why I think that, as far as architecture is concerned, the attempt to re-analyze the issue of more operative periods in History is an important step to take.

Concretely, I would like to propose the need to reorganise the historical evolution from the Renaissance until the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, divided in two

main periods of Modernities that are partially superimposed but that I suppose more warranted than others because they are settled mainly in social-economic fields.

5)-The first one to be considered covers generically the whole period and is the **Macro Paradigm of Anthropological Modernity**.

This means that men have ceased to think about themselves as a consequence of metaphysical conceptions (in this period **Rome would be the *Caput Mundi***). From now on slowly but firmly, men are the real centre of any speculation, and the conception of God is in fact a real consequence of our ideas about ourselves (Almeida, 2005).

6)-Though in the second half of this period, with the economic and social problems that arise from the Industrial Revolution, the specific transformation of life conditions forces us to consider a new Modernity which is totally integrated in the preceding period, rendering it more accurate.

That one is a period we could name the **Minor Paradigm of Sociological Modernity** (from now on **Paris becomes the *Caput Mundi***) (Almeida, 2005).

7)-They both include micro periods like Modernism and Post-modernism which, independently of their qualities and general merits, are nothing but professional movements defining specific paths of research, like many others that have occurred during the long period of Modernities.

8)- In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially after World War II, we can enumerate several attempts to transform New York into the capital of culture (**NY *Caput Mundi***) (Almeida, 2005).

9)- Anyway, in the 21<sup>th</sup> century we also witness the birth of the **Macro Paradigm of the Post Modernity**.

This represents a fairly new cultural circumstance.

No more a world centralised culture, no more peripheral countries, no more guiding cities and vanguards meaning world wide values.

10)- We can say that this Macro-Paradigm disintegrates thoroughly the Paradigms existent until then, which means that now it is spread all over the world, and that a new cultural consciousness which refuses to acknowledge any country or any city the legitimacy of claiming to be the cultural global leaders all over the planet.

11)- Of course this new Macro Paradigm of **Post Modernity** means a strong cultural consciousness but it represents a strong political consciousness as well. Both of them are absolutely necessary to oppose the idea of a procrustean and sterilising “Globalisation”.

12)- To cope with this new era – I believe a big and decisive one-- is perhaps the first step, to be done to establish a new and more suitable frame work in order improve research on those matters.

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# COUNTER-ATTRACTION, OR, HOW TO MIES-READ ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY FOR OUR OWN PURPOSES

ZOLTÁN BUN

Several contemporary architects have turned to *Mies van der Rohe* while they are dealing with real projects and not with the goal of building a pure theoretical edifice: *Peter Eisenman* and *Daniel Libeskind* on a radical formal basis, and *Rem Koolhaas* and *Bernard Tschumi* on a programmatic one. These practices were circling around Eisenman from the '70s in the journal of *Oppositions* to the '90s in the ANY conferences. Now we are going to investigate only Eisenman and Koolhaas in detail, their work from 1985 to 2000. The question is what do they want from Mies and why do they refer to him specifically?

To reveal this relationship let me introduce the term '*culture of interpretation*' in which I place hermeneutics, deconstruction or difference philosophy—and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze or Fredric Jameson—next to each other, being aware of the problems of this blurring. The culture of interpretation or the hermeneutics as the 'art of understanding' originates in the shaken faith of universal reason or of scientific causal explanations. It is sceptical about dominating the world by a final or basic principle which then cannot be considered as an opposition of (metaphysical) spirit and (scientific) material. It is the model of openness and freedom which means that this kind of *individual*

*thinking* makes new by rebuilding old edifices: under these circumstances text and interpretation, or creation and perception, are not two sides of the same thing. Theoretically words gain meaning in the so-called original text only through interpretation, or the system of signs becomes operational only by reading. The reader becomes a writer and in the end there are endless and 'topographically bound' explanations or dynamic differences between what we called earlier extremities. So if we want to 'understand' any kind of texts we have to misread them to dislocate their given frames. It is obvious then that the interpretation is a singular phenomenon and, as such, it is an illustration of the position and the era of the interpreter. And, although it has limited validity, the most important factor in this construction is the *mediator code system*, which can reveal the essence of the interpretation.

This is exactly the case with the story of both modernity and (architectural) modernism. Neither of them can be approached from any grand narratives or ideology: they cannot be understood with moral attitude, which would be a value judgement between such extremities as good and bad. Modernity should be discovered rather by small and personal case-studies.

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The term '*counter-attraction*' describes this thinking model in architecture and it consists of at least two levels. On a *historical level* contemporary architects study Mies, on the one hand, to *position* generally their own (so-called post-modern) culture: to distance it from the Miesian modern project or, in our case, to *link* the two; while on the other hand they want to analyze Mies's specific method, which '*faced honestly*' to the conditions of modernity. For the four architects, 'the today' and 'the (recent) past' are not counterpoints in a linear and causal system, but rather are 'incidentally continuous' between any pasts and any presents—according to the personal interpretation: the *individual level* of the counter-attraction.

The basis for the historical level is the Eisenmanian journal *Oppositions*, in which the other three architects also cooperated, and one of the most prominent standpoints was represented by the architecture-historian *Manfredo Tafuri*. His own critical reading of architectural modernism, to put it very simply, was independent of any classifications and described the story as a continuous struggle between traditional order and modern chaos, hierarchy and weightlessness, handmade and industrial standard, individual and mass and so on. One of the few positive protagonists here was Mies, who handled this contradiction well—being aware of ‘the problems of composition as expression of insoluble dichotomies’ (Tafuri-Dal Co, 1980:152). The works of Mies, for Tafuri, are exempt from both the desire of mystical utopia and the codified (that is legalized hence generalized and normative) typologies. It means that in the early avant-garde cases of the oeuvre there is a parallel presence of materiality, construction, industrializing, ‘noise’ on one side, and classicism (‘Schinkelism’), harmony and ‘informel’ silence on the other. Underlining Tafuri’s statement, Mies can be cited: when he arrived in America he talked about the parallel differentiation and close linkage between the ‘*practical aims*’ of architecture as a general bound to the actual era and the cultural—or in other words disciplinary—‘*values*’ of it.<sup>1</sup> In 1938 Mies said that the only single goal was ‘to create order out of the desperate confusion of our time’ (Johnson, 1978:199). Then, according to Tafuri, instead of betraying the ‘value’ (the specificity of architectural discipline), Mies’s reductive and muted form is the mirror of reality, which is actually chaos: the so-called classicism is not the aim of a traditional will to totality, but

’quite the opposite, it is precisely conscious renunciation of the vital flux of change... in order to dominate it intellectually... No longer is there a plurality of signs but the entire edifice appears as a neutral sign. The will to dominate chaos is entirely contained in the intellectual act that takes

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Inaugural Address as Director of Architecture at Armour Institute of Technology’ (1938) (Johnson, 1978:196-200).

its distance from the real so as to affirm its own presence' (Tafari-Dal Co, 1980:340).

From this point of view the representation/presence of the lost meaning can be re-/gained by the absence of it.

However, instead of the previously mentioned or purely theoretical Tafurian ideological approaches, which still describe our conditions with a totalizing, universalizing concept of 'complexity' and 'chaos' for example, and instead of seeking a way to deal with this ideology architecturally, we should consider the *structure* of interpretation that is the mediator code system. To reveal it we will follow the works of Eisenman and Koolhaas through three approaches from a general to a very close one.

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*The wide approach is about the question of centrality and it deals with the concept of Frame vs. Content based on texts from around the 1980s.*

Eisenman, in his *formalist* research, sees architectural history as a system where the inner elements and rules of the discipline and the relationships between them are differentiating from themselves from time to time.<sup>2</sup> To explore the disciplinary system Eisenman has been working on a '*textual analysis*'. In opposition to literature, to pure text, in architecture both the sign and the object are present: the column, that is to support, is there both in its form and in its supporting function. So Eisenman misreads and detaches symbol and form

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<sup>2</sup> From Le Corbusier through Terragni to Mies he takes and cross-connects one after the other since they are part of a modern canon that is based on atypical, singular cases. He plays them off against each other on a formal basis while Mies—with different purposes—is almost never absent. For example in earlier texts he criticized the Smithsons because they were not able to decide between the 'façade' that is Le Corbusier's expressionistic aesthetic of the direct connection of inside and outside, of content and form, and the 'skin' which is Mies's classicizing aesthetic without iconography and therefore with neutrality. (Eisenman, 2004b:52). Another example is the case of Philip Johnson who was accused of both blurring modernism with the International Style (as a historian) and of using Mies 'as a cudgel against [modernist] functionalism' (as a practicing PoMo-architect) (Eisenman, 2004:92).

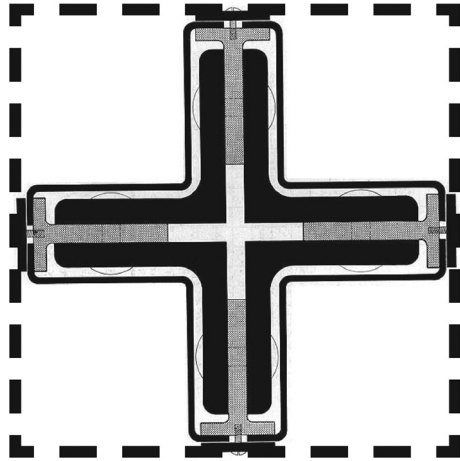


Figure 1. The absence of the ‘columnness’ in the Barcelona-column.  
Drawing of the author.

from the object to be modern or ‘non-classical’. The goal is to strip the symbolic content, that is the representation of the sign, and to reveal the structure (or text) that maintained it. It is necessary then to get rid of the traditional nature of architectural text, which was simulation: the *simulation of man* in structure, proportions or symmetry, because man is exterior to a formal basis.

Mies broke with this humanistic tradition while keeping the structural text behind it. Eisenman analyzes Mies’s early European buildings, claiming that there is an ‘unconscious’ shift from classical (representational or symbolic) architecture to a textual (self-referential) one. To prove this he investigates the semantics of the wall, the column or the materials step by step. For example, the Barcelona column is a sign, not a symbol. The cruciform shape, the polished, mirror-like stainless steel surface and the decomposed order, in which the column takes place, mark the absence of the representation of support. The product of misreading Mies is an architectural sign system, or an architectural text, where

meaning is gained through the presence of the opposition between presence and absence—through the interpretation of Eisenman. This is ‘the sign of the sign’ that makes the counter-attraction between the classical and the modern.

Meanwhile the basic standpoint of Koolhaas sets itself against the whole modern canon that is based on formal approaches. It tells a completely different story of modernism when Koolhaas investigates the quasi spontaneous development of the essential metropolis, Manhattan, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> In his model the evolution-story of the modern city and its buildings is a *generic growth*. This model is nearly independent of form and has roots in metropolitan *congestion*, *density* and *bigness*—in this (chronological) order. It analyzes, in opposition to Eisenman, the typical, the anonymous, the large numbers.

So how can Mies come to this picture of Koolhaas? As a counterpoint of the generic or *Typical plan* which is the American born ‘plan without qualities’. Koolhaas explains it as ‘a zero degree architecture [in the classical meaning], as an architecture stripped of all traces of uniqueness and specificity... [He says that] it is the End of Architectural History, which was nothing but the hysterical fetishization of the atypical plan’ (Koolhaas, 1998b:336). The character of the typical plan comes from the indeterminacy of formless or abstract business needs, thus it is fundamentally Western: it is ‘the stamp of modernity itself’ (Koolhaas, 1998b:339). The typical plan is not European, rather it is anti-ideological and neutral. It is also not functionalist, it is rather an absence of content. In this way the early skyscrapers of Mies are ‘ultimate atypical plans’. Furthermore, in Koolhaas’s view architecture is the background of cosmopolitan lifestyle and this style is what defines the shape or the envelope of a building. Typical and valuable are not counterparts in this way and the late skyscrapers of Mies are the best examples of this: they are the simplest closed boxes defined by the grid, but placed and ‘figured-in-details’ with European sensibility.<sup>4</sup>

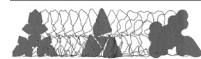
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3 See (Koolhaas, 1978).

4 A ‘literal’ reading of Koolhaas on ‘frame vs. content’ could be his *Kunsthal* in Rotterdam (1987-92)



Figure 2. Spree Dreieck plan and image of Eisenman: morphing between the two Miesian towers.  
(Davidson, 2006:350-351).



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*The tightened approach is about the question of horizontality and it deals with the concept of Original vs. Copy. Hardly mentioned and underestimated pure concepts will be examined here: the Friedrichstrasse project from 2000 by Eisenman and Koolhaas's Barcelona-pavilion reconstruction in the Milan Triennale in 1986.*

To make a skyscraper for the Spree Dreieck site in Berlin, Eisenman used Mies's legendary towers of that area. It means that instead of a built or buried material

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which is a contemporary building with a seemingly Miesian modern tonality. Its structure consists of carefully formed columns but of several kinds; it has typical materials of the era but common ones instead of high-tech products; it is enveloped partly by stone but in an anti-tectonic manner; its exterior is boxlike with a folded inside; and so on. An extended formal interpretation could be the comparison of the series of projects from the Jussieu Bibliothèque in Paris to the Dutch Embassy in Berlin with the bigger Miesian American projects, which are both pure and neutral forms hiding, suggesting, or suspecting a blazing metropolitan complexity within.

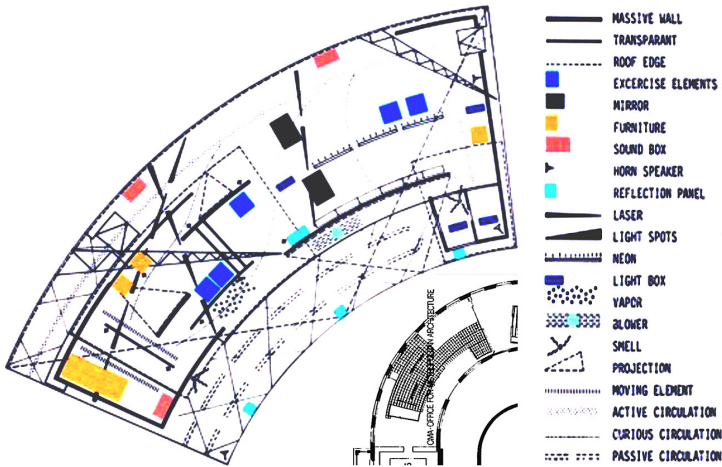


Figure 3. Barcelona Pavilion reconstruction plan of Koolhaas. (OMA, 1988:7).

context, a *fictitious history* of the site was studied: the ground level forms or footprints of Mies's two towers were superimposed on each other (by the digital technique of morphing) and then the top plan was rotated off of the base plan. For Koolhaas the basic problem was twofold: on the one hand he wanted to criticize the architectural exhibitions which degrade the discipline eliminating the dispute about its complexity or relationships; this ends in a quasi- or fake-architecture since the installations untied architecture from real tasks like clients, use or technology. The other side of the problem was that Koolhaas's project was contemporary with the rebuilding of Mies's Barcelona Pavilion, which had been destroyed more than fifty years before, and Koolhaas wasn't able to differentiate it from a Disney-act. So the two threads became one in the designated room in Milan in the form of 'an exhibit about exhibition', or, using Eisenman's words, in the form of 'the sign of the sign'. Thus the Barcelona Pavilion was reconstructed inside the palazzo and since the room was curved the Pavilion also needed to be

curved. What is more, Koolhaas's Office for Metropolitan Architecture created an afterlife fiction or a fake mythology of the Pavilion as if it had not been pulled down after its half-year-life in the 1929 World Exhibition. This vitriolic story of the non-usable quasi-building was also exhibited in the curved pavilion by a massive multimedia-set.

At first sight these two projects, the skyscraper and the pavilion, are literally the twisting of Mies; they seem to be banal and exist for their own sake. But through their pure conception and the didactic manifestation of it we can see clearly at least three important things:

Firstly, the so-called *author is really dead* as we were aware of it. The free interpretations mark both the unique aspects of Eisenman and Koolhaas and, at the same time, mark the shifting emphasis from their names as authors, or rather as misreaders, to their projects as texts. Furthermore the two architects have a propensity for linking their own concepts together from time to time. Eisenman used Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital plan in his Cannaregio plan, where his earlier house model was imported too, and then the whole plan was transferred to Paris to a lot in the Parc de la Villette where co-authors were Jacques Derrida and Tschumi. Also, Koolhaas likes to propagate his astonishing idea to use the plans, that is the shape and structure, of a Dutch family house to the Casa Musica in Porto which process fits in the series of experiments of organizing space by the spiral. But they are just following their father's footsteps as Mies continuously developed his concepts, based on the relationship between free space and structural formation, both in the early European houses and in the public buildings in America.

Secondly, modern *function became a subordinate factor* in both cases under the textuality or concept of architectural discipline.

And finally, to tell the narrative of the concept of the skyscraper-clone and the pavilion-clone, Eisenman used the computer to do the morphing and to make the process of design transparent, while Koolhaas communicated by media-transmission, through images, videos, voices and suchlike. So *immaterial high*

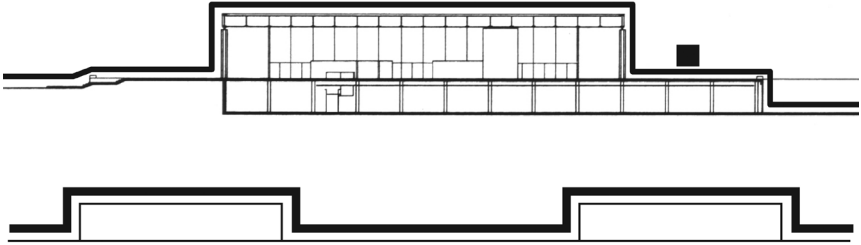


Figure 4. Serra's cube as 'figure' made both the Miesian glass-edifice and its podium a 'ground'.  
Drawing of the author.

Figure 5. Horizontality of the IIT campus: the buildings belong to the ground.  
Drawing of the author.

*technology and fictitious concepts* based on reality were emphatically combined to reveal, with intended criticism, the nature of contemporary image-based culture, which is unambiguous, representational and nothing more than what we see on the surface.

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*The direct approach is about the question of verticality and it deals with the concept of Figure vs. Ground. The narrative frame is the competition for creating a new centre of the IIT campus in Chicago in 1997; Koolhaas's proposal won and it was completed in 2004.*

Eisenman used an analogy to begin thinking about Mies's masterplan and the relationship between this and a new building: his example was the 70-ton steel cube of *Richard Serra*, which was placed on the podium of Mies's *Neue*

Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 1977. It was not enough for Serra to contrast the massive and heavy materiality of the cube with Mies's entirely transparent edifice, so one edge of the cube was sunk three inches<sup>5</sup> into the pavement, which is the roof of the real gallery space partly under the ground. According to Eisenman this act, destabilizing the solid steel volume and playing with gravity, leads to the questioning of the traditional *figure/ground* conflicting relationship. In this aspect the cube rewrites the original Miesian relationship between the glass edifice and the supposedly basic podium of it, creating a figure/ground relationship between the sculpture and its artificial context, making both the edifice and the podium a ground.

Then, in the IIT campus masterplan, there is a so-called horizontal dominance investigated by Eisenman. He sees the campus as a kind of solid mass that contains both the ground and the building blocks. They are incorporated with the 'voidness' of signifying absence through the formation of the corners. We should see this misreading of Eisenman as a continuous investigation from the cruciform shape of the column of the Barcelona Pavilion. In Chicago, I think, the concept is like the drawing of multistable figures, the vase vs. face, in which the two counterpoints get meaning according to the viewer. Architecturally it can be considered as a shift from the opposition of figure/ground to the attachment of a figure/figure formation.

The IIT-proposal wants to be a critique of Mies's idealism according to Eisenman. He says that the aim is 'to bring the past [that is a historical ground] into a critical present [as figure], to see Mies in a manner that has been repressed by his own modernist context'.<sup>6</sup> By 'figuring' both the historical and physical ground the project does not want to hurt the objects of the campus system but tries to free them from their modernist idealism.

So there is no historicism, no formal challenge, no originality (as a figure/ground

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<sup>5</sup> Approximately 7,62 cm.

<sup>6</sup> Project description by Eisenman (Davidson, 2006:260).

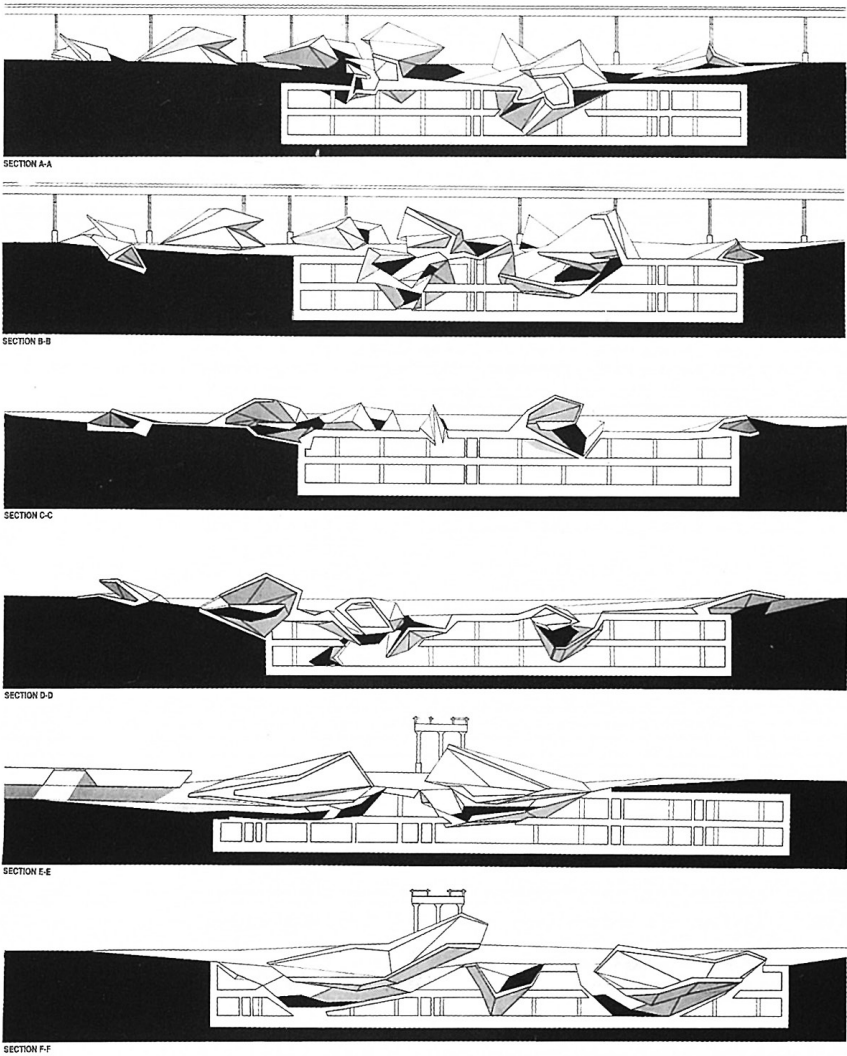


Figure 6. Eisenman's proposal for the new centre of the IIT campus.  
(Davidson, 2006:262).

relation) and there is no edifice. Although Eisenman wants, by reframing or by re-contextualizing the campus, to ignore the dominating and thus ideal horizontal plane, ‘figuring’ both ground and underground would rather emphasize it. Furthermore, as I see, distorting the overall rigid grid with an infinite topological net recalls more totalizing principles: the idea of an architecture that is able to solve the problems of the campus by formalism and the idea of ‘topology’ that is the direct manifestation or form of the hybrid, networked or rhizomatic model of our own era.

The keyword for Koolhaas was the *lapidary*. It means here that all the aphorisms of Mies, like ‘Less is More’, on the one hand carefully hide his real intentions by their simplicity and transparency, and on the other, because of this so-called easy-understanding, they become dogmatic cornerstones later. Since Mies never ‘explained’ himself except in the most lapidary terms it is (too) easy to misread him, so Koolhaas asks if ‘Mies is to blame for his own misreading?’<sup>7</sup>

And of course, as Eisenman did, Koolhaas repeats his theoretic approach as a visual commonplace. As usual, he twists and turns the interior with ramps, elevated slabs and stairs, according to the pre-existing footpaths on the site, and makes underground excavations around Mies’s Commons Building just for fun: to see the foundations of the old building from the restaurant’s terrace. But there is another aspect here, of which Koolhaas is aware, as we saw in connection with the pavilion of the Barcelona Pavilion, that is the problem of a so-called monument. He chose the site next to the Commons Building, in opposition to Eisenman who preferred a more neutral one; Koolhaas treated the existing building as a ground that can be built onto and not as an untouchable object or monument from the fifties. This ‘untouchability’ would be far away from Mies’s

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<sup>7</sup> He continues as follows: ‘Mies’s fusion of the sublime and the generic/featureless into a new hybrid was a form of alchemy, a laboratory experiment that could never be duplicated by others. Is the magician responsible for the lack of intelligence of his believers? Could Mies have avoided the endless reproduction of the Box that, in the 60s and 70s, threatened to take the essence of the original in an avalanche of reproduction, to give the original a bad name? Did he send us unknowingly to our mediocrity?’ (Koolhaas, 2004:189).



Figure 7. Mies's Commons Building surrounded by the new student centre of Koolhaas in the IIT campus.  
Photo from Flickr.

intention to host any program or change in his buildings. At the same time the excavation takes us closer to a literally deeper reading of Mies: to understand that *swindler structure* which hides the undesirable under the ground to make 'The less is more' architecture above.

So the concept of Eisenman suggests that Mies's overground figures are one and the same with their underground counterparts, while Koolhaas whispers that Mies was a cheater who made quasi lifted up low-rise buildings in the campus in which any function can be housed by the column-free, opened interior. But the interiors of both new proposals are differentiated programmatically and formally, which makes a great noise beside Mies's silence. At the same time they are cautious or 'Almost nothing' on, or, over the ground.

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We started from denying the universal directives of abstract ideologies, which also exist today in the form of pure digitally virtual utopia-constructions or that of sustainable dogmas. The concepts illustrated above want to escape from them by a kind of individualizing or rather '*singularizing*' nature. Here, instead of historians or critics, architects write their own critical or self-critical architectural history, placing their fathers' image next to their own. Hence the lines of thought of Eisenman and Koolhaas are not historical readings, but *generative interpretations*.

They turn to Mies because in his works the modern *Zeitgeist* did not appear in formalist aesthetics, but coded in the construction technology.<sup>8</sup> The projects of Mies were not exiled into utopias but tried to overcome practical life. The meaning was not lost here but recreated in the constructing system, in the so-called build-up of the concept. This introduces a kind of autonomy of the discipline rooted in the structural and conceptual rules of architectural history as the Miesian spaces and forms are independent of any content—specific function, program or event—thus they cannot be explained by a 'functionalism'. The constructive and partly 'traditional', partly 'progressive' approach of Mies mirrors, or tries to 'attract', this contradiction. It ends in the *duality of neutral exterior and congested interior*, with Koolhaas preferring the typical to atypical, as does Tschumi by simply enveloping fluxing events. This means that both architects, like Mies, exhibit city life through the 'large glass'. Meanwhile Eisenman uses a *semantic colour scheme* to show the traces of the conceptual structure of his Aronoff building<sup>9</sup> which then becomes a transcription of the *architectonic material scheme* of Mies's Barcelona Pavilion. The 'making of architecture' appears also at Libeskind, in a similar manner to the Miesian one, in the form of revealing the

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8 As Tafuri and dal Co wrote about it: 'the building was presented in the absolute schema of its own technical nature. As construction, it does not speak of formal orders; only perfect adherence to the productive system can guarantee that the linguistic reduction does not itself become a style.' (Tafuri-Dal Co, 1980:153-154).

9 Aronoff Center for Design and Art at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, 1988-96.



Figure 8. Daniel Libeskind: 'Never is the centre: Mies van der Rohe Memorial' for the City Edge project, Berlin, 1988. (Papadakis, Cooke, Benjamin, 1989: 202).

conflict between (classical) craftsmanship and (modern) standardization: as Mies simultaneously admitted that we cannot satisfy the needs of a mass society with medieval means and tried to make such a (neo-classical) craftsmanship-quality<sup>10</sup>, Libeskind created a completely handmade, that is individual, reading machine but had to make industrially a (copying) writing machine for architecture.<sup>11</sup> The sophisticated, or let's say autonomous, handling of Mies's materials and structures lead Libeskind to dedicate his City Edge project to the 'father' of the four architects.

Each of the buildings of the four authors is simultaneously *more*, as the space and the viewer are guided, directed and controlled, and *much less*, as 'embodying the

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10 See Mies's essay 'Baukunst und Zeitwille' [Architecture and Time] from 1924. Short version in *Der Querschnitt* 1924/4. Extended version in (Neumeyer, 1986:303-306).

11 *Three Lessons in Architecture. The Pilgrimage of Absolute Architecture* (Libeskind, 1992: 37-45). The essay was first published in 1985.

absolute absence', than the Miesians. On the one hand the spirally interweaving slabs of Koolhaas, the hovering bridges of Tschumi, the in-between valleys of Eisenman surrounded by column-grids and the vertical and horizontal voids of Libeskind are all *reference systems* which, on the other hand, thanks to their complicated or chaotic delineation, do not hold the secondary classicality or monumentality any more. They search for the disciplinary convergence or specificity somewhere else—maybe betraying the moderate Mies with a more sensationalist or didactic method of *exploiting* the idea of modern chaos. While Eisenman misreads Mies as 'text' (against the historical Mies-image) and Koolhaas as a hidden essence behind aphorisms (against contemporary exhaustion or the using up of Mies), they are talking about the same problem and—from this point of view—with the same attitude, no matter if the product is formalist or typical. Meanwhile Mies is being 'modernized' or updated: his harmony, simplicity, transparent transparency, rationality gains new meaning through distorting and individualizing. So Mies is the practical origin and Mies is the theoretical goal: but isn't this counter-attraction too much of an interpretation?

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ARCHITECTURE  
& PEOPLE



# TRADITION AND MODERNITY. THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE SURVEY ON REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE<sup>1</sup>

ALEXANDRA CARDOSO  
AND MARIA HELENA MAIA

## **The Survey**

Carried out between 1955 and 1960 by a number of modern architects in Portugal, the survey of regional architecture, commonly known as the ‘Inquérito’, was promoted by the Portuguese Architects’ Union and received official support from the government.

The surveyors divided the country into six geographical zones and a team of surveyors was assigned to each. In the introduction to *Popular Architecture in Portugal* [Popular Architecture in Portugal], the authors describe that practical reasons led them to establish that each team have three individuals: two young architects who would complete the field work, and a senior architect who was in charge of the team.

The authors describe also the duration and the means of transportation used during the field work: In three months of travel the six groups covered about 50.000 kilometres by car, scooter, on horseback or on foot. They stopped in hundreds of villages where they took about 10,000 photographs, made hundreds of elevation readings, prepared drawings and took thousands of written notes”. In addition, they also inform us about their methods: “once in possession of

this material they all began the work of arranging, classifying and systematically analysing, a task which took over a year to complete.”

According to them, “it was possible to begin to make sense of such a vast amount of material”, as it began to be organised into photo files and detailed drawings and when the typologies were distributed on maps and their characteristics registered in grids.

From this compilation of materials resulted the 1961 publication *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*, which was subsequently reprinted in 1979, and again in 1988 and 2004.

### **Background and framework**

Ten years after the publication of *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*, José Augusto França (1970: 106-108) discusses the survey in a text which, for the first time, establishes the history of the problem of the *casa portuguesa* [Portuguese house] and establishes a link between both<sup>1</sup>.

Later, the same author clarifies the contextual background of the survey and links its origins to the 1st National Congress of Architecture in 1948 (França, 1974).

In this Congress, modern architects reacted against the *casa portuguesa* and the notion of *Portugueseness* in architectural language (França, 1970; Portas, 1978), thus paving the way for the publication of a series of texts which demonstrated the error on which these ideas were based.

The importance of the journal *Arquitectura* [Architecture] in the historical context of the survey was underlined by Nuno Portas (1978). By the late 1940s, some young architects had assumed control of this journal, and in it introduced their critique of functionalism while publishing new ideas and approaches to architectural design.

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<sup>1</sup> This link was later followed by several authors with different points of view.

It was in this journal that in 1947, Keil do Amaral published the article *Uma Iniciativa Necessária* [A Necessary Initiative]. In this text, Keil defends the importance of collecting and surveying the Portuguese architecture of different regions of the country. The publication of the results of the survey would provide “students and professionals of construction [...] the basis for an honest, active and healthy regionalism”. In other words, he formulates the idea of the Inquérito.

Nuno Portas (1978) makes reference to the text of Fernando Távora, *O Problema da Casa Portuguesa* [The Problem of the Portuguese House], published in 1947, in which he criticises the *casa à antiga portuguesa* [old Portuguese-style house]. Távora also argues for increased knowledge of Portuguese architecture, including the architecture of the folk house which being “more functional and less fanciful”, could provide a lesson to the architects.

Later, Pedro Vieira de Almeida and Maria Helena Maia (1986), without questioning the paternity attributed to Keil, reminds us of the prior existence of a number of previous official and unofficial surveys on popular architecture, to which the idea of the Inquérito was also indebted.

Among them, Vieira de Almeida recalls the *Inquérito à Habitação Rural* [Survey of Rural Housing] which was completed at the end of the 1930s by agronomists and counted on official government support. According to the author, the survey’s results denounced the miserable living conditions of the inhabitants of these houses, in a clear challenge to the dominant discourse of the time. Inevitably, the third and last volume of this publication did not pass censorship remains unpublished (Almeida and Maia, 1986).

On the other hand, the survey conducted by the Portuguese architects was characterised by a detachment from social concerns. With the exception of the Trás-os-Montes team who, perhaps because of the extreme poverty of the region, paid more attention to the living conditions of the local populations (Almeida and Cardoso, 2002).

### **The link to geography and anthropology**

It was precisely the team leader of zone 2, Lixa Filgueiras, who, in 1986, makes a new contribution to what we know of the antecedents of the survey, particularly in relation to the anthropological and geographical fields which came to influence the work carried out by the teams assigned to the northern zones of the survey. Filgueiras offers a description of the cultural entourage existent at the time in the Escola de Belas Artes do Porto [Oporto Fine Arts School], directed by Carlos Ramos, who was in charge of selecting the members of the teams assigned to the northern zones.

At the time, Orlando Ribeiro had held a series of master classes in that school and accompanied the students on a trip with the purpose of completing the field work for their class.

Orlando Ribeiro was the geographer who published *Portugal, o Mediterrâneo e o Atlântico* [Portugal, Mediterranean and Atlantic] (1945), a remarkable portrayal of the country which influenced the geographical division of the country into six zones for the purposes of the survey (Ollero, 2001).

Later, the same students participated in the fieldwork and surveys in the north of the country, and also collaborated with the team of Jorge Dias, the most important Portuguese anthropologist, of the time, working on the material that he had made collected.

Filgueiras (1986) adds that another immediate consequence of these influences was that for the first time, a dissertation on architectural theory was accepted for the completion of a degree in Architecture. Titled ‘*Urbanism: A Rural Theme*’, the work was defended by Filgueiras in 1954 and resulted in his selection as coordinator of the team assigned to zone 2 of the survey.

Following in the footsteps of Lixa Filgueiras, Arnaldo Araújo, another member of zone 2 team, presented in 1957 the “the second different thesis”, addressing the issue of rural habitat (Filgueiras, 1986).

It is based on this work that Pedro Vieira de Almeida and Maria Helena Maia (1986) draw attention to the fact that it is precisely Arnaldo Araújo who, together

with Viana de Lima, Fernando Távora and Filgueiras, will launch an integrated study for an agricultural community in Trás-os-Montes, which was presented by the CIAM team from Porto at the Tenth Congress in Dubrovnik in 1958.

Ana Tostões (1997[1994]:165) highlights the importance of this work, directly connecting it to the ongoing survey “for the revision of international method condensate in the approach of the authentic forms of life as an inspiration of architecture”.

For Manuel Mendes (1987), the approach to the survey by both teams assigned to the north is characterised by a more anthropological and less functionalist vision of space and of architectural forms. Later, he will defend that “...the report adopts a territorial approach forms of settlement and life-styles brought about by the take-over of space: land, built environment, buildings” (Mendes, 1990).

This characterisation, however, is one that Pedro Vieira de Almeida and Alexandra Cardoso specifically restrict to the analysis done by the zone 2 team in the region of Trás-os-Montes, an analysis that “largely hinged on ethnological approach”. The authors also consider that this work is the “the richest and most complete of the whole survey” (Almeida and Cardoso, 2002).

### **The relations with the political regime**

The final press proof of *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* was presented to Salazar himself, and he was particularly interested in the results of the survey conducted by the Architects’ Union.

In fact, according to Nuno Portas (1978), “a curious coincidence of misunderstandings or false pretences” have contributed decisively to the achievement of the survey. While the government believed this action would reinforce the aspects of *Portugueseness* in national architecture, the architects intended instead to “trap an explosive documentary” which would demonstrate the existence of as many ‘traditions’ as there were regions.

The same idea is conveyed in the preface to the 2nd edition of *Arquitectura*

*Popular em Portugal* (Direcção da AAP, 1979), further reinforcing the claim that the equivocation have been intentionally kept by the architects to ensure the continuation of financial support from the government, crucial to the implementation of the project.

The same text also clarifies the role of Francisco Keil do Amaral, who launched the idea of the survey and given a decisive impetus to its realisation when he was president of the Architects' Union.

According to these authors, due to the state of disrepair of many of the surveyed structures, Keil felt a great sense of urgency in the completion of the survey and the registering of the country's vernacular architecture. At the same time, Keil also considered that this survey would constitute an important instrument by which to debunk the myth of a single "national style" (Direcção da AAP, 1979). Following the fall of the political regime in 1974, there is a marked increase in the interpretations of the survey as an act of resistance against the architectural impositions of the regime.

In fact, the very notion that the regime held some sort of 'architectural control' is not consensual. Following Pedro Vieira de Almeida's discussion on this point, the existence of the imposition of a specific architectural language by the Salazar regime has been questioned (Almeida and Maia, 1986; Almeida, 2004).

This author argues that the idea of a "national style or styles", as imposed by the government, constitutes a basic misunderstanding of the Inquérito.

According to Vieira de Almeida, the discovery of diversity and the absence of specific aspects of Portuguese architecture is a direct consequence of the fact that the teams departed for field work "militantly willing to read this diversity, everything that in the national territory was irregular and disjointed". This is the attitude that the preface to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Arquitetura Popular em Portugal* legitimises historically through the "deliberate and circumstantial strategy of counter an alleged official interpretation" (Almeida, 2008:108).

### **The methodology**

The methodological issue is one of the problematic aspects of the survey and, in addition to the contents of its published results, one of the aspects that has received least scholarly attention, since most texts are limited to merely describing factual aspects of the survey and analysing its antecedents and consequences.

Indeed, Vieira de Almeida (1986) is the first author to focus on the survey itself, highlighting the issue of a total absence of common methodology among the survey teams. This will be confirmed by Nuno Teotónio Pereira (1987), one of the team leaders, in the preface to the third edition of *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*.

In contrast, while recognising the diversity of results, Ana Tostões (1997[1994]:160), basing her argument on a document allegedly written by Keil do Amaral, argues for the existence of a prior plan and guidelines common to all groups, “in order to ensure the unity of the work.” These guidelines were based on the recognition of: “current materials and processes in the construction (...), urban structuring (...), weather influences(...), influence of the economic (...), influences of the social organisation (...), habits, practices and other conditioning factors (...) and expression and plastic value of the buildings and the urban settlement” (Keil do Amaral quoted in Ollero, 2001).

Later, Rodrigo Ollero (2001) makes reference to yet another document, which, according to him is also by Keil do Amaral. The document consists of the outline of a letter, written to the teams of the north, which, according to Ollero, “reveals a misunderstanding between the teams of the north and of the south about how the work should be done, especially about the dimension and capacity of what they had to do it, in a way very different from the one that ended up being made”.

Indeed, Manuel Mendes (1987) has defended that the work of the teams in the north was differentiated by a careful approach to spatial values, although we have doubts as to whether this was actually a decision taken by the teams, or whether this is the author’s own interpretation.

### **The consequences of the survey**

Understood from the beginning as being able to provide “the basis for an honest, active and healthy regionalism” (Amaral, 1945), the survey had a great influence on the development of architectural culture in Portugal.

Undertaken at a historical turning-point, both national and internationally, when the critical review of some of the principles of the modern movement, the survey will allow modern architects to recover national history and tradition, which “the architects began to use more freely, without feeling they are betraying the basic principles of modern architecture, some traditional elements that were previously considered unclean and therefore proscribed ...” (Pereira, 2000).

Indeed, after the survey comes a “*third way*” (Portas, 1961) which uses tradition in the construction of modernity.

Commonly cited examples of this third way are the house of Ofir, by Fernando Távora (Portas, 1961), the house of Afonso Barbosa and HICA’s<sup>2</sup> inns by Januário Godinho (Portas, 1978; Tostões, 1997[1994]), the house of Ruben A., by João Andresen (Tostões, 1997). Similarly, the architectural works of Viana de Lima (Fernandez, 1988 [1985]; Almeida and Maia, 1986), Nuno Teotónio Pereira, Nuno Portas, Álvaro Siza and many others are also identified as representative of this third way.

On the other hand, Manuel Mendes stated that the study of vernacular architecture has brought a new equilibrium “that had been deformed by the technological enlightenment of the Modern Movement: the harmony between space, architecture and the life of the inhabitants, the relation between transformation proposals and the existing landscape” (Mendes, 1990).

The rationalism, functionality and connection with the landscape found by the architects in traditional regional architecture had a decisive influence in the directions taken by subsequent Portuguese architecture.

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<sup>2</sup> HICA is the way in which the Hydroelectric of Cávado is referred to.

However, the way in which they built modernity in direct liaison with tradition can vary.

According to Nuno Portas (1978), there are differences of interpretation between the survey teams, “one more cultural, more instrumental or tactical, the other” that “announce the split, that during the 1960s ... divided the supporters of CIAM from the critics of CIAM”, a division that will come into focus precisely on the relationship between tradition and modernity and in the different manners in which it was understood.

Sérgio Fernandez noticed in 1985 that another consequence of the survey was the interest generated among the students of Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto (ESBAP), which had as teachers the leaders and other participants of teams of the northern zones. This situation had pedagogical effects (Fernandez, 1988[1985]). The interest in issues related to rural housing came to be reflected in the presentation of several theses, like those of José Dias and Sérgio Fernandez on communities in Bragança and that of José Forjaz about a village in the Alentejo (Almeida and Cardoso, 2002).

Moreover, this experience would be exported to Mozambique, where José Dias and José Forjaz had important technical and administrative responsibilities in government and António Quadros, a painter and poet who also hailing from ESBAP, exerted a unanimously recognised cultural influence. Pedro Vieira de Almeida and Alexandra Cardoso (2002) even suggested the hypothesis that “this multi-functional approach with anthropological and ethnographic roots” had come to influence the implementation and development of “communal villages” in Mozambique.

In fact, in his thesis, Arnaldo Araújo had already argued that it was in the “effort for analysis and detection of specific needs of specific populations, as well as committed to local proposals for intervention” that could “come to settle the basis of a 'new regionalism' (Almeida and Cardoso, 2002) that the Portuguese architect, without having to abandon or reduce (and without being able to do so) his relations with the universal lines (technical and aesthetic) of modern

architecture, should be close to the realities of his people, to interpret their virtues and build a rooted Portuguese architecture” (Araújo, 1957).

The interest in popular architecture which characterises the survey has its roots in other countries, such as the avant-garde Catalan group GATEPAC that in the 1930s published several examples of vernacular architecture in its journal (Toussaint, 2009).

However, the survey is actually avant-garde in its conception and in its systematic implementation.

Note that, as inventoried by Michel Toussaint (2009), both the survey and its publication predated the famous exhibition at MoMA and the book / catalogue by Bernard Rudofsky *Architecture without Architects* (1964). *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* is also present in the bibliographic references of *House Form and Culture* by Amos Rapoport (1969).

The influence of this work in the five volumes of *Arquitectura Popular Española* [Popular Spanish Architecture] by Carlos Flores published in the end of the 1970s is also well-known.

Indeed, Nuno Teotónio Pereira (2000) notes that one of the most immediate consequences of the survey was its contribution to the expansion of the concept of ‘architectural heritage’ to the popular architecture and urban settlements. It is thus undisputed that the Survey on Regional Architecture is an important record of a rural reality that almost immediately disappeared.

On the other hand, the photographic collection that had been published, provided a renewed formal repertoire of architectural elements which had the unexpected consequence of being appropriated for tourism and have come to appear in the many ‘typical’ constructions in the coastal parts of the country, producing a result antithetical to that originally intended.

### **The current importance of the survey**

The enormous spoliium consisting of notes, drawings and photographs produced during the survey, constitutes an important record of a Portugal that has already

disappeared.

As noted by Nuno Pereira Teotónio (1987), this documentation can support approaches directly related to architecture, but may also constitute an important source of information for other research areas such as history, anthropology, sociology and photography.

With regard to architecture, the survey “constitutes an important point in the history of Portuguese architectural culture as a historical testament of its time representing a serious challenge to our current critical conscience” (Almeida et al. 2009).

At this moment, we have begun to work on a research project within CEAA in the field of architectural theory and criticism, which makes use of the survey as a main working document. The research project, titled *Popular Architecture in Portugal: a critical look*<sup>3</sup> is based in the premise “that the critical discussion of the Inquérito maintains all its relevance, now that the themes of the vernacular and regionalism have again entered into professional discussions” (Almeida et al. 2009).

However, the present text has no other pretension other than to begin to objectivise the real contribution to the study and understanding of the survey and its significance in Portuguese architectural history. With this objective in mind, we attempt a first provisional analysis of the historiography of the Inquérito, identifying chronologically the various contributions and their authors.

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<sup>3</sup> This project, directed by Pedro Vieira de Almeida and funded by FCT [Foundation for Science and Technology] began in April 2010 and will continue until March 2013. A preliminary clarification of the development of this project has been published by CEAA in April, and it also marks the launch of the research work (See Almeida, 2010). In this project, the approach to the survey will be structured and structuring in keeping the study in constant critical dialogue with the architecture of today and in constant interaction with theoretical elements connected to the expressiveness characteristic of some of the modern erudite languages, maintaining in parallel the vernacular and the contemporary.

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# WEAK ARCHITECTURE - COOL DISCIPLINE

MARIANN SIMON

*Modernity confronts us with puzzles rather than with solutions, with opaqueness rather than with transparency. Some would blame 'fetishism', others the increase in 'complexity', for these epistemic difficulties, all of which make complete sense. Still, the puzzles are not eliminated.*

(Heller, 1990:4)

The question – whether we live in post-modernity, in late modernity or in the era of reflexive modernity – is no longer fashionable. We have had to resign ourselves to the fact that modernity survives, so the problem is not about how to find an appropriate attribute that we can ascribe to the word *modernity*, but about how to describe the situation we live in, and how to adapt ourselves to it. So the most appropriate question now is: how should architecture react to this new version of modernity?

My paper picks up on two well-known answers. One is the concept of *weak architecture*, as described by Ignasi de Solà-Morales in 1987, and the other is the proposal for architecture to be seen as a *cool discipline*, which was launched by Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting in 2002 (De Solà-Morales, 1997; Somol-

Whiting, 2010). These two essays share a kind of radicalism, as they give a clear definition of a proposed approach to architecture. They also christen this new approach with a new name, and define it as an antithesis of the already existing one. At first glance the result in both cases seems very similar: they both opt for an easy, relaxed and light form of architecture. However a more thorough investigation of the articles uncovers many differences and explores the authors' different standpoints – a radical shift in the interpretation as to how architects and architecture should relate to culture and to society.

### **Weak Architecture**

Ignasi de Solà-Morales's essay was originally published in the Spanish magazine *Quaderns* in 1987. Although it took 10 years for it to be translated into English, the author and his thoughts were already familiar to the English speaking world of architecture theoreticians at an earlier date. He was a regular contributor to the series of ten conferences organised by the American Any Corporation between 1991 and 2000.<sup>1</sup> So it was not by chance that his essays were edited within the Writing Architecture Series, the project of the same Any Corporation.<sup>2</sup> The appreciation and importance of his concept of weak architecture was also made evident by the fact that K. Michael Hays included it into his anthology of architectural theory edited in 2000 (Hays, 2000).

De Solà-Morales was an architect-historian and critic, so it is obvious that in the construction of his essay he followed the classical academic rules.<sup>3</sup> His thesis – *weak architecture* – appears straightaway in the title of the article; he explores it briefly in the introduction, and then describes the changed cultural situation which needs a new approach. He lists previous solutions to this challenge,

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1 Ignasi de Solà-Morales participated on nine conferences from the ten in all.

2 For us it has a special importance – explored later in this text – that the editor of de Solà-Morales's collected essays was Sarah Whiting, the co-author of our second investigated text.

3 Ignasi de Solà-Morales 1942-2001.

analyses and rejects them one after another, and at the end of the paper he presents his own proposal, puts it into a cultural and philosophical context and describes the characteristics of *weak architecture*. He borrows the expression *weak architecture* (which refers to *weak thought* and *weak ontology*) from philosophy and directly from the philosopher, Gianni Vattimo. In his description of the crisis of modernity he refers to other philosophers like Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche. His starting point is the “loss of ground”, the “disappearance of any kind of absolute reference that might in some way coordinate” our living in the world. This melting of universal rationality, within which art, science and social and political praxis could be constructed, also influences architecture. Before expounding his proposal as to what the role of architecture should be in this new system, he presents some previous and current answers. He states that the striving to return to the essentials of modern architecture made by Aldo Rossi or by the New York Five led to a kind of fundamentalism and finally to pure historicism. Kenneth Frampton’s proposal for critical regionalism in the 80s was less monist and closed in concept, but in reality it advocated resistance, while theoretically being based on the already lost world of order and unity. Both approaches were similar, however, in that they were retrospective and seeking to escape from confrontation with the reality of the unpleasant present.

The third reaction – post-structuralism and deconstruction – confronted this reality and reflected on its uncertain character. It is clear that this last approach is the most plausible for de Solá-Morales, whose standpoint is that architecture is a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon which has the task of reflecting the age we live in. In this respect de Solá-Morales’s attitude is still very modernist. It is not by chance that he refers to Manfredo Tafuri’s late writings (about the loss of linearity), and suggests that the continuity of time as one of the main characteristics of the first generation of modern architects – the main argument of Sigfried Giedion’s *Space, Time and Architecture* – is only one particular

interpretation of the experience of the modern age.<sup>4</sup> The expression *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the time) is not mentioned in the essay; however the concept of *weak architecture* is based on the initiative to create an artistic experience appropriate to its time – appropriate to our diversified, juxtaposed modern world.

By positioning the aesthetic experience at the centre, the field of architecture is pushed toward the arts. “The world of art appears a kind of last preserve of reality, where human beings can still find sustenance. Art is understood as being a space in which the fatigue of the contemporary subject can be salved away.” – de Sola-Morales states (De Solá-Morales, 1997:60). Of course the task of art (and of architecture) is not to express the truth of time; the hope of the only truth has already gone, just as the promise of linear time has dissipated. Which is still possible to get closer to the many existing truths that can be experienced by the many existing times. The multiplicity of time can be caught in the concept of the event, which de Solá-Morales introduces to avoid the negative character included in the fragmented world of deconstructive architecture. While the elements of the former are taken from the past as remnants of a previous era and form a heap of meaningless pieces, the event exists in the present but at the same time it hides (or reveals) memories. To get to this positive reinterpretation of the “loss of ground” de Solá-Morales turns to Gilles Deleuze and his notion of the *pli*.<sup>5</sup> With the involvement of the fold, the uncertainty of the present becomes friendlier, and it also makes it possible to combine the Deleuzian concept with phenomenology. However de Solá-Morales’s Heidegger interpretation differs from that of Kenneth Frampton, because for him the connecting element is the

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4 “Time in the cubist experience, futurist time, time in Dadaism, time in the formalist experiences of the optical and the Gestalt experiences of formalism, are versions of a diversified, juxtaposed time that constitutes one of the basic conditions of modernity. It is nevertheless clear, that this condition was not always fully understood by the masters of modern architecture.” de Solá-Morales, *Weak Architecture*, p. 67.

5 “The seductive appeal of this text lies, among other things, in its grasp of the fact that in contemporary thought the objective and the subjective are not different and opposing fields but constitute what he calls <folds of a single reality>.” *ibid.* p. 69.

positivist attitude that is present in both philosophies, that is “attentiveness to the formal, eidetic dimension of our understanding” (De Solá-Morales, 1997b:10). The main features of *weak architecture* follow the above interpretation of the contemporary situation. Weak architecture is untimely, but not in the meaning of eternity, solidity or stability. According to the contemporary situation, it is “untimely in the sudden, unanticipated coagulations of reality” and it appears in “events that are produced not through linear and unforeseeable organization but through fold and fissures”(De Solá-Morales, 1997:69). Weak architecture is decorative, not as a substance but as an accident; weak architecture is monumental, not as the representation of the absolute, but as “an opening, a window on a more intense reality” (De Solá-Morales, 1997:71). As such weak architecture can even be strong; it may have “the strength which art and architecture are capable of producing precisely when they adopt a posture that is not aggressive and dominating, but tangential and weak” (De Solá-Morales, 1997:71).

A possible evaluation of *weak architecture* as described above is that it is an opportunist answer to the present situation, to the “loss of ground”. De Solá-Morales takes for granted the fallacy of a universal truth and linear development, and instead of looking for a new ground or for new ideas, he tries to conform to the existing reality. But while he refuses some former ideas and principles, he also introduces some other principles and in this new, maybe uncertain and flexible construction – which he later calls topography – he still insists on some rules.<sup>6</sup> The fact that there are no longer general rules, does not exclude the importance of occasional rules that should still exist. “The proposals of contemporary art are to be constructed not on the basis of any immovable reference, but under the obligation to posit for every step both its goal and its grounding” – as he states

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<sup>6</sup> The word ‘topography’ later became his core concept –like for many other critics since then. For de Solá-Morales topography served as a visual description of the pluralistic vision of our time, where the particular objects may occur like intensities, which are still in connection but in a fluid, uncertain way.

in the essay (De Solá-Morales, 1997:59). This is a position corresponding to Gianni Vattimo's weak optimism from 1995: "Once the architect is no longer the functionary of humanity, nor the deductive rationalist, nor the gifted interpreter of a world view, but the functionary of a society made up of communities, then projection must become something both more complex and more indefinite." (Vattimo, 1997:147). Weak architecture like weak thought faces the loss of universal values and the directing role of theory, but does not give up the right of theory to interpret, reflect or create projects.

### **Cool Discipline**

The essay written by Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting was first published in the architectural magazine *Perspecta* in 2002.<sup>7</sup> Its structure is very different from the previous one, as it is more didactic in argumentation. Somol and Whiting are practicing architects and they write a manifesto not an academic study. The authors' intention – to break with the theoretical approach to architecture – is suggested right in the title: *Notes around the Doppler Effect and other Moods of Modernism*. Mentioning a physical phenomenon adumbrates a pragmatic approach to the discipline, and the text is relevant to this upbeat. The proposal – *cool discipline* – is described in contrast to the dominant paradigm (within American academic circles) of architectural autonomy or criticality. The medium length article is divided into four parts, each having a subtitle, expressing the contrast between the past and the proposed future: from critical to projective; from index to diagram; from dialectics to Doppler; from hot to cool. The structure is adjusted to the mediatised era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – short parts, clear oppositions – so it is not surprising that the authors' central reference point is Marshall McLuhan, from whom they also borrow the concept of the discipline which moves from hot to cool in its character.

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<sup>7</sup> Due to its provocative character the essay was later reprinted in several collections and anthologies, and discussed in different forums both in Europe and in the United States.

Somol and Whiting connect the attacked interpretation of architecture to Colin Rowe, Manfredo Tafuri and their contemporary followers, K. Michael Hays and Peter Eisenman.<sup>8</sup> According to the authors Hays and Eisenman are the propagators of an architecture which is based on the autonomy of the discipline. They claim that architecture is a cultural product, but to preserve the critical position of architecture it must have autonomy, consequently autonomy is the precondition of architectural engagement. This kind of architecture – as Somol and Whiting interpret – is based on representation and signification, even if the main protagonists often try to convert it into indexes which are not determined culturally.<sup>9</sup> The result of this approach is a *hot discipline*, which deals with a method-based way with details and connotations, while its autonomy and criticality remove it from architectural practice. As a consequence this kind of architecture is worked, belaboured, difficult and complicated. What Somol and Whiting propose instead is *cool discipline*, based on performance and practice. With this second pairing – the way of method-acting as opposed to performance acting – the authors turn again to film, performing arts and to the media. The authors' key concept is that architecture belongs to the performing arts. The light character of architecture as a *cool discipline* is the result of this shift from creative to performing art. As a consequence *cool architecture* is instrumental, projective and pragmatic. It does not represent, it is not for reading, but it is for seducing, becoming, instigating new events and behaviours. Instead of indexes it works with diagrams, which – here the authors quote Gilles Deleuze's words – “impose a particular form of conduct on a particular multiplicity.” (Somol-Whiting,

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8 This concentrated attack against K. Michael Hays and Peter Eisenman was interpreted by some later reflections as reckoning with father figures, which might explain its radicalism. “I do not think it is a coincidence that so many of the protagonists of the currently proffered alternatives to ‘criticality’ are former protégés of Eisenman, or at least figures at the edge of his circle.” George Baird, ‘Criticality and Its Discontents’ in William S. Saunders (ed) *The New Architectural Pragmatism*. A Harvard Design Magazine Reader 5. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis – London, 2007, p. 140. Baird's essay was first published in 2005.

9 They refer to the interpretation of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion by K. Michael Hays from 1984, and to Peter Eisenman's analysis on Le Corbusier's Dom-ino house from 1979.

2010:196). The reference to the Doppler Effect – the perceived change in the frequency of a wave that occurs when the source and receiver of the wave have a relative velocity – acts as the explanation of this multiplicity but on a strictly rational level in tune with the whole pragmatic turn. *Cool architecture* is relaxed and easy; it never looks like work. It has got rid of knowledge and forms is based on shared norms, principles and traditions, and as a “discipline it is not a fixed datum or entity, but rather an active organism or discursive practice, unplanned and ungovernable” (Somol-Whiting, 2010:197). This projective practice does not look back and does not criticize the status quo, but it looks forward and believes in the intelligence of design – or design intelligence as Michael Speaks propagated this shift later in the same year (Speaks, 2010).

Design intelligence involves information and impulses of a wide range, it “focuses upon the effects and exchanges of architecture’s inherent multiplicities: material, program, writing, atmosphere, form, technologies, economics, etc” (Somol-Whiting, 2010:196). The architect, as a design expert, always reacts differently according to the actual input and circumstances; this creates the lightness and adaptability of the performance. However something is missing: the directing principles are left hidden. Even if in the last sentence of the article the authors try to mark themselves off from “capitulation to market forces”, this restriction of architects’ competence to design can’t be interpreted other than as an escape from responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

### **Market forces and the pirouette of a ballerina**

Concepts of *weak architecture* and of *cool discipline* both bring relief for architecture, because they leave behind certain former principles, known and inherited from the avant-garde period of modernity, which have become

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10 “Setting out this projective program does not necessarily entail a capitulation to market forces, but actually respects or reorganizes multiple economies, ecologies, information systems, and social groups.” *ibid.* p. 202.

obsolete over time: linearity, homogeneity, universal truth, or the architect as a functionary of humanity. This new era of modernity has really changed the role of the architect, whose position has been weakened since Le Corbusier closed his manifesto with the words – architecture or revolution – in 1923. This weakening has also had an effect on the autonomy of the profession. In an essay which dates back to 1991 de Solá-Morales also dealt with the topic of autonomy and concluded in the possibility of a partial autonomy, presented in the events of time. He does not give up cultural reflection as the autonomy and an aim of the profession, but stresses its partial and volatile character. His example for this experience is the situation where a performance touches us: “Like the tale told by the actor on the stage, like the unexpected pirouettes of a graceful ballerina” (De Solá-Morales, 1997c:90).

The editor of de Solá-Morales’s collected essays was Sarah Whiting. In her introduction she appreciates de Solá-Morales who “favors humanism but a nonconforming humanism” (Whiting, 1997:xiv) and defines his position in the relationship between theory and practice as succeeding “in establishing a critical collaboration with practice.” (Whiting, 1997:xv). The two concepts – weak architecture and cool discipline – are similar in character: both are light, easy and relaxed. However when comparing them we find that the second one is even lighter; cool discipline leaves behind not only the universal theory, but also the possibility of any kind of relevant theory in the name of practice. Somol and Whiting call for a projective practice, which is evaluated by its performance, but they do not mention what it is for the whole.<sup>11</sup>

This kind of cool performance – without autonomy and without responsibility – is not that of the artist, but of the expert. And I go further: it is not about

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11 In his essay Reinhold Martin expresses this deficit clearly: “We might ask the affirmative, projective practitioners of the ‘postcritical’ just what sort of world they are projecting and affirming in their architecture and in their discourse.” Reinhold Martin, ‘Critical of What?’ in: William S. Saunders (ed) *The New Architectural Pragmatism*. A Harvard Design Magazine Reader 5. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis – London, 2007, p. 159. The essay was first published in 2005.

the artist or the expert. We may need experts who do their job in an easy and relaxed way, but not without autonomy, criticality and engagement, even if they repeatedly need to define their goals and groundings. The puzzles are not eliminated.

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Comme maître-assistant à Ecole d'Architecture de Toulouse et enseignant invité à la Faculté d'Architecture de Cagliari, il enseigne le projet en deuxième et troisième cycle et en tant que chercheur il a publié des recherches et articles portant principalement sur les rapports entre la ville et l'architecture au vingtième siècle, autour des projets de Léon Jaussely pour Barcelone, de Candilis, Josic et Woods pour Toulouse le Mirail et de Le Corbusier, à Chandigarh, en Inde.

Parallèlement à ses recherches sur le patrimoine du XXème siècle et à son implication en tant qu'administrateur de la Fondation Le Corbusier, il est en charge de l'étude pour le Grand Projet de Ville de Toulouse le Mirail.

Publications récentes :

2008 *Le Mirail, mémoires d'une ville*, avec Stéphane Gruet, Ed. Poesis. 450p.

2008 *Le Team X. Les bâtiments et les théories qui les font naître : le cas des opérations de logement collectifs à grande échelle en Europe*, Actes du Colloque. Avec B. Fayolle Lussac, Recherches et publication. Ed MSH Bordeaux. 200p.

2007 *Jajpur une ville neuve en Inde*, Ed Thalia, avec Alain Borie et Françoise Català, Paris, 280 p.

2007 *Chandigarh, Portait de ville*, Institut Français d'Architecture, Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, 72 p., Paris.

### **ZOLTÁN BUN**

He received his MSc architecture (2005) and PhD (2012) from Budapest University of Technology and Economics. He studies architectural theory linked directly to practice and interdisciplinary techniques especially from 1968. He participated in several research programs such as OTKA 72671 under the title 'Active theory. The changing role of architectural theory in the Millenium'. His essay, 'Between Analogue and Digital Diagrams' received EAAE Best Paper award at the 2008 'Changes of Paradigms in the Basic Understanding of Architectural Research. Architectural Research and the Digital World' conference in Copenhagen. He is a senior architect at Firka Architecture Studio, Budapest.



# ABSTRACTS

## **FROM THE CITY TO THE BUILDING APPROACHES TO MODERNITY - LA TOURETTE AS A LANDMARK**

*Ana Lidia Virtudes*

The architectural and urbanistic practices have always been linked with society and the epoch in which they occur. The arrival of modernism brought about changes in the production of architecture and spatial planning, in the manner in which they are projected. On the one hand, the building practices were changed due to the introduction of concrete and pillar, the cross-beam and the slab system, which became an omnipresent duality (architecture vs structure) in modernist architecture. On the other hand, the aspects of space and nature gained a new dimension in terms of urbanistic practices, with the Charter of Athens, focusing on the housing question and the urban regeneration.

The medieval monastic heritage was able to inspire artists and architects to produce new works and to find the missing link between the truth of the medieval stone work and the modernist concrete work, in its most straightforward way: apparent concrete.

A landmark of this tendency is the project of a convent by Le Corbusier that was inspired by his visits in 1907 to the Charterhouse of Ema, in Italy; and in 1953 to the Cistercian monastery of Le Thoronet, in France. In 1952 the proposal was made to him to design the Dominican Convent

of Sainte Marie de La Tourette, Éveux-sur-Arbresle, in France. This project represented the opportunity for Le Corbusier to put in practice a new approach towards modernity based on the idea of collective forms of life. This article aims to give a view about the process related to the project of La Tourette, characterized by a modernism of a 'béton brut', so strong in Le Corbusier's work.

## **NOTES ON THE POTENCY OF ARCHITECTURE**

*Josefina González Cubero and Noemí Vicente Martín*

Since the modern age, 'potency' has been an attribute associated with the notion of beauty sought by certain architects. Potency is understood as clear and resounding, geometrically dominant, and prevailing over its surroundings. This attribute has carried down to the present as an end in and of itself in works that continued in the tradition of modernist architectural conception and that purport to define contemporary architectural design. However, there are several factors in the present that have varied and prevented ideas of the past from being carbon copied. These factors have to do with the form's material and therefore with the appearance and spatial perception of architecture. Lately, potency gets, even beyond its actual force, through the photography of buildings' exteriors.

**PERMANENCES AND EXPERIMENTATION  
IN THE STRUCTURE OF MODERN SPACE**

*Iván I. Rincón Borrego*

The idea of structure is a concept which is strongly connected with the idea of space in modern architecture. The structure is a creative and a formal tool: it is understood as an essence, as an inner composition and as a minimal framework of the space. The structure establishes the order of the space. For many architects, the clear expression of this idea is an aim and a way to renovate the modern architecture.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the successive generations of architects have focused their attention on design with the idea of the structure. It has been a vehicle of innovation to express the *Zeitgeist*, so it has been constantly developed. This idea feeds on the work of the masters of Modern Movement. It also gives continuity to modernity as a process which is full of permanences and experimentations that are nowadays in force in contemporary architecture.

**CHANDIGARH, THE INDIAN CITY OF LE  
CORBUSIER AND THE NOTION OF TIME**

*Rémi Papillault*

This article will explore Le Corbusier's assimilation of time as an essential dimension - and constraint - in his town-planning for Chandigarh, the new capital of Punjab, between 1951, the year in which he started to work on the project, and 1965, the year of his death. It will pose the question, how did the architects who were to design this new city - in fact not only Le Corbusier but also P. Jeanneret, M. Fry and J. Drew - "position" themselves with respect to time? And furthermore, how did they define and respond to the constraints imposed by time - past, present, future - and its rhythms, from its more or less long durations to its brief "moments"? Taking up an idea expressed by Georges Kubler (1962) with reference to art, I would like to argue that the number of temporalities affecting the urban project is perhaps as great as the number of ways in which space (Papillault, 1994) is occupied.

It is possible to identify a number of temporalities which come into play in the creation of a new town. Different actors - politicians, administrators, engineers, architects - all have their own perceived relation to time and their own ways of dealing with the constraints it

imposes. In this context, I will limit myself to the exploration of the time-factor by the architect in the process of conceiving the urban project.

**COUNTER-ATTRACTION, OR, HOW TO  
MIES-READ ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY  
FOR OUR OWN PURPOSES**

*Zoltán Bun*

According to Fredric Jameson every interpretation, in other words semantic creation, is allegorical. It is not a pure representation of its object, neither is it a comment as value judgement. It refuses to be a strict binary structure of signifiant et signifié, rather it is a ternary structure: it tells the story of the mediator code system between the two poles. And that is how we can create meaning today. Thus neither modernity nor (architectural) modernism can be approached from any grand narratives or ideology, with moral attitude or with a will to a universal relevance, but only via little case-studies. This paper endeavours to reveal interpretations—individually different and homogeneous in purpose—of the same object, which are the responses for the metropolitan condition given by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. It will focus in detail on how interpreters like Peter Eisenman and Rem Koolhaas use the Miesian 'heritage' to be attached to and to be separated from it—according to their specific aims.

**TRADITION AND MODERNITY. THE  
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE SURVEY ON  
REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE**

*Alexandra Cardoso and Maria Helena Maia*

In this paper we intend to make a first approach on the historiography of the Survey on Regional Architecture in Portugal, in an attempt to understand how it relates to the historical and critical interpretation that its authors created, as well as to identify its divergences and convergences with current historiography.

With the study of the survey and its subsequent publication titled *Popular Architecture in Portugal* (1961), we pretend intend also to understand how its existence was used in the construction of the critical discourse about the links between tradition and modernity in the context of Portuguese modern architecture evolution.

**WEAK ARCHITECTURE - COOL DISCIPLINE***Mariann Simon*

We have had to resign ourselves to the fact that modernity survives, however it is not the same as it was before. The paper picks up on two well-known answers on the question: how should architecture react to this new version of modernity? The proposals launched by the two investigated essays for the first glance seem very similar: they both opt for an easy, relaxed and light form of architecture. However a more thorough investigation of the articles uncovers many differences and explores the authors' different standpoints – a radical shift in the interpretation as to how architects and architecture should relate to culture and to society. Weak architecture faces the loss of universal values and the directing role of theory, but does not give up the right of theory to interpret, reflect or create projects. It is based on reflexive autonomy and artistic experience, while cool discipline rejects autonomy and responsibility for pragmatism based on adaptive design. Cool discipline leaves behind not only the universal theory, but also the possibility of any kind of relevant theory in the name of practice.









# APPROACHES TO MODERNITY

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