AN AMERICAN THINK TANK WITH 'SOMETHING TOO EUROPEAN ABOUT IT'
Theory, Politics, and Feminism at the IAUS in New York

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Abstract

This paper assesses the influence of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) on Peter Eisenman's Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) in New York City. Founded in 1967, the Institute was a 'think tank,' a school, and a site for public discourse, criticized by Italian architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri for having 'something too European about it.' Tafuri's statement serves as a foundation to analyze the IAUS's complicated relationship to European modernism, by assessing some of the varied projects and groups associated with the Institute. Eisenman's Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment (CASE), for example, began in the mid-1960s as a series of meetings on contemporary architectural concerns – in some ways an American counterpart to the earlier CIAM (although Eisenman had actually envisioned CASE as more of a 'Team 10-like group'). Members of the IAUS were splintered in their positions on architecture's responsibility to political, social, and aesthetic issues, which prompted the founding of ReVisions, a group formed within the auspices of the IAUS in 1981 that focused on architecture's thorny relationship to political ideology. This paper addresses the neglected role of ReVisions and women members, topics which have been long neglected in the historiography of the IAUS. A study of the IAUS illustrates the complex influence of CIAM on the direction of architectural intellectualism in New York in the wake of 1968, which is instructive for engaged architects and intellectuals working in the United States today.

Keywords: IAUS, Peter Eisenman, CASE, Team 10, architectural theory

The now legendary, and somewhat infamous, Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) was truly a product of its time and place. It was New York City, 1966, a time of seismic change within the discipline of architecture, as the growing dissatisfaction with modernist planning ideals, the destruction of the city, and the perceived failure of social housing encouraged many architects to turn to theoretical activities as alternatives to building. The IAUS grew out of architect

Peter Eisenman's earlier, lesser-known project, Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment (CASE), which began in 1964 as a series of meetings on contemporary architectural concerns. CASE acted as a postmodern counterpart to the European modernist Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM). Reminiscent of CIAM in its acronymic name and discursive aims, Eisenman had actually envisioned CASE as more of a '*Team 10-like group*' (Colomina & Buckley, 2010, p. 264), a reference to the younger generation of architects and urban planners who splintered off from CIAM at their ninth meeting in 1953. CASE was also similar to CIAM in its international character; in Stanford Anderson's historical account of CASE, he emphasized how crucial the European participants were to the vitality of their early meetings on architectural education; Bruno Zevi of the University of Rome and Reyner Banham of the University of London were the most polemical, and helped set the tone for critical exchange that would define the IAUS (Anderson, 2013, p. 582). However similar, CASE and the IAUS were not mere vehicles to extend CIAM's reach – they were also part of the growing critique of the earlier generation's faith in top-down planning and blind idealism.

Modernism bore the brunt of the criticism but also stimulated new ideas, and contemporary Italian architectural theory is important for an understanding of the development of the IAUS along these lines. While Manfredo Tafuri claimed that the Institute's formal and institutional autonomy were signs of '*the organizational structure of intellectual work in America,*' he criticized the Institute for having '*something too European about it'* (Allais, 2010, p. 32). The European tinge that Tafuri identified was no doubt intentional; despite some staunch critiques of European modernism, members of the IAUS hardly rejected its tenets wholesale. CIAM's intellectual debates and more humanitarian efforts (epitomized by Le Corbusier's 1943 conception of the 'Modulor Man,' modeled after Cesariano's 'Vitruvian Man') resonated among members of the IAUS; not only was the image of Vitruvian Man emblazoned on IAUS apparel (Figure 1), the revolving door at the IAUS had an image of 'Modulor Man' on one side and 'Vitruvian Man' on the other.

The internationalism that CIAM was known for would also characterize the IAUS, whose members came from North America, South America, and Europe (just to name a few: Diana Agrest and her husband Mario Gandelsonas were Argentinian, Rem Koolhaas was Dutch, and Rafael Moneo came from Spain). The history of the Institute can further be broken down into two periods, both European in origins: the first was associated with British architectural historian Colin Rowe and his Cornell University circle; the second centered on an Italian influence. Rowe had famously compared Palladio to Le Corbusier in his 1947 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa,' a sign of a growing interest in reinterpreting Le Corbusien aesthetics and moving the spirit of CIAM into the postwar era. Rowe's influence was strong in the early years of the Institute, not only because he was Eisenman's mentor at Cambridge but also because of his presence at Cornell, one of the early sponsors of the Institute. Rowe also accompanied Eisenman on a trip to Italy in 1961-62, where Eisenman was first exposed to magazines such as *Casabella* and Giuseppe Terragni's Casa del Fascio in Como (Eisenman and Rowe, 2008, 131). The trip deeply affected him; after seeing Terragni's rationalist building for the first time, it caused him to have an '*epiphany*' of sorts. As Eisenman put it: '*I was berserk'* (Colomina & Buckley, 2010, p. 261).

Eisenman was the founder, director, and veritable mouthpiece and image of the Institute until he stepped down in 1982 (Anthony Vidler, Mario Gandelsonas, and Stephen Peterson were named director in 1982, 1983, and 1984, respectively, and the Institute officially closed in 1985). He was also one of the founding editors of *Oppositions,* their organization's chief publication. It is no surprise, then, that Eisenman remains the figure most closely associated with the IAUS. As Stanford Anderson wrote, '*Eisenman was the great entrepreneur of all'* (2013, p. 633).

Crediting Eisenman alone, however, would be at odds with the collective nature of the Institute – in one promotional photo the members even presented themselves as a team, dressing in matching 'uniforms' (Figure 1). Although there were dozens of architects, teachers, artists, fellows, and interns involved, four names are primarily associated with the Institute – Eisenman, Kenneth Frampton, Mario Gandelsonas, and Anthony Vidler, the foursome who jokingly referred to themselves as '*The Beatles*' (Colomina & Buckley, 2010, p. 60)

Figure 1. IAUS members as a soccer team. Top row, from left: Joseph Rykwert, Duarte Cabral de Mello, Isaac Mario Gandelsonas, Kenneth Frampton, Jachim Mantel, Gregory Gale, Thomas Schumacher, Stanford Anderson; Bottom row, from left: Elizabeth Cromley, Robert Slutzky, William Ellis, Beth Spekter, Emilio Ambasz, Peter Eisenman, Victor Caliandro, Suzanne Frank. Photo by Dick Frank. Published in *Casabella* 359/360, 1971, 'The City as an Artefact.' Image credit: Esther Choi, 'The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies IAUS and Princeton School of Architecture, Princeton NJ and New York NY, USA, 1965-1975, *Radical Pedagogies,* <http://radical-pedagogies.com/search-cases/a19-institute-architecture-urban-studies-princeton-school/>.

This oversimplified narrative further ignores the women who were involved in official and unofficial capacities, as well as the ReVisions 'study group,' as contributing factors in the Institute's success. Often neglected in studies of the IAUS and virtually unknown today, ReVisions brought together a group of young architects and thinkers who met on a regular basis to discuss theoretical texts, share new projects, and organize public programs. Its members (who included Joan Ockman, Mary McLeod, Alan Colquhoun, and Bernard Tschumi, among several others) wanted to counter the perceived lack of attention to the political and ideological underpinnings of architecture at the IAUS and beyond. The need for a close study of ReVisions and the contributions of women at the Institute underscores the fact that the historiography of the IAUS, much like that of CIAM, is still in its infancy.

Beginnings

The history of the IAUS has already been well-documented by Kim Förster in his important archival research at The Canadian Centre for Architecture, resulting in his 2011 Ph.D. dissertation, 'The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York (1967-1985): ein kulturelles Projekt in der Architektur.' However, a brief synopsis is necessary to provide some context for the purposes of this paper. According to Eisenman, the self-proclaimed '*central activities of the Institute*' upon its founding were '*research and development*' (Eisenman, 1980, p. 58). It was a laboratory for ideas, an alternative school, an exhibition space, and a publishing house. They ran an evening lecture series for the public, held symposia, published *Oppositions* journal, translated and published books, operated four educational programs, and ran an exhibitions program. As a grant proposal of 1968 explained, the Institute would '*coordinate theoretical ideas with practical constraints*,' and act '*as an intermediary between public and private agencies to demonstrate the potential of such a realm for other studies*,' such as sociology (as quoted in Allais, 2010, p. 32).

In late 1960s New York it would have been difficult to ignore such potential; indeed, this context prompted the Institute's only built project, Marcus Garvey Park Village, constructed in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. Brownsville had developed a notorious reputation in the postwar years as a poverty-stricken, crime-ridden neighbourhood, a situation which, like that of the South Bronx, was only exacerbated by discriminatory housing policies and the economic depression of the 1970s. Part of the 'Low-rise, High Density' housing project commissioned by the New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC), drawings for Marcus Garvey Park Village were exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art's 'Another Chance for Housing' in 1973. Although anti-modernist sentiment was strong by the early 1970s, the roots of socially responsible and engaged architecture undeniably stemmed in part from the social housing projects of CIAM. The high-density plan for Marcus Garvey Park Village may even recall Ernst May's 'Existenzminimum' interwar housing, and the emphasis on incorporating nature through courtyard spaces evokes Siegfried Giedion's call for '*light, air, and openness'* in his manifesto of 1929.

However, as Kenneth Frampton explained in the catalogue for the MoMA show, Marcus Garvey Park Village was modeled more closely after Atelier 5's 1961 Siedlung Halen in Switzerland, which was itself inspired by Le Corbusier's 1948 unbuilt project for Roquebrune-Cap-Martin in the South of France (Museum of Modern Art, 1973, p. 11). This would be the Institute's only built project, as concrete humanitarian or sociological projects were discarded in favour of increasingly theoretical activities. Even though Marcus Garvey Park Village was promoted by the IAUS as '*not another theoretical exercise*' but rather a way to address '*real problems*,' the hallowed halls of the MoMA in Midtown Manhattan seemed light years away from the reality of Brooklyn's Brownsville neighbourhood and its residents' needs. (Allais, p. 30)

The IAUS moved away from such social projects early on, and quickly became known as a 'think tank,' a '*symptom of a broader intellectual turn in the American political scene'* (Allais, 2010, p. 32). That shift in architecture '*from doing to thinking*,' as Allais put it, occurred not only due to a dearth of commissions during the economic downturn of the 1970s, but also as the perceived failure of modern architecture led to a sense of disillusionment or even pessimism about the power of architecture to address social problems. This setting also provided alternative opportunities for women, who were too often denied positions and/or a voice in architectural firms, to help shape the contemporary architectural discourse.

ReVisions and the Women of the Institute

Unlike the women of CIAM, whose roles were limited and almost entirely undocumented at the time, there were many women involved in various capacities at the IAUS who made significant contributions to public programs, exhibitions, and publications. Laurie Hawkinson and Frederieke Taylor, for example, wrote grants and spearheaded the 'Open Plan' lecture series, and Hawkinson ran the exhibition program from 1979-1981. Lindsay Stamm Shapiro was then director of exhibitions from 1981 to 1983 (Frank, 2011, p. 243). Suzanne Stephens organized the relaunch of *Skyline,* a newspaper-style publication that began in 1981, published under Rizzoli Publications (Colomina & Buckley, 2010). Joan Ockman

was a Fellow from 1981-1983, wrote articles for *Oppositions,* and was a keen editor and often revised Eisenman's texts; she also was responsible for making some of the texts more comprehensible to a wider audience, according to Julia Bloomfield (Frank, p. 222). Bloomfield and Diana Agrest were also editors integral to the success of *Oppositions.* However, their impact has long been overshadowed or downplayed by their male counterparts and historians alike.

Only in recent years have the women involved at the IAUS made public statements on this topic, and even in this context their concerns seemed to fall on deaf ears. When Beatriz Colomina confronted Kenneth Frampton at a panel discussion on *Oppositions* in 2010 about why Agrest was not made part of the official editorial board, Frampton skirted the question, replying, '*Diana Agrest was an important part of the board. She was with us at the end*' (Colomina & Buckley, p. 63). And yet, as Colomina noted, Agrest was only listed as a board member for the very last issue. Eisenman, for his part, asked the panel to '*get over the implied male chauvinist critique*,' conceding that it is '*probably true*,' adding that '*there were more women in powerful positions at the Institute than there were men'* (Ibid.). Eisenman continued to state that Julia Bloomfield '*ran Oppositions, no matter what anybody wants to say*,' although Colomina then pointed out that, despite that fact, Bloomfield was excluded from the editorial board as well (Ibid.). In another interview, Eisenman allowed that '*there must have been some gender prejudice, even if the Institute was really very open*' (Ibid., p. 262).

These exchanges highlight two facts: one, that both sides agree that women had significant roles and influence at the Institute; two, contrary to Eisenman's and Frampton's remarks, women were rarely given official credit for their contributions. As Frederieke Taylor affirmed, women were seldom made full fellows at the Institute, and instead usually started as receptionists, only to move on '*to manage programs that were directed by men*' (Frank, 2011, p. 319). Taylor also recalls that there was a women's group that met at the Institute about once a month as a show of solidarity (Ibid.). This information is part of Taylor's account of her time at the IAUS, published in Suzanne Frank's own 2011 memoirs. Although Frank admitted that she '*may not have been a central player'* at the IAUS and the book '*is more of a personal memoir than a definitive, scholarly study*'

(Ibid., p. 5), her memoirs are nevertheless an important resource that includes accounts by twenty-seven other key members. This book had potential to address the chauvinism alluded to by Colomina above, but the issue was scarcely mentioned.

The ReVisions group, however, which formed in the spring of 1981 and continued until 1988, lent agency to women who had been excluded from official positions at the IAUS. Roughly half of the ReVisions members were women, and the production of their publications speaks to their crucial leadership: the first volume was edited by Joan Ockman, one of the founding coordinators, and co-edited by Deborah Berke and Mary McLeod; the second was edited by Beatriz Colomina and Ockman, co-edited by Berke and McLeod. Perhaps the most radical aspect of this seemingly humble 'study group,' besides the fact that it was largely driven by women, was that their discourse addressed pressing yet overlooked socio-political issues.

The idea was first proposed by Eisenman's assistant, Walter Chatham, who wanted to bring together younger architects and thinkers (Ockman, 2013). Christian Hubert and Joan Ockman were involved early on, although the group would eventually include a cross-section of members involved at the IAUS: Alan Colquhoun, Pe'era Goldman, Michael Kagan, Bernard Tschumi, Mary McLeod, Deborah Berke, Denis Hector, Beyhan Karahan, Lauretta Vinciarelli, and Jon Michael Schwarting. Their initial focus was on producing public programs about the relationship between architecture and ideology and between architecture and art. As Ockman recalled, '*it was just the moment when people like Julian Schnabel and David Salle were kind of bursting on the scene – Laurie Simmons, people like that – and we invited them to speak*' (Ockman, 2013). ReVisions also provided a testing ground for new work – Tschumi, for example, first presented his project for the Parc de la Villette competition to the ReVisions group, and competitions were held – one for Columbus Circle was won by Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio. (Frank, 2011, p. 296)

In addition to their regular meetings, the group held a symposium at the Institute in 1982, the papers from which were subsequently published in *Architecture,*

Criticism, Ideology (1985); this included the first published version of Frederic Jameson's influential text on postmodernism, 'Architecture and the Critique of Ideology.' After that symposium, ReVisions began detaching itself from the Institute, shifting its focus away from public programs and towards reading and discussing texts by Neo-Marxists such as Manfredo Tafuri and Galvano Della Volpe, as well as leading voices in postmodern debates: Jürgen Habermas, Benjamin Buchloh, Craig Owens, Frederic Jameson, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Michel Foucault (McLeod, 2016). In the process, they raised issues related to architecture and politics, education, and philosophy, resulting in a rich cross-pollination of ideas. The second volume of ReVisions texts, *Architectu(re)production,* was published in 1988 and included essays centered on modernist subjects such as Le Corbusier, Konstantin Melnikov, Mies van der Rohe and the relationship between architecture and design (and production and reproduction, as suggested by the multivalent title).

By taking a Neo-Marxist approach, in large part adopted from Italian thinkers like Tafuri, Antonio Gramsci, and others, ReVisions played a vital role in establishing a critical voice for the architectural discourse in New York. The political fervor that pervaded architecture culture in the late 1960s had dissipated by the early 1970s as architects found their discipline at an impasse. With the rise of semiotic, structuralist, phenomenological, and typological analyses in the 1970s, politics were increasingly expressed through theory or downplayed in favour of formal concerns. As Mary McLeod explained in the introduction to *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology,* the architectural discourse in America had for a long time fallen short of engaging the relationship to politics and ideology: '*The naive utopianism of the modern movement, the social criticism of the sixties, the semiological analyses of the seventies, and contemporary eclectic approaches – all fail to examine architecture's "real connection" to material processes*'. (in Ockman, 1985, p. 9).

ReVisions was conceived to fill that void, as a mode of examining, as McLeod stated, '*the relationship between culture and material conditions – in particular, the nature of architecture as ideology'* (in Ockman, 1985, p. 8). At issue was the role of architectural representation and its relationship to consumption. As the economy rebounded in the 1980s and architects began to gain more (and more

profitable) commissions to build, many of the dilemmas of public housing and urban blight remained while the connections between postmodernism and market forces became increasingly explicit. ReVisions members addressed these sets of problems in a manner similar to CIAM – meeting, discussing, debating, publishing – in order to interrogate a progressively dominant postmodernism.

The legacy of ReVisions extended far beyond the walls of the Institute and, like the IAUS itself, impacted architectural theory, education, and practice. Several members had long and ground-breaking careers at Columbia University, Princeton, The Cooper Union, Yale, and elsewhere; McLeod and Vinciarelli were in fact some of the first women hired to teach architecture studio courses at Columbia University. Ockman also taught at Columbia, and later served as director of the Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture at Columbia from 1994-2008. Tschumi was Dean of Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation from 1988-2003, and in 2016, Berke became the first woman to be Dean of the Yale School of Architecture. Several members also went on to found architecture firms or collaborate with others; Vinciarelli, for example, worked with Minimalist artist Donald Judd for roughly ten years on architectural projects for Marfa, Texas, Providence, Rhode Island, and Cleveland, Ohio.[1] Fittingly, one of the most enduring legacies of ReVisions is their scholarship on modern architecture: Colquhoun's critical survey of Modern Architecture (published by Oxford University Press), Ockman on mid-century architectural education and theory, and McLeod on Charlotte Perriand, the latter which inspired my own research on Vinciarelli.

The CIAM Effect, Then and Now

Just as the architects of CIAM reevaluated the role of the architect and historian in the wake of two world wars and members of the IAUS in the wake of 1968, so too must we consider our responsibility in this politically and socially volatile era.

[1] These collaborations had been omitted from the literature on Judd until very recently. For more, see: 'Lauretta Vinciarelli, Into the Light: Her Collaborations with Donald Judd,' *Women's Art Journal* 38, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 20-27.

Familiar problems persist in a new context: affordable housing is an especially important and timely issue considering the exponential rate at which high-rise, luxury apartments have been constructed, consequently warping the real estate market and making it increasingly difficult to make the case for more affordable housing. In New York, the major concerns that gentrification continues to raise, especially regarding the complicity of artists and architects and the increasing need for low-income housing, make clear that the stakes are high especially in dense urban areas. In early 2018, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio unveiled his plan to rehabilitate 125,000 public housing units under more sustainable means and build 200,000 new units of affordable housing (Zacks, 2017).

New questions have been raised in the process, in light of the tumult of the last few years: '*can public space and public housing be used as an antidote to practices of exclusion? What is the relationship between the size of an apartment and the rate of gentrification*?' (Cheah, 2017). It might be instructive to look back to projects such as Marcus Garvey Village in Brownsville (as the New York City AIA Center for Architecture did for their 2013 exhibition, 'Examining the 'Compromised Ideal': Marcus Garvey Park Village at 40'), or to revisit some of the conversations about architecture and ideology that took place among members of ReVisions. The time is right to reevaluate the impact of CIAM and the IAUS, to reimagine the socio-political potential of experimentalism, 'real and theoretical' approaches to design, and measured utopianism. However, we must look back with a critical and cautious eye, recognizing the implicit biases of taking two overwhelmingly Eurocentric and male organizations as models for design problems in an era defined by the social reckonings of "Me Too" and Black Lives Matter. More than ninety years after the founding of CIAM and fifty years after the founding of the IAUS, there ought to be a new model, one grounded in a true sense of internationalism and humanitarianism that can keep pace with the needs of our diverse and rapidly transforming societies.

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