

A Journal for Ideas and
Criticism in Architecture

Published for The Institute
for Architecture and Urban Studies

By The MIT Press

Summer 1977: 9

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Peter Eisenman, Kenneth Frampton,
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The "Allusions" of Richard Meier

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With this issue *Oppositions* begins its fourth year of publication. In reviewing the brief history of the journal, the editors have felt the need to re-assess its initial aims and format and to open the coming year with a renewed statement of intent.

The eight numbers already published have, we believe, succeeded in establishing a significant critical level for ideas in architecture; they have proposed a number of themes for extended debate so that, within the architectural culture of the United States, *Oppositions* has already been able to assume the dual role of being both a stimulus for discourse and an independent critical voice. In this, the special duality of cultural reference assumed by the journal, its opening of a dialogue between critics and architects on both sides of the Atlantic, seems to be of special importance. By translating critical articles of the best European thinkers in architecture—some addressing specifically American issues and objects—and by introducing to a European audience the works of younger American writers, the journal has already contributed much to this interchange. In future issues the editors will endeavor to strengthen and sharpen the focus of this European-American debate.

Central to the themes and diverse viewpoints introduced over the first four years has been an inquiry into what the editors have termed the ontological basis of contemporary architecture; the nature of its practice and the foundations of its formal and technical production. To this end the journal has set itself the task of examining the roots and manifestations of modernism in architecture and the related arts and the debates that have ensued since the end of the eighteenth century over the specific relations between architecture and society. This underlying inquiry will continue to inform future issues and our detailed examination of the nature of “formalism,” “realism,” “modernism,” and “post-modernism” will be undertaken on many different levels—critical, theoretical, and historical.

Special issues, the first of which, *Oppositions 8*, has already been published, will enable such themes to be pursued in depth; it is intended that at least one special issue—whether historical, theoretical, or critical—be published each year under the general guidance of one or more of the editors and sometimes with invited guest editors. The themes of these special issues will be chosen as far as possible within the terms of current debate, and the attempt will always be made to situate this debate in a rigorous, theoretical, and historical context.

The categories already established within the journal, distinguishing between “oppositions,” “theory,” “history,” and “documents” will be maintained, but a

2 conscious effort will be made to relate their individual themes to each other both within single issues and from issue to issue. Our recognition of the close relation between “oppositions”—the critical practice of architecture—and “theory” has resulted in our re-ordering of the journal itself, and in this respect the critical contribution of the “oppositions” essay will be always reinforced by a theoretical exploration. At all times the essential historical bases of debate will be recognized. At the same time the present policy of relating historical investigations to documentation will be strengthened with special emphasis being given to certain themes in history that have recently emerged as relevant to the current condition and future development of architecture. In order to further these relationships, the editors, who in the past have written short introductions to each piece, will now discontinue this practice in favor of presenting more extended commentaries to certain articles that engage the interests of one or more of the editors. Such commentaries, it is hoped, will not only allow for greater specificity and depth but also for extensive argument and for the development of the overall discourse of the journal itself; a critical discourse in which, we hope, the readership of the journal will participate.

In the formation of this discourse the visual material of the journal takes on special importance. Always concerned to avoid an uncritical presentation of already published material, illustrations have been used in the past as discursive “footnotes” to a particular text. It is clear, however, that in a journal of architecture certain visual material must take on a life of its own, and the editors will now endeavor to deploy illustrations in a new way so as to create a critical graphic discourse parallel to that attained in the text itself.

Irrespective of our differences, evident from the individual editorials that were concluded with *Oppositions* 7, the critical problems of the time remain for us as they were before: namely, the fate of the humanist legacy in a modernist epoch; the specific nature of ideology and its role in the creation of culture; the problematic nature of architecture and urbanism subject to the impact of accelerating industrial production and consumption; and, finally, the nature of linguistic operations in the generation and assimilation of non-verbal art.

Peter Eisenman, Kenneth Frampton, Mario Gandelsonas, Anthony Vidler

Anthony Vidler

Superficial whiteness, sensitivity to European precedent, an explicitly theoretical level of discourse informing theory and practice, personal friendships—such common attributes have tended to obscure the very real differences between the work of the New York Five. While three seem to have consistently worked to find alternative models for architecture than those provided by the Modern Movement, two have been content to advance this now established tradition. Thus Eisenman, Graves, and Hejduk, in their very different and continually developing ways, seem to find the roots—the ontology—of an architecture by reference to “universal” constants outside architecture itself. Thus, Eisenman is fascinated by the deep structure of structure, Graves by the symbolism of nature, Hejduk by the exercise of a poetic faculty projected on form with all the primal energy of a Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Charles Gwathmey and Richard Meier, on the other hand, have exhibited a reluctance toward so “radical” a gesture. Admitting the artistic nature of their work, they nevertheless see it as centrally rooted in the practice of building, the tradition of modern architecture. Their “vocabulary” does not derive from painting or from an abstract concept of form in itself, but from the practice of architecture, historically bracketed and defined as a developing vocabulary between Le Corbusier and Paul Rudolph. Gwathmey and Meier may differ in their conception of space and containment but their common aim is to be highly sophisticated *modern* architects.

Gwathmey has approached a solution in specifically cultural terms; relating his work to an American spatial tradition, he has tried to assimilate and dissolve any stray “linguistic” references to European modernism through a continuous process of volumetric invention and manipulation. Here the physical action of the architect on his material—conceived as three dimensional volume defined by the tectonic elements of building—in the course of the design becomes almost tangible and marked on the finished work. It is as if space were putty for the architect to mold, and that each new model projects the possibility for its reformulation.

Richard Meier, however, has chosen a different route. Self-consciously wedded to Europe, with an eclectic’s respect toward the received elements of architecture—spatial organizations, already formed episodes, and types of articulation—he has preferred to engage in a sophisticated form of assembly, of *bricolage*, that tends to leave the roots of his expression exposed. This exposure has led to the interpretation of his work as a kind of replay of the history of Modern Movement architecture from 1914–1939. Kenneth Frampton has even proposed his latest work, the Bronx Developmental Center, for inclusion in Alfred Roth’s *New Architecture* published in 1946.

4 Thus Richard Meier, more than any of the Five, opens himself to the charge of an imitative eclecticism, an architecture imitating architecture that has been characterized as the narcissist phase of modern culture. And the critics who have approached his building, working according to the received methods of art-historical scholarship, have indeed found it easier to trace the origins of his “language” in the various backwaters of the Modern Movement than to see any essential unity or authenticity in the work on its own terms. Francesco Dal Co in the following article has from the outset removed himself from such attribution hunting, recognizing that to return Meier’s work to its origins in the International Style as a mirror of recent history from Le Corbusier to the Bowman brothers is too facile a historical ellipsis. The conditions of Meier’s “modernism” must be confronted in terms presented by the contemporary “post-Modern Movement” condition. Francesco Dal Co has for this reason reviewed Meier’s recently published book in the light of problems raised by the last completed building, the Bronx Developmental Center. Seeing this work as both the synthesis of and the evidence for unresolved contradictions in all the previous buildings and projects, he is able to ask the question, not where did the “words” of Meier’s language come from, but rather, by what process have they been transformed and what do they imply for his contemporary practice? He concentrates on the way in which the tentative experiments in the early houses, leading to what he sees as radical “explosions” of language in the second phase of Meier’s development, have been in some way synthesized in the last buildings. But this “synthesis,” rather than following the potentially radical implications of the first works, relies, Dal Co finds, on a fundamentally conventional idea of unity—the harmonious reconciliation of form and function proposed by the Modern Movement. That is, the ever present contradiction between technique and form, while accepted in the earlier works in a way that seemed initially to generate a potentially dynamic “linguistic” opening, has indeed been resolved in the Bronx building, but at the expense of such dynamism and according to the premises of an already discredited Modern Movement compromise—the functional ethic. In this Dal Co agrees with Frampton in returning the Bronx to the nineteen-forties, but sees more radical experimentation in the first works; an experimentation impossible in the twenties and essentially post-Modern Movement in its implications.

At this point we are returned to our initial dilemma: has Meier escaped the artificiality of linguistic allusion by a synthetic and unitarily bonded formulation of technique, function, and form in the Bronx building, or have the very terms of this escape brought him inescapably back to the impossible utopianisms of the thirties? In raising the criteria of a Walter Benjamin or a Gottfried Benn as the arbiters in this question, Dal Co has assumed that only

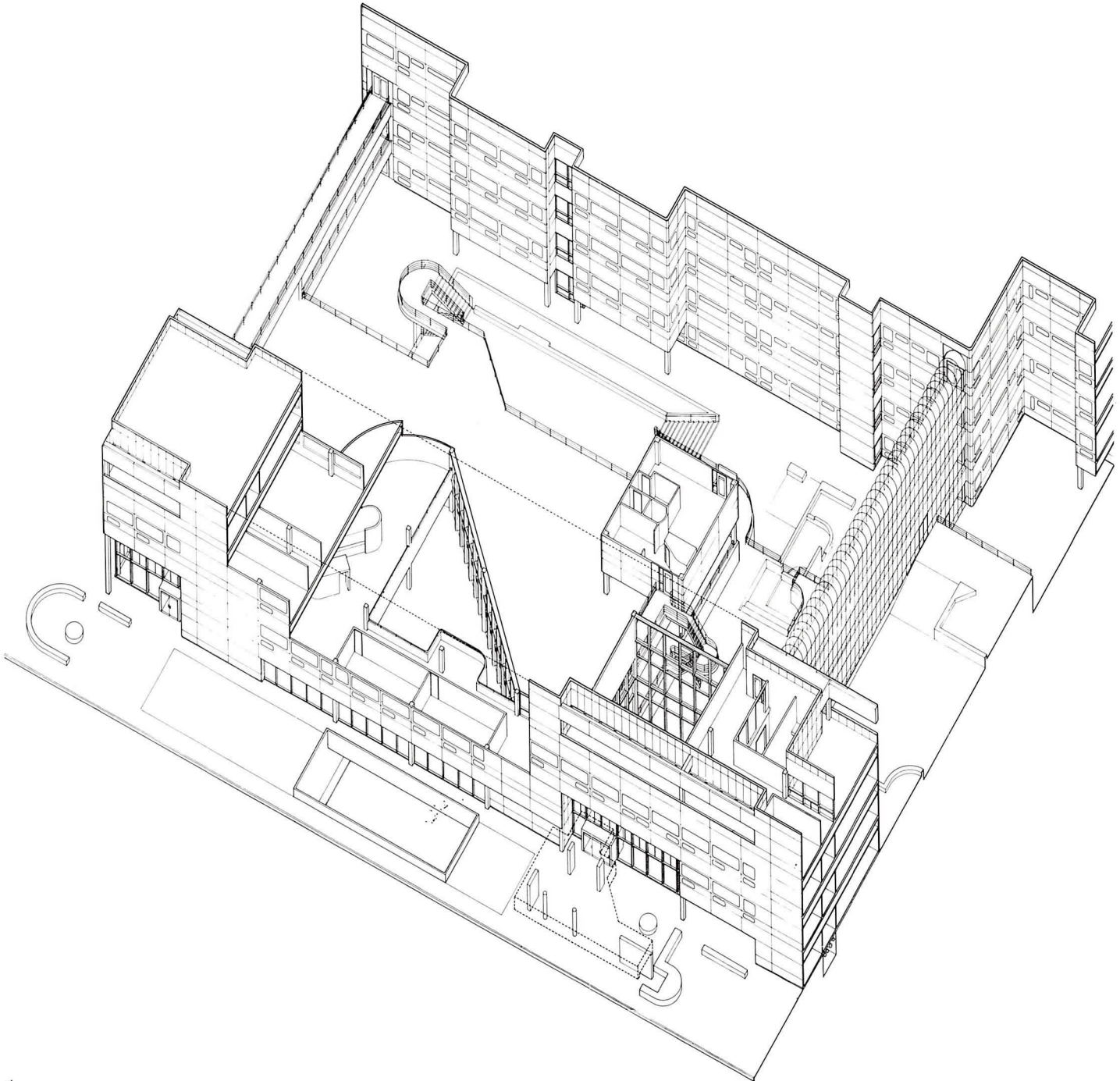
a judgment of authenticity that relates to the external conditions of production and consumption can restore the political meaning of an architecture lost in utopia; but however appealing such criteria might be to those who mourn, as did Benjamin and Benn in their very different ways, the loss of signification in industrialized society—the loss of the “aura” imposed by the craftsman in a pre-mass production society—the condition of loss of signification *in itself* is not entirely faced. And while it is true that Benjamin himself, working with Brecht, outlined a possible program of technical transformation that would respond to the meaning of technique in itself, it is also true that such a program remains embedded in the terms of discourse set by the modernist project of the twenties. It may not, therefore, confront in every respect the condition of the present as we seek to understand the failure of this discourse, and the repeated failure of society at large to accept the meanings projected by architects onto the forms of everyday life.

Oppositions

1 Bronx Developmental Center, New York. Richard Meier & Associates, architects, 1970–1976. Partial axonometric view of north courtyard.

2 Site plan.

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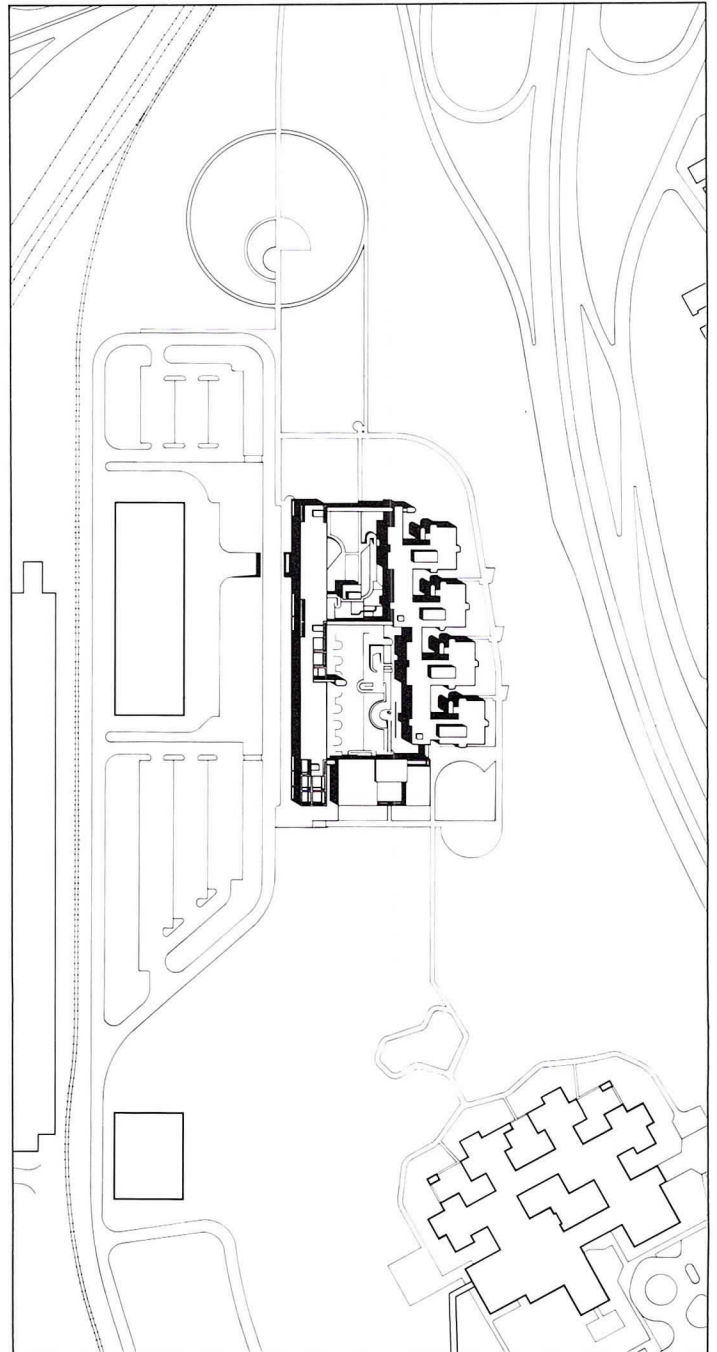
The “Allusions” of Richard Meier

Francesco Dal Co

Translation by Alessandra Latour

Every debate on contemporary architecture risks falling into a contradiction between, on the one hand, an over-emphasis on the process by which the work was generated, and on the other hand, the isolation of the work in its completed “object-hood” (fig. 3). Such a contradiction should be avoided. Rather than posing the question as a mutually exclusive choice between means and ends, design process and finished object, it is perhaps more useful to acknowledge that the two terms are in fact mutually inclusive. The process by which architecture is generated is finally revealed in the object realized: but even as this process cannot by itself *explain* the end result, neither can this object explain the route traveled. The two co-exist and reveal *themselves* in the act of appearing to be contemporaneous. In the specific case of the work of Richard Meier, the end result—each of his finished buildings or projects—reveals different twists and turns of the process of its generation, and contains within itself all the crises confronted along the way.

We will take for granted what has already been said about Richard Meier and his work. He is a well-known and much discussed architect. Further, the so-called “Myth of the Five” has made him an object of particular affection for the critics. And they have avidly searched the scrap heap of memory to unearth reminiscences and comparisons that might explain the overtly obvious precedents and underlying prototypes that have inspired Meier’s work. Like any architecture, that of Meier has been forced to recognize a father figure to overthrow, a mother to possess, a sister to violate. Confronted with this, the critic plays the analyst: with the architect’s work on the couch and the lights dimmed, the somewhat kitsch game of conjuring up its infancy becomes easy. The correct identification of the architectural traumas experienced in the history of the work depends solely on the skill of the critic; the number of brilliant comparisons to be made is inexhaustible. And when everything else fails, the supporting apparatus of “comparative” illustrations will always neatly resolve every difficulty of critical acrobatics. In the case of Meier there is no lack of documentary evidence with which to conduct this inquiry. Indeed the analysts have done good work: conceived from opposite points of view, what Kenneth

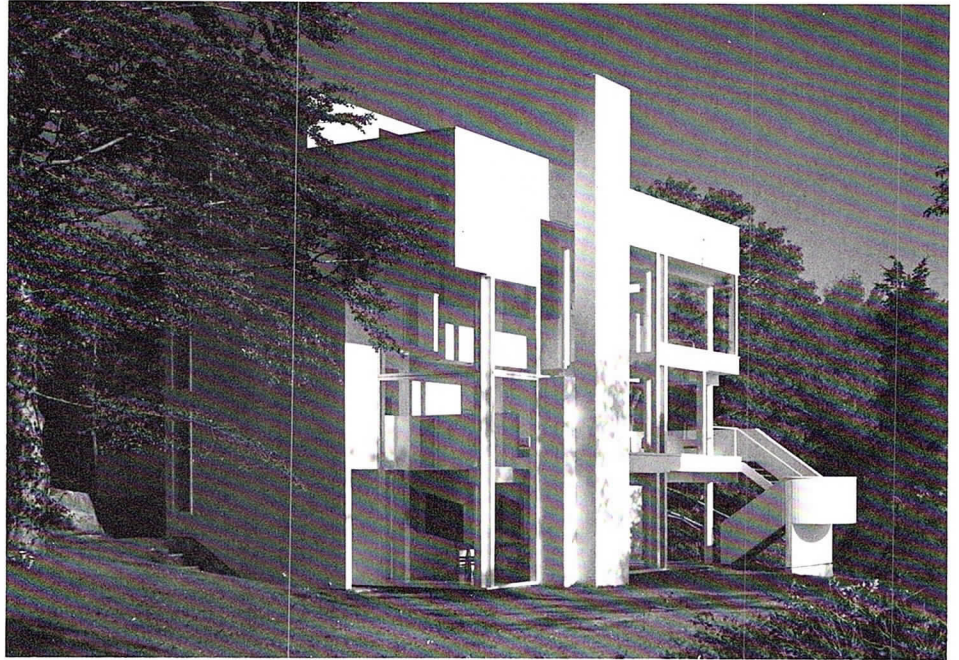
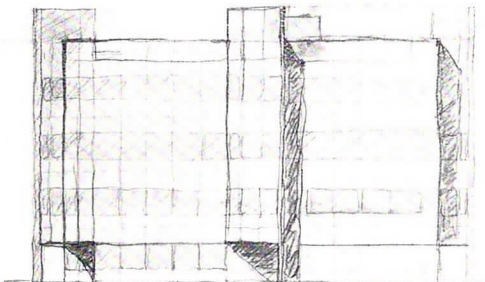
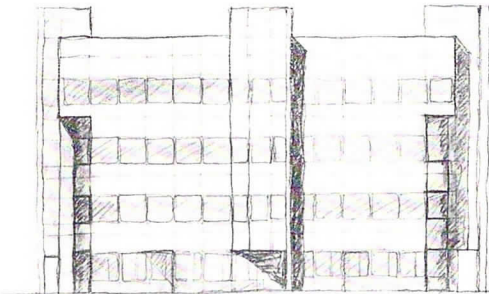
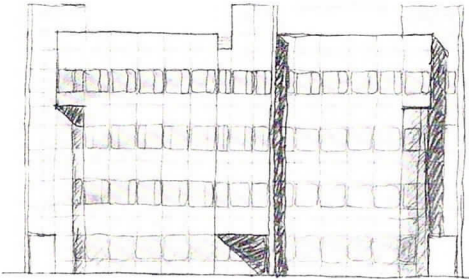
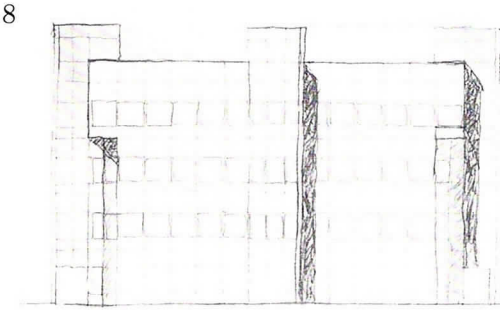


3 Bronx Developmental Center, New York. Richard Meier & Associates, architects, 1970-1976. Sketch designs for facade paneling.

5 Bronx Developmental Center. Training 'house' for residents in transition from full-care to out-patient care.

4 Smith House, Darien, Connecticut. Richard Meier & Associates, architects, 1965-1967.

6 Entry level floor plan.



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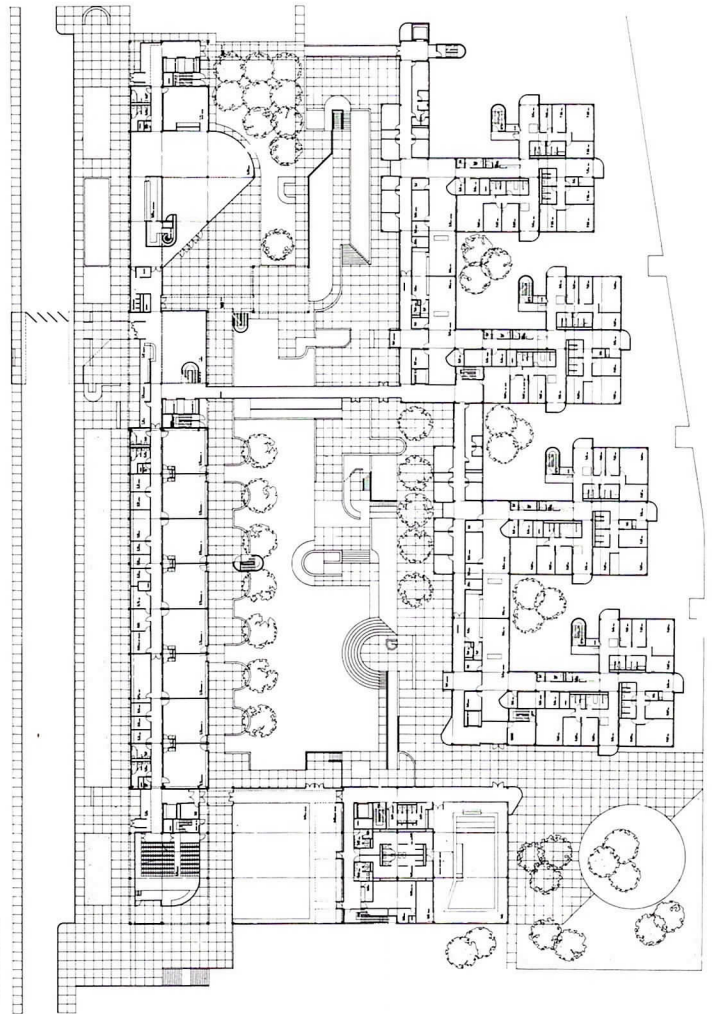
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Frampton and Manfredo Tafuri have written should satisfy the curiosity of every *voyeur*.¹ Their observations have been so accurate as to induce me to refrain from any impulse to add something original to their articulate constructions. If I were to propose yet another pedigree for Meier's architecture, thus enriching the gamut of comparisons, I would only run the risk of falling into that most ambiguous and dangerous of all philologies—the archeology of knowledge. Therefore, my discourse must be different. Rather than speaking of what Meier's architecture suggests with respect to any internal "architectural specificity," I will address the more general mechanisms that can be seen in his work that open the question of the relationship between the process of *architectural formalization* and *language*.

But any review of Meier's work must now also necessarily take into account its recent publication as a whole. Confronted by the projects and buildings enclosed within this book,² set between a preface by Kenneth Frampton and a postscript by John Hejduk, two questions immediately come to mind: first, what significance does this book have in itself? Second, what role does the final building—the Bronx Developmental Center—play with respect to the previous work (figs. 4, 5)?

We will take the second question first. First of all, although I know that it would be prudent to be more guarded, at least in an art historical sense, it seems to me that the Bronx complex (figs. 2, 6) represents a complete rupture with respect to Meier's previous work. But to say this is to recognize that the perception of any rupture is necessarily the result of defining a pre-existing continuity, a continuity to which it is intimately related without being its natural outcome. And indeed, if we look at the Bronx complex, such continuity is not hard to find in the appearance of passages, quotations, and inventions refined in a composite way from his previous projects. If we then follow the chain of allusions back, it is possible to distinguish the archetypes of these quotations; but we have to go still further if we want to clarify the *procedures* through which these architectural "words" have assumed their present consistency. Through these illusory traces, which in this case are extremely eclectic,³ one can try to retrace the

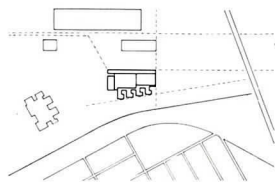


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7 Bronx Developmental Center, New York. Richard Meier & Associates, architects, 1970–1976. Diagrams.

8 House in Pound Ridge, New York. Richard Meier & Associates, architects, 1969. Diagrams.

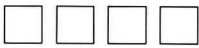
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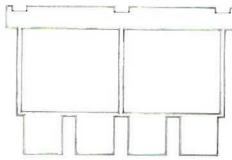
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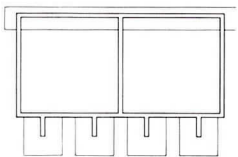
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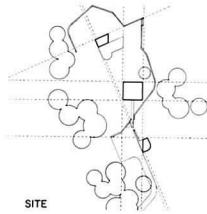
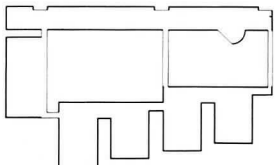
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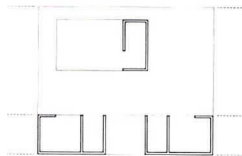
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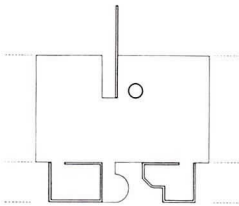
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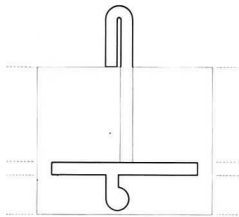
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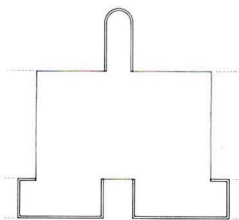
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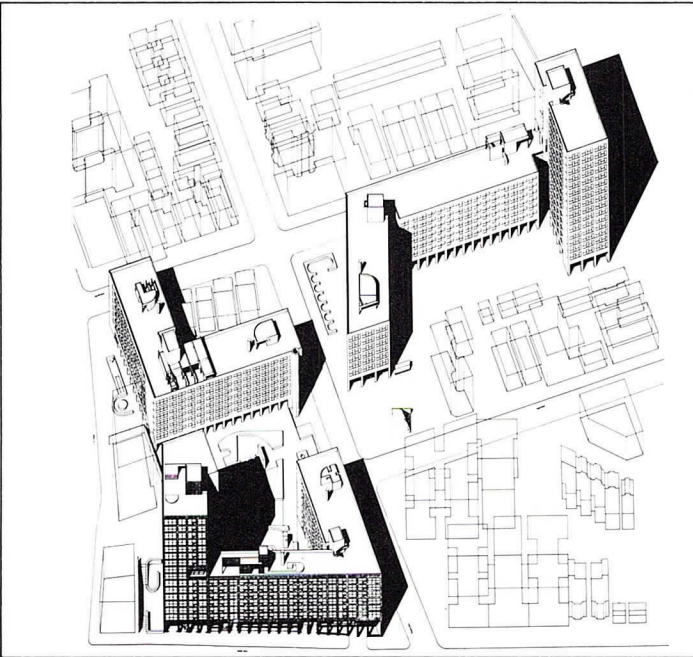
route by which the *sound* of Meier's architectural words was originally formed and to articulate the successive distortions of these sounds. We may then discover the moment in which their basic significance has been transformed. But even this kind of reading hardly leads further than a simple phonetic inquiry, one that runs the risk, to speak in German terms, of remaining on the level of *appearances* rather than *essences*. Here, however, at the point at which we can recognize all the apparent iconographic relations between Meier's last work and its antecedents, we have approached the heart of the question, a question posed by the nature of the architecture under analysis: to what degree does the architecture of Meier find in its own inner "quality" the strength to liberate itself definitively from its original "baby-talk" and express its own relationship with the language clearly? And, to put the question in more general terms, to what degree can "cultivated architecture" today in any way clarify its own linguistic condition?

The work of Meier demonstrates that the transformation of an architectural vocabulary does not exclude the putting together of functions; indeed both the words of his language and the functions he accepts are taken whole from an already existing vocabulary of forms and social tasks; they arrive, as it were, "already spoken" and complete, ready to be related to one another as the architect attempts through an act of synthesis to overcome their individual separateness (figs. 7, 8). The question is, what price is paid for this attempt at synthesis? And, if one starts by recognizing the separateness of the words and the given functions, what is to be valued finally: the act of synthesis or the realized work?

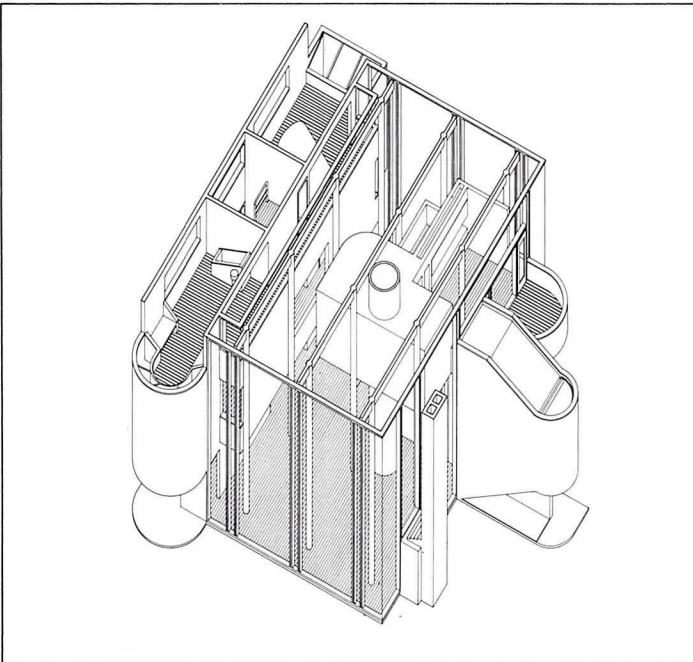
The design process that we have characterized in this way—the synthesis of previously discrete and given forms and functions—is in fact common to much architecture of the modern period. It can be described by the term "realism"—the positive accommodation of social use by means of appropriately selected forms. If the buildings of Twin Parks express this kind of "realism" to an extreme (fig. 9), then in the Bronx complex it would seem that the attempt to reconstitute the language of architecture synthetically has succeeded. If the language of architecture has, since

9 Twin Parks Northeast housing, Bronx, New York. Richard Meier & Associates, architects, 1969–1974. Axonometric.

10 Bronx Developmental Center.



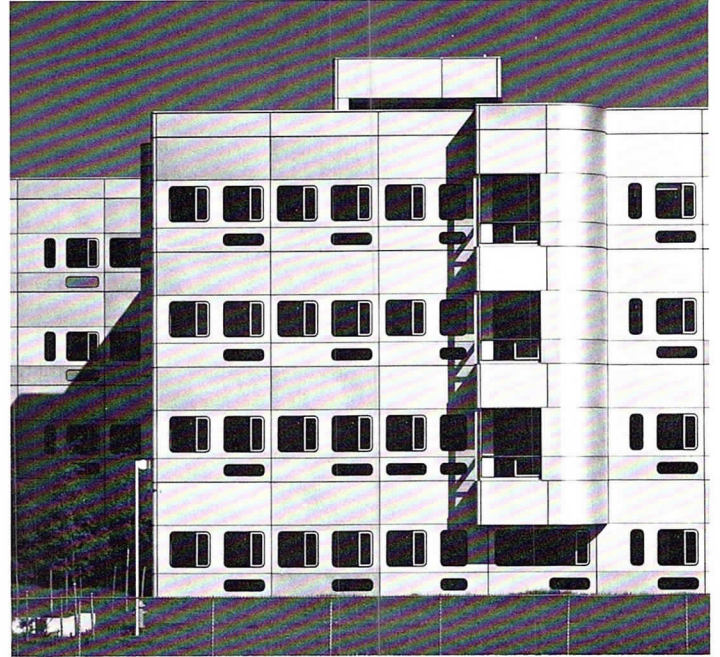
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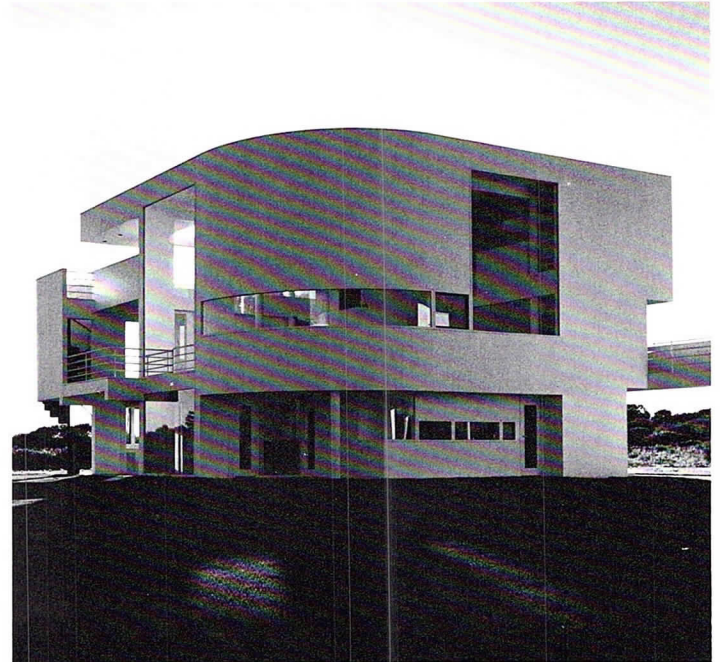
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11 House in Pound Ridge, New York. Axonometric view of lower roof level.

12 Saltzman House, East Hampton, New York. Richard Meier & Associates, architects, 1967–1969.



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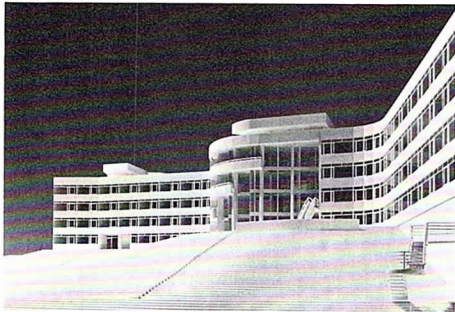
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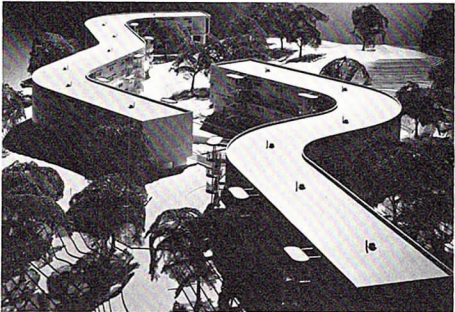
13 *Dormitory for the Olivetti Training Center, Tarrytown, New York. Richard Meier & Associates, architects, 1971.*

15 *Bronx Developmental Center, New York. Richard Meier & Associates, architects, 1970–1976.*

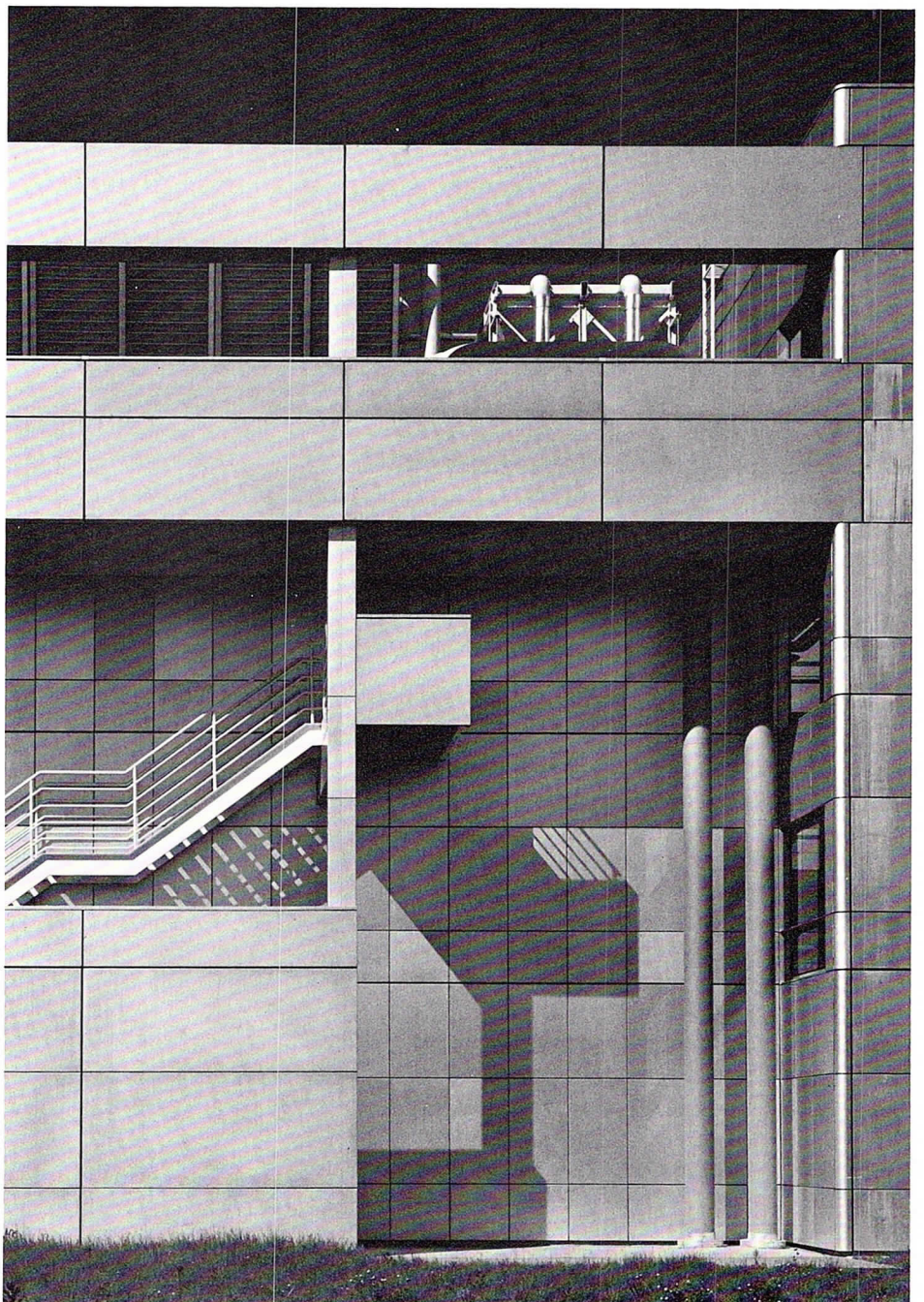
14 *Cornell University Undergraduate housing, Ithaca, New York. Richard Meier & Associates, architects, 1974.*



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14



15

the advent of mass-production, tried to make universal the formalization of certain repetitive processes within the field of its own communication, then this attempt seems to have reached its apogee with this latest work of Meier (fig. 10). The Bronx complex, in its attempt to remove itself from every uncertainty, seems to represent a dialectical synthesis between formal articulation and spatial unity, between fragmentation and continuity.

Kenneth Frampton is right when he speaks of an allusive "scale" in the work of the Five, as is Manfredo Tafuri when he sees in the work of Meier the attempt to exercise an almost desperate control over the architectonic imagination. But in the case of the Bronx complex, there is still something more to be noted. If the discourse of the architect is entirely focussed on the nature of the building as an expression of what it could or ought to be (as seems to be the case in this project), then we are immediately precipitated into the apparently infinite realm of allusion. And yet is not this apparently boundless field closed precisely at the point where the limits of language to signify, to explain, and to speak are revealed? At this point, does not allusion lose its infinitude and simply become a vehicle for affirming its relationship to precedent? And, when allusion finally becomes *affirmation*, the architectural "word" demonstrates, however implicitly, its loss of full meaning. The word is immediately reduced to a sign, among many signs, static and given, revealing traces of its origin but in no way recreating meaning for itself.

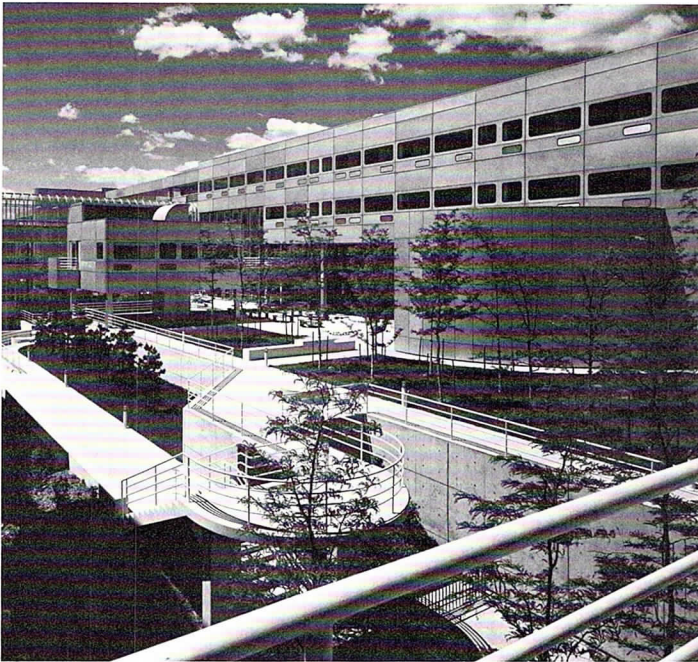
If we understand this specific characteristic of allusion, we can better justify the role of the "rupture" that we have recognized in Meier's Bronx complex. This is to say, that in this building the synthesis between the words and the functions is only apparent; that what then emerges is once again the autonomy of the architectonic word; that the language is solely an ineffable phantom, a shadow, whose only function is to maintain an open escape hatch to utopia. This analysis is confirmed by comparing this project with the other projects or "sites" which exhibit the recurrent words of Meier's language.

The first works still remain paradigmatic: they speak with

a childlike poetry, with a fascination for volatile sounds. One has to listen carefully to them in order to recognize the nature of the word. With the help of these primitive sounds, the architect searches for the phonetic roots of a language. This search makes the relationship that Meier establishes with tradition both original and stimulating. The Saltzman house (fig. 12) stands as the masterpiece; second only to this is the house at Pound Ridge (fig. 11). In these two houses Meier utilizes tradition as an abandoned mine where the roots of violated words are hidden. Assembling his own discoveries, Meier experiments with the hardness of words and finds that beyond them there exists a language that already speaks *itself* and remains irreducible and out of reach. The Bronx complex is the very image of this distance. And it is with such *conditions* that works like those projected for the Olivetti Corporation of America (fig. 13), the Fredonia Health and Physical Education facility, and the Cornell University Undergraduate housing (fig. 14) are confronted without, however, any solution being found. The way out of this impasse still seems to be the Bronx complex, at once the most ambiguous, the most allusive, and the most accessible of Meier's buildings. It is ambiguous insofar as it appears to refute the choice between alternative models, limiting itself to shaping a complexity (fig. 18); this leads it to assume a purely reflexive character. Yet for this reason it is also allusive, insofar as reflecting complexity it transforms the abused words of modern architecture into the periphrasis⁴ of a language that cannot speak about the complexity of the reality it is meant to reflect (see fig. 1). Finally, it is Meier's most accessible work: participating in an image of machine-like rationalization (fig. 15), it seems to be predisposed for a return to the heavens of a progressivist utopia, to that dimension which its apparent premises initially seemed to have precluded—that is, those premises evident in the earlier works of Meier that seemed to accept the "celebration of what has already been said."

Even if the significance of the "rupture" in his work is explained in this way, the Bronx complex possesses aspects which remain to be discussed.

In those buildings used by a number of critics as a dem-



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onstration of the persistent striving toward the *tendenza* in contemporary architecture, one is, in fact, breathing the fresh air of a subjective relationship with regression: in the Bronx complex, however, such a relationship is reversed: any regressive aspects are here violently married to hope. But the validity of regression is established precisely to the degree that it *excludes* hope; indeed hope, as soon as it appears, acts to transform regression, moving it toward reaction. In architecture, hope is signified by a pressure for a reconstituted language, the will to repossess a fullness that can speak of a universal rationalization of the world, that will finally redeem the separateness and the isolation of words. With this last building, Meier, after his earlier confrontation with “what has already been said,” seems inadvertently to re-tread a path which he has already traveled, returning to repeat a development from which his first buildings should in fact have immunized him. For architecture, once it becomes an allusion to the possibility of understanding, of *possessing* the complexity of the world, in the end returns to the river bed of the avant-garde, to the utopia of a language without fracture where words are used to express a universal mechanization. And here we do not mean a “return” in the sense of a nostalgic *evocation* of the avant-garde, as something already experienced, but a literal return to the condition of avant-gardism itself: this is the watershed, the crucial dividing line between “nostalgic” and “progressivist” utopia (figs. 16, 17, 19, 20).

No architectural phenomenon is valid in itself; such is the burden which modern architecture has to bear, such the dramatic condition of its signification. Is it possible to escape from this condition? Or is it possible to sink into so perverse a privacy as that which results from the freedom to use one's own invented words? In fact, every act of *return* is far removed from such a state, from the fullness of the renunciation that it conceals in itself. And so it is with Meier's own return.

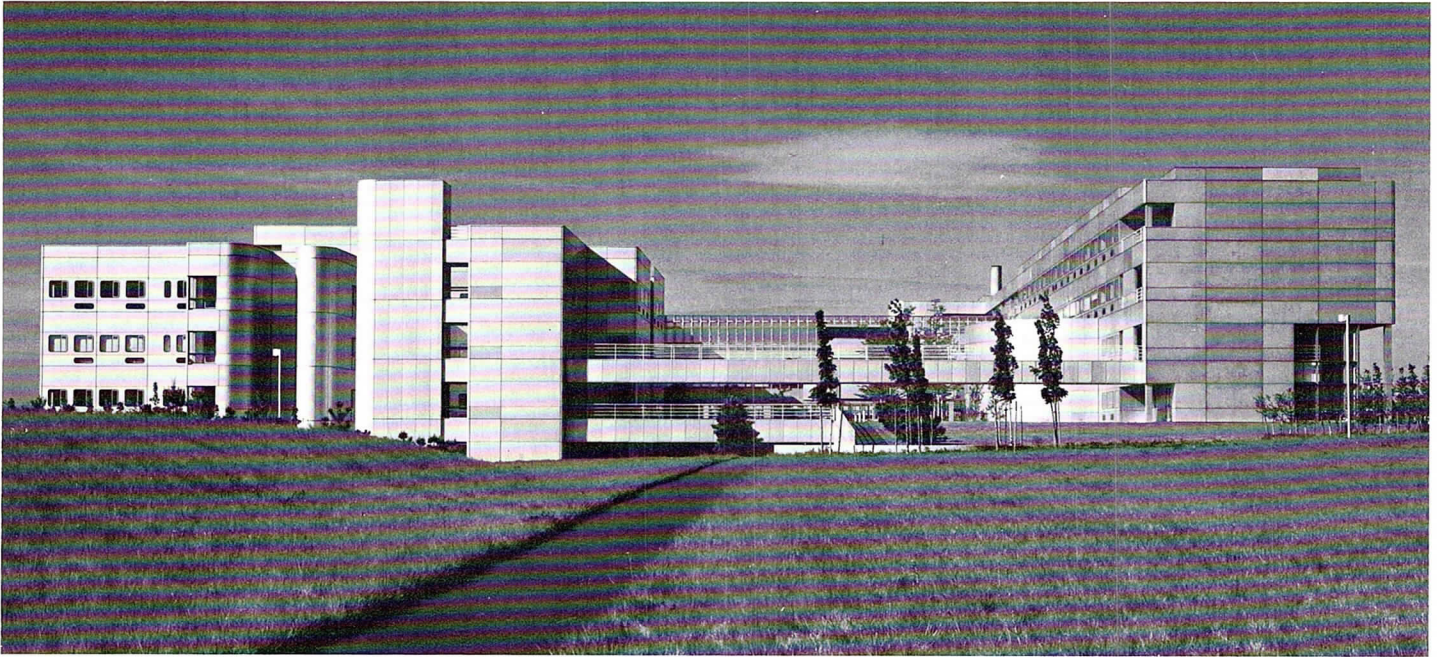
The avant-garde, in whose game Meier also seems to wish to play in his last buildings, is not, however, the place where Heideggerian bridges may be joined but rather the site where impotent ideological impulses are reduced to their former condition. And if the task of architecture is

16 *Bronx Developmental Center,
New York. Richard Meier &
Associates, architects, 1970–1976.
Southern courtyard.*

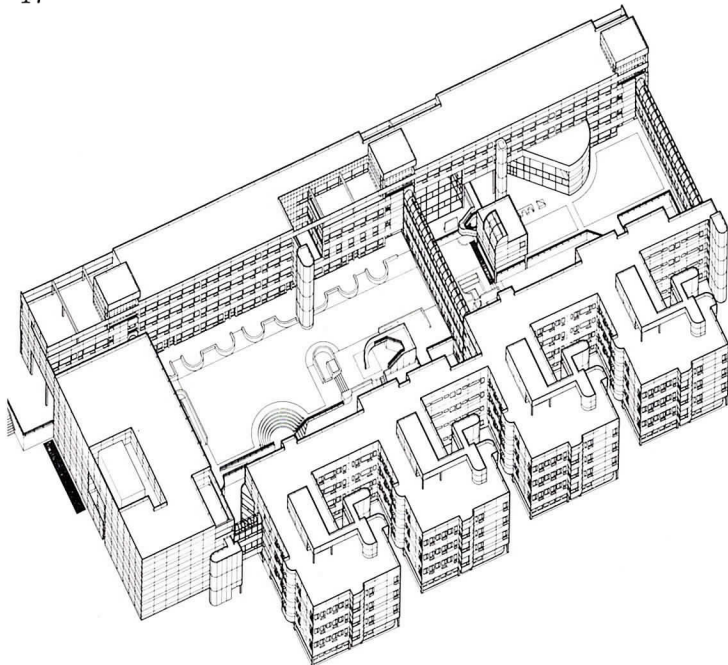
17 *View from the north.*

18 *Axonomic view of complex.*

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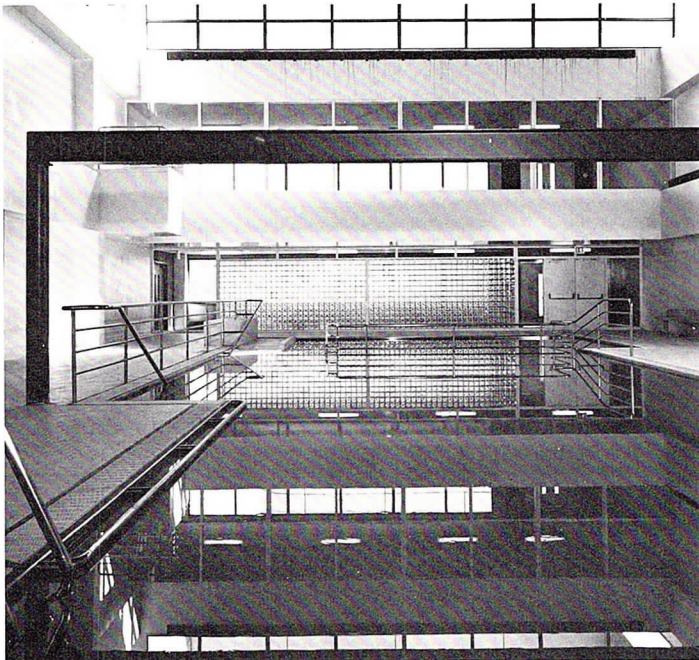
19 Bronx Developmental Center,
New York. Richard Meier &
Associates, architects, 1970–1976.
Glazed corridor.

20 Indoor swimming pool.

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principally to understand the place where it finds itself, its own being *there*, then the bonds with this great cultural season—the epoch of the avant-garde—have still to be broken. The avant-garde has too long been the path for the gratifying myths of *our* continuity; the time has come to recognize the epoch of the avant-garde as having actually deprived us of such a gift, of such security. The roots of architecture must be found in other soil. Architecture must learn to know itself on another planet, to dwell on another shore. To do this it must renounce its dreams of security: no matter what instruments are used, there are no other conditions for “speaking about architecture.”

If there exists no hope of giving life to any form of language that already contains in itself the act of its own birth, it is equally true that language, so divided from life cannot explain anything outside of itself. The dream of the avant-garde was that of escaping such conditions, of searching for a language able to communicate to the world. To abandon this dream means admitting, with Gottfried Benn, that the moment has come to recognize that the task is no longer to “go beyond” but rather to “call out from the deep.”

In what sense can this observation explain the architecture of Meier? His work, in fact, can be read as production situated at the very limits of two Bennian oppositions. On one side, his work expresses the desire to submerge itself in the quest for the roots of “already spoken” words, as if to demonstrate that novelty resides within such limits in the *horismos* (“upsurge”) of language that explains its own transformations.

On the other side, the work is both illusion and allusion: it demonstrates the tautological impotence that seizes everything which, moving *from* architecture, tries to break out of such limits. Architecture, the moment it leaves the private domain of writing and offers itself, independent of the language it knows, to the languages of the world, lives as *relation*. It acquires meaning to the degree in which it becomes speech, to the degree in which it loses its own “privacy”; it is finally of value when it reveals its own impotence to intervene in such relations, renouncing utopia to speak of its own relationships, in order to abandon itself,

precisely, to be newly spoken. In this way, the renunciation of utopia opens the way to the Bennian “summons.”

If, on the contrary, we assume the allusive quality of architecture as the grounds of analysis, we find ourselves in an opposite situation. In this sense those who underline the continuity of Meier’s work are correct. But my task is to find the moment when this appearance of continuity falters, and to demonstrate that any “subjective continuities” are only mystifications of the linguistic differences they are forced to confront. From this it follows that the more that architecture confirms its own capacity to dominate different languages, the more it misses the way to reconstruct speech, the unique linguistic entity that it can know. The more architecture speaks of a “smoothed over complexity” and the more it mystifies its own being as an object *among* objects, the more it is constrained to abandon itself to the imitation of the mechanisms of metropolitan life, “concealing” by this its own separateness. It transforms that which does not belong to it, straying from the path of regression toward its own *difference*.

Such, it seems to me, is the path traced in Meier’s work and especially in the light of the Bronx complex where such a route, only hinted at in his first buildings, is in the end abandoned. This last work finally sublimates in allusion the abandonment of a terrain of research that, even though highly ambiguous, at least presented signs of a notable originality.

Perhaps, however, it might be useful to verify the possibility of grasping such solutions of continuity in the work of our architect by using a different measure of inquiry. Accordingly, we might ask, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, to what degree does the production of Meier respond to its obligation to be an art of the post-avant-garde in order to prove the authenticity of that art? To what degree, in our specific case, do these last works of Meier allow us to verify the authenticity of the architectural language, of discovering its nature? To prove such authenticity means to discuss continually the very instruments through which architecture is *produced*. But in order to understand these instruments is it not perhaps necessary to know their basic

nature, to identify them also as being means of production? And then immediately comes the question posed by Benjamin: to what degree does architecture work toward the transformation of those means of production? At what point does not the utopia of fictitious continuities arise precisely to block such a transformation? At what point are not the mystifications about the “autonomy of form,” the formal “linguism,” absolved from their own social mandate, removing any such duty for architectural work? It is necessary to be convinced that the very concept of autonomy is worthwhile to the degree that it is synonymous with exclusion from the synthesis, with its refutation of utopia, and with the effort to recognize within a *given specificity* the authenticity sought by Benjamin.

Finally, to respond to our first question; what is the significance of this book? Every book is the product of the market; at the same time it changes the market. It is to be hoped that Meier’s work will not be read in order to satisfy the need for new utopian evasions, or that it will not reinforce those esoteric expectations that the appearance of the “Five” excited in some sections of the work force. Indeed, if it does anything along these lines, Meier’s book rather suggests some useful correctives to the ideology of the “flight from the relations of production” to bastardized and reactionary versions of “renunciation.” Beyond this, his own production contributes to show the futility of the myth of the “Five”: we now have a demonstration of how diverse are the directions from which these architects move, of the multiplicity of their languages, of the different strengths of their experimentalism. It is symptomatic that the book of the architectures of Meier concludes with a brief postscript from John Hejduk: thus enabled to compare the research of Hejduk with the work of Meier one becomes aware of the very different paths that each has taken. But, freely borrowing from the title of one of Hejduk’s works, all this goes to show how the path that leads to “silent witnesses” is too arduous, perhaps even inaccessible for those who programmatically refuse to submit their own mode of working to the verification of Benjaminian *authenticity*, to the *modern* tragedy of language.

18 Notes

1. See essay by Kenneth Frampton, *Five Architects* (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1972); introduction by Kenneth Frampton, *Richard Meier, Architect: Buildings and Projects 1966-1976* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Manfredo Tafuri, "L'Architecture dans le Boudoir," *Oppositions*, 3, May 1974.
2. *Richard Meier, Architect: Buildings and Projects 1966-1976* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).
3. The iconographic references in the book only partially help us in this reading, although the citation of James Stirling side by side with Stedman Whitwell is a significant coupling.
4. Periphrasis: that figure of speech that expresses the meaning of a word, phrase, etc., by many or several words, instead of a few or one; a roundabout way of speaking, circumvention.

Figure Credits

1-3, 6-9, 11, 18. Courtesy Richard Meier.
4, 5, 10, 12-17, 19, 20. Photographs by Ezra Stoller © ESTO.

Peter Eisenman

The rather unpleasant skirmish between Aldo van Eyck and Manfredo Tafuri which was witnessed by the participants at last year's Venice Biennale was more than just a one day show of petulance or a simple display of vanity and ego. It is more likely to have signaled in a somewhat oblique way the end of a generation. However, unlike the usual transition between generations, this was not just the passing of an age or the changing of a style. Instead, it revealed the existence of a profound schism between the architects of the fifties and sixties and those of the seventies. This split is marked by a galaxy of complex liaisons and alliances, as well as by the conflicts represented by the architects at the Biennale—United States vs. Europe, Team 10 vs. Tendenza, near Left vs. far Left, populism vs. elitism, realism vs. formalism—all of which are too fraught with subtle nuances to be easily condensed in this context. Nonetheless, they locate in the substrata of their surfaces a single fissure so deep and so filled with a passionate energy that it can no longer be passed over in any assessment of architecture today. 19

While for the architects of the fifties and sixties there was a continuing belief in a programmatic and social evaluation of the city, for those of the seventies the city became only one component of an internal search for a structural and typological essence of built form at all scales. The acknowledgment of this difference—fundamental to any analysis of architecture today—is particularly pertinent to an assessment of the work of Van Eyck or Herman Hertzberger.

The importance of the Dutch participation in the history of the Modern Movement is unquestionable. During the time of their neutrality in World War I, their contribution was reflected in two parallel yet divergent movements: the one, De Stijl, was an abstractionist and metaphysical tendency; the other, Wendingen, was a more expressionist and realist tendency. Underlying these seemingly divergent tendencies, however, was a singular and particularly Dutch preoccupation. This might be characterized as mystical anthroposophism, and it is hardly surprising that this latent condition would eventually bring about a fusion between these two tendencies in the late 1950's, a fusion that came with the work of Aldo van Eyck and the work of the so-called new Amsterdam School and Herman Hertzberger. The new Amsterdam School seems to have substituted a new mysticism of anthropological belief for the old mysticism of anthroposophic abstraction. But in this fusion there was also an attempt to conflate a certain social idealism with a form of Kahnian 'constructivism'. That this elision has been received without so much as a stir by the critical establishment deserves our attention; and moreover, underlying this apparent anachronism is an even more serious problem.

While it may be easy to trace, and thus supposedly to understand, the origin

of Team 10's postwar anthropological critique of CIAM, such a pedigree is not in itself important. Indeed, that Team 10's revision of the CIAM grid would occur soon after its recognition of the failure of the Modern Movement was surely to be expected. At this juncture, Kahn, an American, became a seminal figure in the development of Team 10 because his polemic of "structure is the space" provided a concrete idea with which to counter the abstractions of the free plan of the Modern Movement. This, in turn, permitted the third generation of architects such as Van Eyck to begin to clear new ground. At the same time, Kahn's work contained a kind of messianic idealism with which the Dutch architects in particular could easily identify, and, in fact, underlying the work of Van Eyck and Hertzberger, there is a version of Kahn which parallels the De Stijl idea of Constructivism.

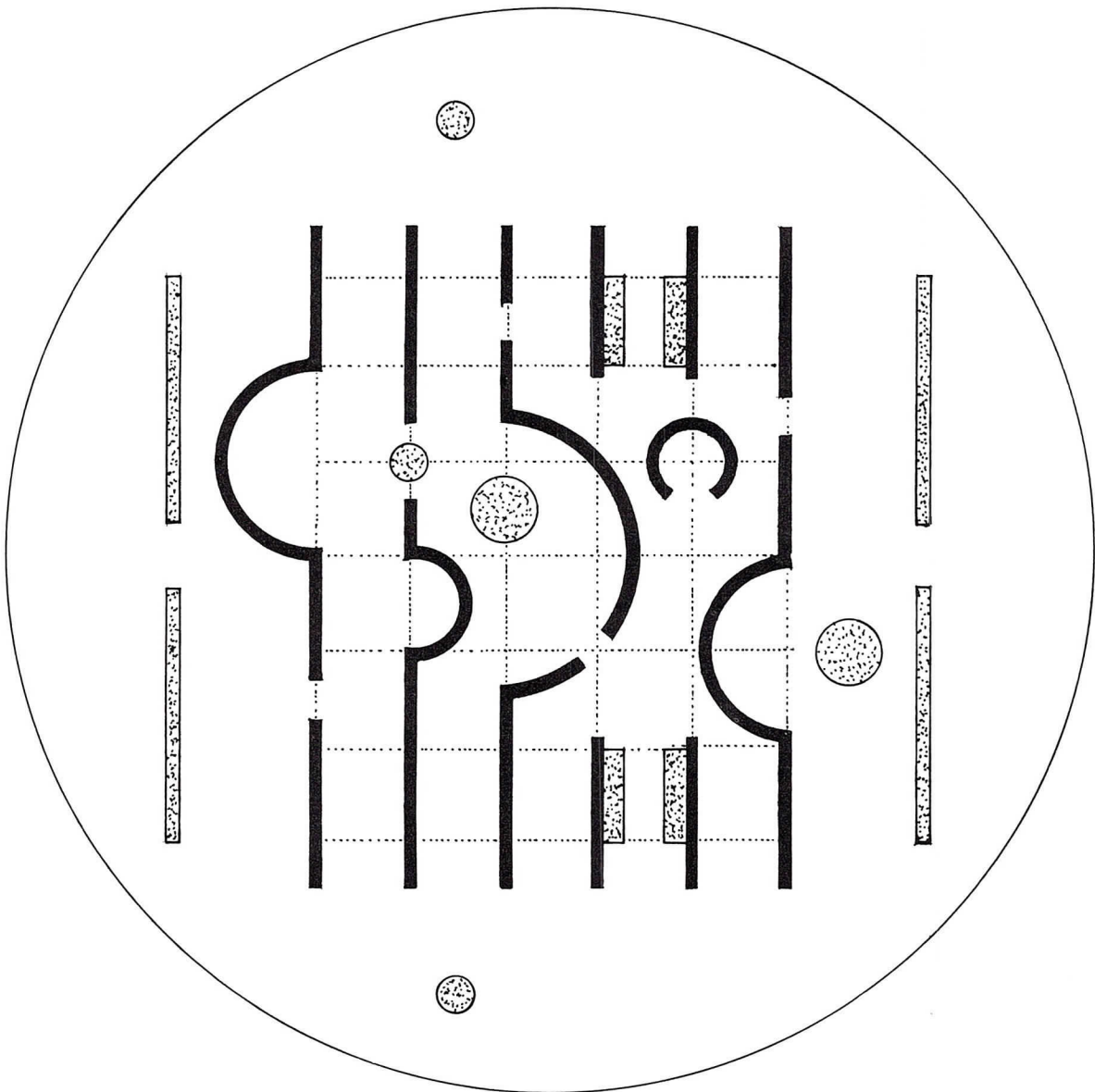
The force of the argument, from Van Eyck's Orphanage to Hertzberger's Old Age Home, manifests itself both in the ideas, which tend to define a conceptual spectrum, and in the architecture, which is based on a belief in the power of unitary geometry and its capacity to create an intense imagery through repetition. The argument is that geometry will create a scale of reality at once modulated and comprehensive. This geometry produces a polemical energy, which includes an assault on modernism, on the free plan, and on the supposed abstractions of the twenties. However self-contradictory, it relies on a device similar to that used by the architects of the free plan. For the form-making is clothed in the mythology of a social idealism—now derived not from the machine imagery of the twenties but from man's own presence. Thus the geometric order becomes invested with that same aesthetic neutrality which characterized the Modern Movement. Van Eyck and Hertzberger now speak of an anthropological and sociological *essence*, an entity that relies solely on the force of words for its projection into realized form. This rendering of what is in fact no more than a geometric determinism with the rhetoric of a latter day humanism is symptomatic not so much of Dutch architecture as of the architecture of the fifties and sixties. But even in the new light of the regenerated social realism of the seventies, it is not the virtue of the rhetoric which gives the geometry of Van Eyck and Hertzberger its anachronistic presence. It is rather their implicit denial of a new consciousness which has existed in most disciplines since the nineteenth century and which, since the events of 1945, has seemed to preclude in architecture especially the continuation of a progressivist view of man and his technology.

With the ultimate corruption of the technological metaphor, the architect is forced to search outside of the machine for his imagery. But even beyond this, the dual calamity of 1945 finally forces into question the value of the objects of man's conception that have traditionally marked his existence. This crisis suggests that the relationship of man and his object world may no longer be sustained by the anthropocentrism of a unitary geometry. The old hierarchical belief in the efficacy of man as creator and in architecture as the embodiment and representation of man's aspirations seems now to have been replaced by a new, more relativistic, more fragmented, and more discursive relationship between man and object.

This seems to be the central issue, which separates the architecture of today from architecture of the recent past. It is surely one that should be faced by Van Eyck and Hertzberger, and one that should certainly concern their present apologists.

Oriol Bohigas

Translation by Lydia Dufour



1 *Sculpture pavilion, Arnheim, Holland. Aldo van Eyck, architect, 1966. Plan.*

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Aldo Van Eyck has had a profound influence on recent architecture, not so much for the quantity of his work as for its overall significance and for its didactic role, supported by his extraordinary captive way of communicating.

His most immediate influence has been in Holland, his native country, in which the coherent emergence of localized “schools” has had a major impact on the development of modern architecture. While today we may speak in all seriousness of a new school in Amsterdam headed by Van Eyck himself, it might be more appropriate to regard Delft as the center of his influence since this was where he had his academic platform and the place of his collaboration with other members of his school. Alternatively, we could consider the place of his practice as the Dutch *Architectural Forum*, which was the platform for his views and a vehicle for his catalytic activity; or again, in more general terms, we might acknowledge his influence on Team 10, and the part that this group played in disseminating his brash but admirable views.

While it is difficult to summarize the major characteristics of this new school, we may, however, identify three main areas of concern for a provisional analysis of the more programmatic aspects of Van Eyck’s work: 1) a preoccupation with anthropological data as a base for architecture; 2) a concern with establishing formal order through geometric and symbolic elements; and 3) a drive toward an integrated and object-oriented architecture which is committed to the development of urban “form.”

In writing and lecturing widely on architecture, Aldo Van Eyck has dealt with issues that are invariably imbued with an anthropological concern, centered around his keen understanding of “place” and “occasion” as formalized reductions of “space” and “time” (fig. 2).¹ Despite the generality of this approach, Van Eyck’s texts, like the writings of most architects who are primarily concerned with building, cannot be analyzed as the substance of a coherent doctrine. Since he has “identified the built artifact with those it shelters, and defined space simply as its own appreciation,”² we should look to his writings more for their indication of a general attitude than for their theoretical coherence, and

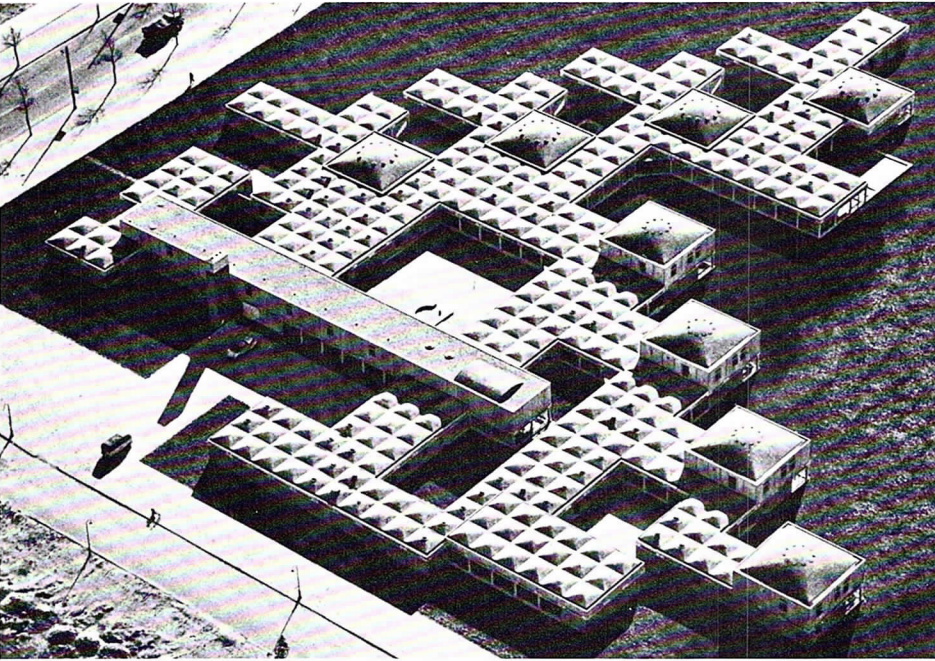
2 Orphanage, Amsterdam, Holland.
Aldo van Eyck, architect, 1957–
1960.

5 Frankfurt/Main Center
Competition. Candilis, Josic, Woods,
architects, 1963. Model.

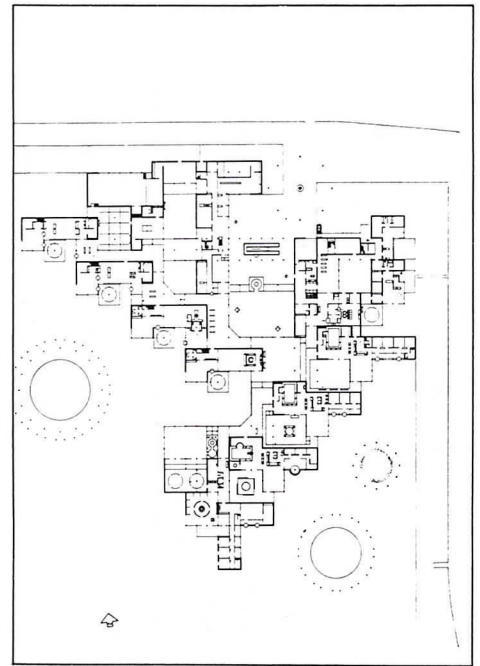
3 Aerial view.

6 Plan.

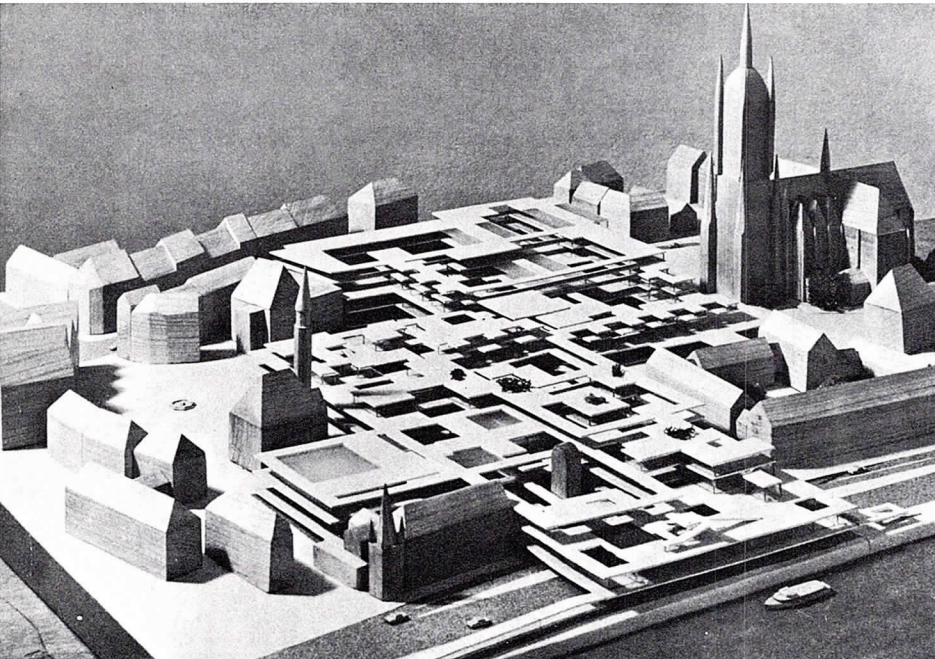
4 Ground floor plan.



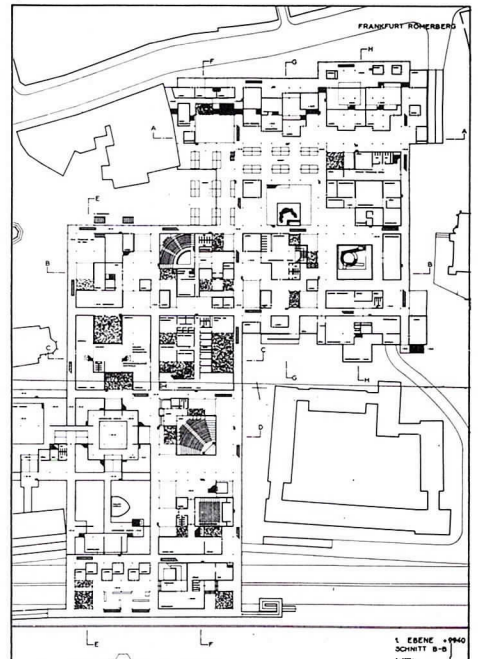
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24 it is just this attitude which has been transmitted most effectively to his school. The “place” and the “occasion” are the production of natural and cultural coincidences—“cultural” referring here to a more profound stage than that which has been eroded and overlaid by the superimpositions of civilization. The architect, Van Eyck argues, should emphasize these coincidences rather than insist on a process of abstraction which is removed from such a profound reality: “architecture need do no more than assist man’s homecoming.”³

Van Eyck’s study of primitive residential settlements—as morphological patterns or as an ecological space in which man, animals, and plants spontaneously interact to constitute an authentic mode of life—tends to reassert his discovery of a new cultural and natural freedom. This freedom demands a certain participation of the user in the design task and, above all, in the ultimate realization of the artifact. But for Van Eyck this participation should never be extended beyond the point of its formalization within the discipline of architecture, which through its geometric laws and symbolic references assures the coherence of its structuring elements with natural law. Like the architects of the Enlightenment, Van Eyck imagines an order of superior validity which expresses itself equally in the essential effectiveness of primitive life, in the authentic rhythms of nature, and in the geometric and symbolic structures of man’s achievement. As far as he is concerned, all of these phenomena participate in a harmonic whole which must be rediscovered. Thus, what is “natural” about human products resides as much in the application of natural ordering principles as in cultural contexts which extend from the essential forms of life to symbolic codes.

This “enlightened” attitude to architectural production parallels that of other architects who are close to him in both a chronological and geographic sense; they share above all, a commitment to the rediscovery of strict architectonic laws. Van Eyck’s early practice coincided not only with the publication of the Wittkower studies, which introduced new parameters into architectural practice, but also with the period that brought James Stirling and Colin St. John Wilson to study Hawksmoor’s London churches. It was the

moment in which Team 10 set out to reassess the tradition of the Modern Movement, that moment strongly influenced by Kahn, and in which the Brutalists tried to establish a new order.

A number of specific compositional elements have continued to permeate Van Eyck’s most recent architecture. Linked to the principles of English Neo-Palladianism or to central European Romantic Classicism, and characterized by a similar concern for an ordered and coherent cosmos, these elements could become the foundation of a new “compositional treatise,” which certain systematic theorists of architecture have begun to demand.

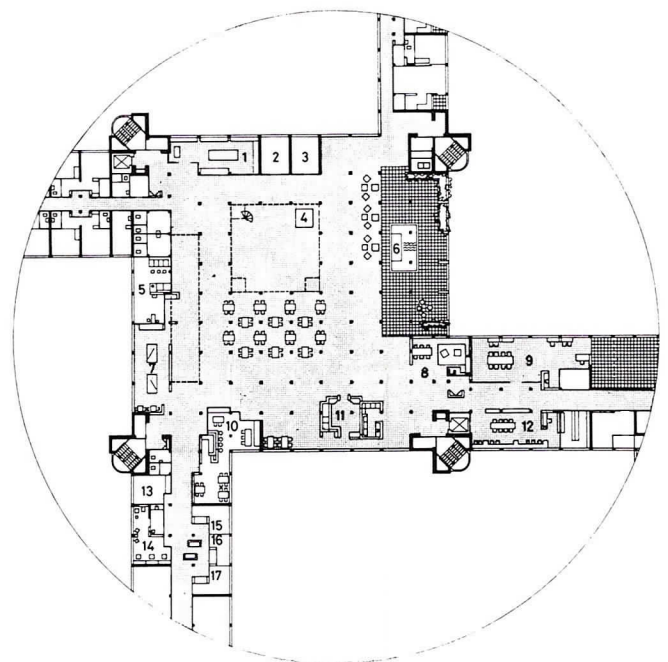
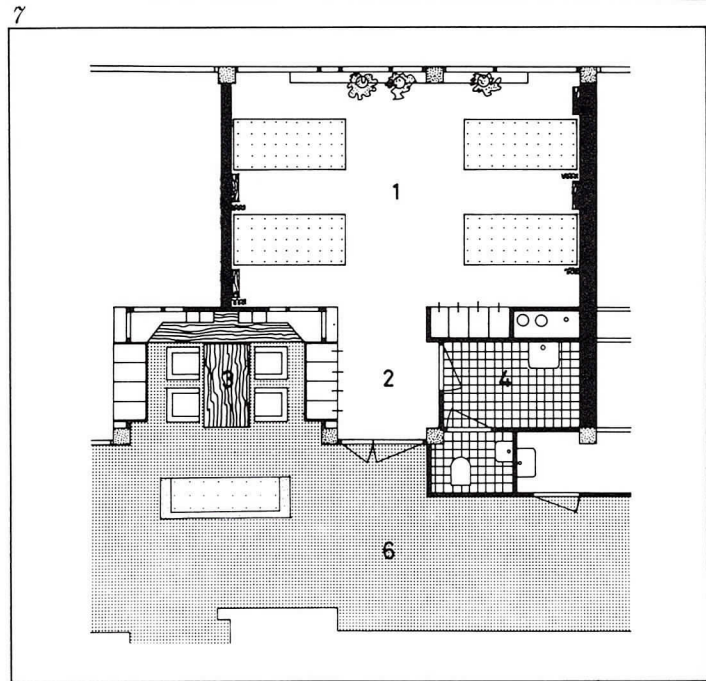
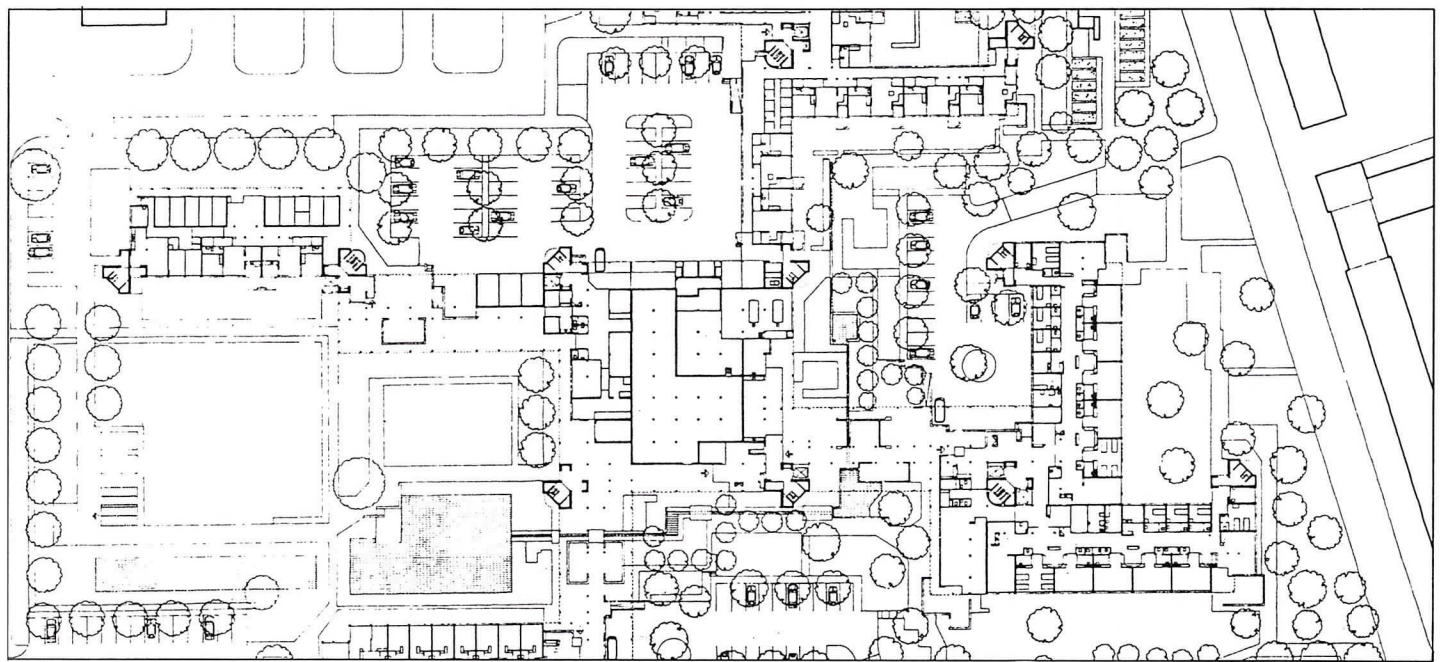
The first of these is that which we may term the additive method of composition, Van Eyck’s “labyrinthian clarity.” Within the contradictory development of Team 10, we are able to identify a moment when the lineal systems initially proposed by the Smithsons in their Golden Lane housing failed because they were unable to go beyond the functionalism of the Athens Charter—the categories of dwelling, work, recreation, and transportation. The next model to be proffered by Team 10 appeared with the continuous grid and reached its apotheosis in the projects for Frankfurt (figs. 5, 6) and the Free University of Berlin by Candilis, Josic, and Woods. But something very similar to this last had already been attempted by Van Eyck in his orphanage in Amsterdam built between 1957 and 1960. Following his notion of “labyrinthian clarity,” he had devised an additive system of analogous cells in which the spatial continuity was ordered on a modular basis. At the same time, this modular system was arranged “labyrinthically” in an attempt to rediscover a “natural” reality. After the realization of the orphanage, the additive method became a recurrent theme in the Van Eyck “school,” although this method often manifested itself in diverse ways (figs. 3, 4).

There were, nonetheless, certain differences between the additive composition of the Dutch and the continuous grid approach of Team 10, which included the “stem” and “web” of Woods and the rather raw “mat buildings” of Alison Smithson.⁴ In the latter, an attempt was made to force the existing mixture of functions into a unifying structure in a

7 Home for the Elderly, De Drie Hoven, Holland. Herman Hertzberger, architect, 1974. Ground floor plan.

8 Four person room: 1) Bedroom, 2) Entrance, 3) Communal living room, 4) Bathroom, and 6) Indoor "street."

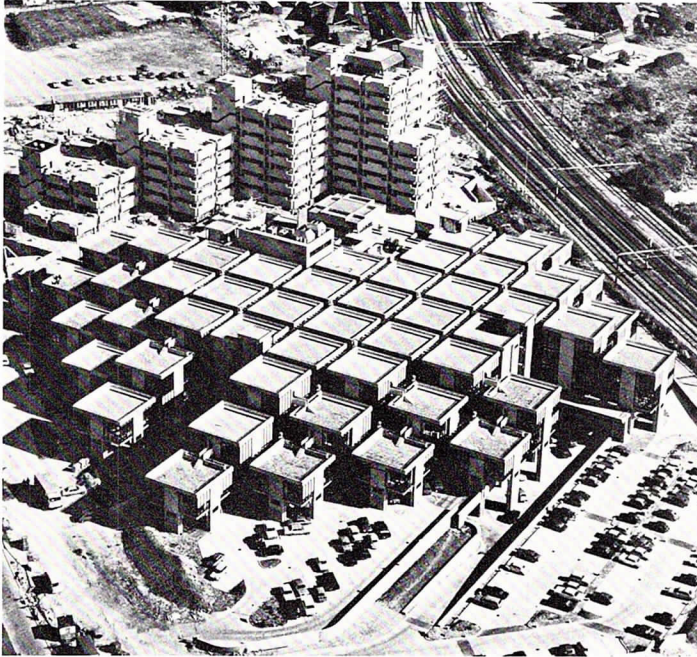
9 Plan of the central meeting area.



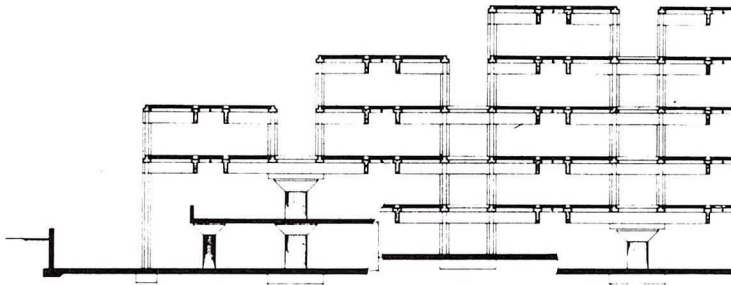
10 “Centraal Beheer” office buildings, Apeldoorn, Holland. Herman Hertzberger (with Lucas and Niemijer), architects, 1972.

11 Section. The structure of the Centraal Beheer is compiled out of a number of square-roofed cruciforms. Each square is supported by six columns; one pair on each side.

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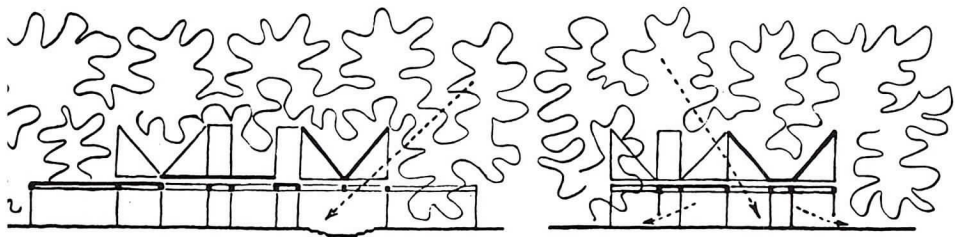
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way that would be “naturally” complex and flexible. In the former, there was an endeavor to produce a formal classifying structure, compatible with the thesis of Wittkower and with the compositional tradition, an endeavor that was concerned with the expressive value of form and its cultural content. To a certain extent this approach could even be seen as paralleling that *ad infinitum* composition of elements which Kaufmann defined as the distinguishing characteristic of Neo-Classicism, in contrast to the concatenation, integration, and gradation of the Renaissance and Baroque systems.

In Van Eyck’s orphanage, there was a strict relationship between spatial module, structural module, and functional module—this last inevitably involving an aggregation of the module in order to accommodate volumes of larger dimension. In De Drie Hoven, a home for the elderly in Amsterdam built in 1974 and designed by one of Van Eyck’s immediate disciples, Herman Hertzberger, a compositional method was developed for the subdivision of the whole of the building volume (fig. 7). The building volume, conceived as a coherent unity at the urban scale, was treated as though it were a container in which modules established a visual—and structural—rhythm without becoming involved in strict functional relationships (figs. 8, 9). The left-over space of the “city in miniature” by-passed these modules and thereby remained independent of the building envelope. Hertzberger’s Centraal Beheer building, built in Apeldoorn in 1972 (figs. 10, 11) used a similar structural module as a means of meeting the functional program by creating a hierarchy of individual and open office spaces (“*burolandschaft*”). An important element was the full height inter-modular space capped by a continuous clerestory. Since this element was at the same scale as the whole building, one was able to visualize the modules as elements floating within an overall structural unity.

This “floating” module was achieved in a more extreme and subtle way—from a plastic standpoint—in four works by Van Eyck; the project for a Protestant church in Driebergen of 1965 (figs. 12–15), the sculpture pavilion in Arnheim of 1966 (fig. 1), the Tajiri Exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam of 1967, and the Catholic church in

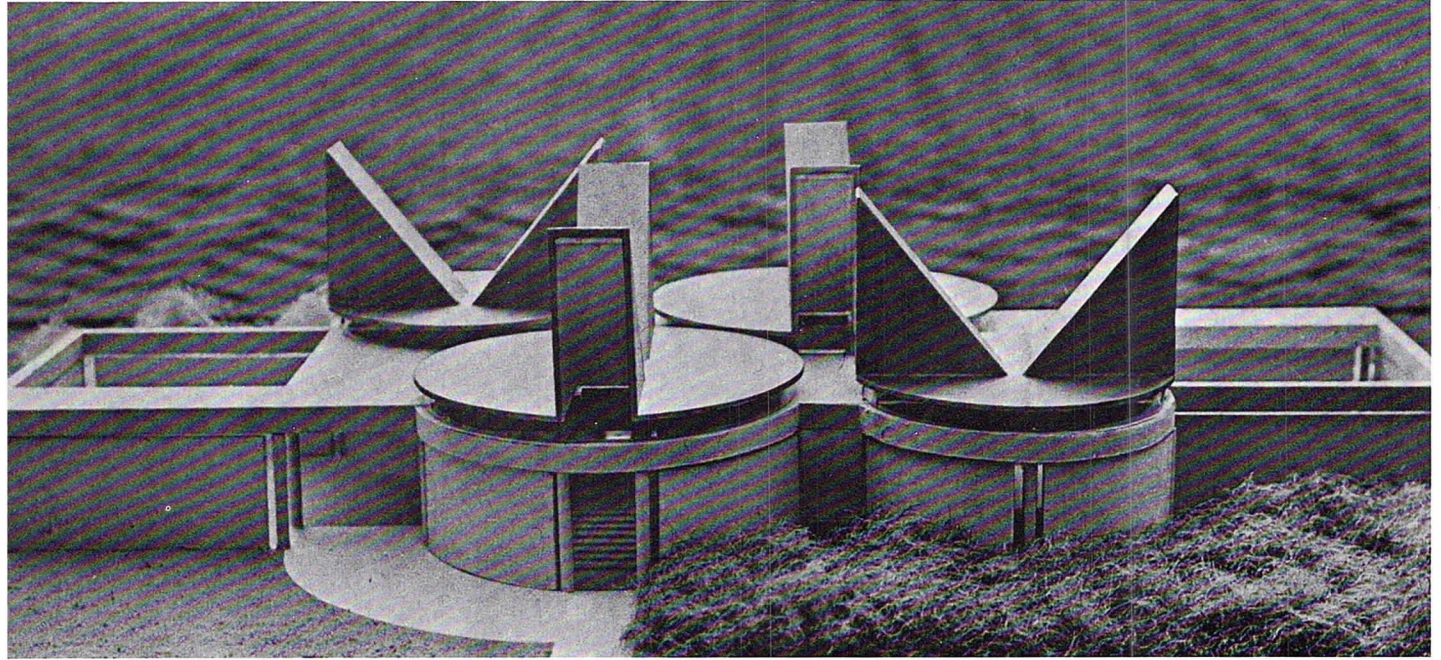
12 Project for a Protestant church,
Driebergen, Holland. Aldo van Eyck,
architect, 1965. Elevations.



13, 14 Model.

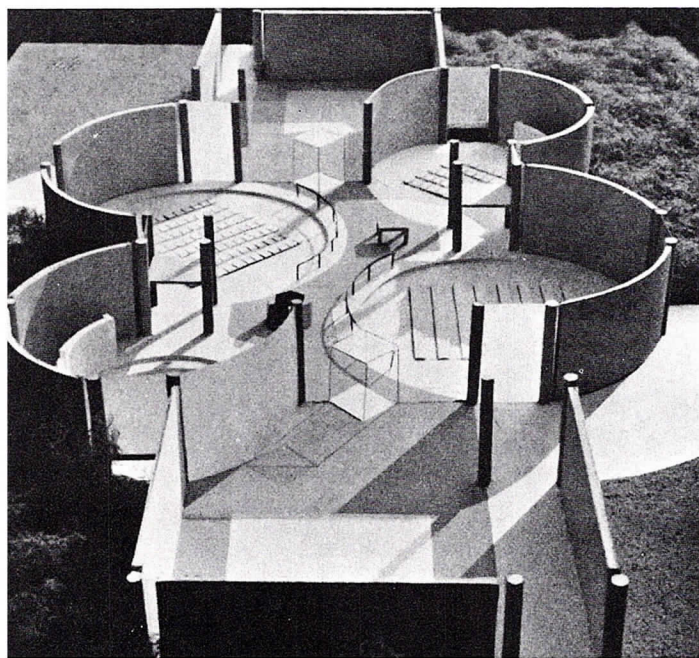
15 Plan.

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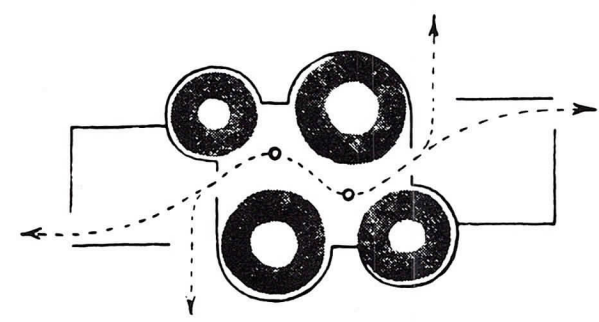


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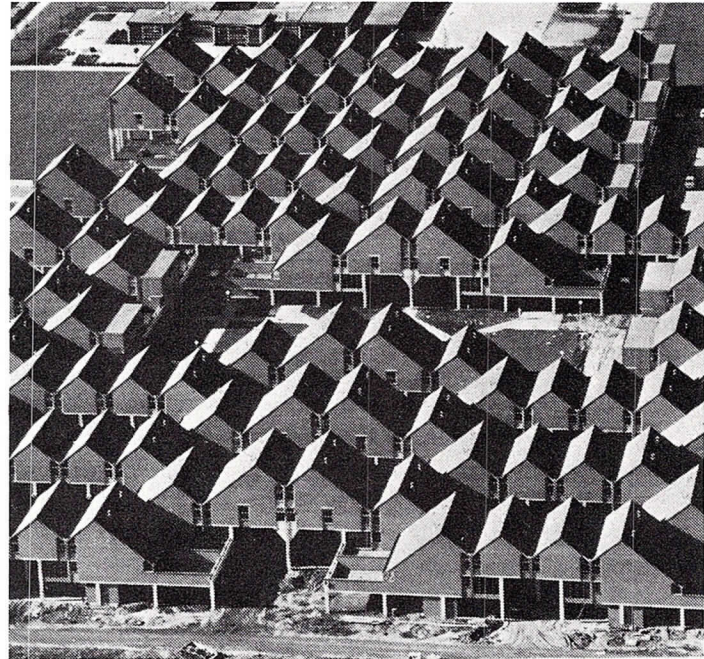
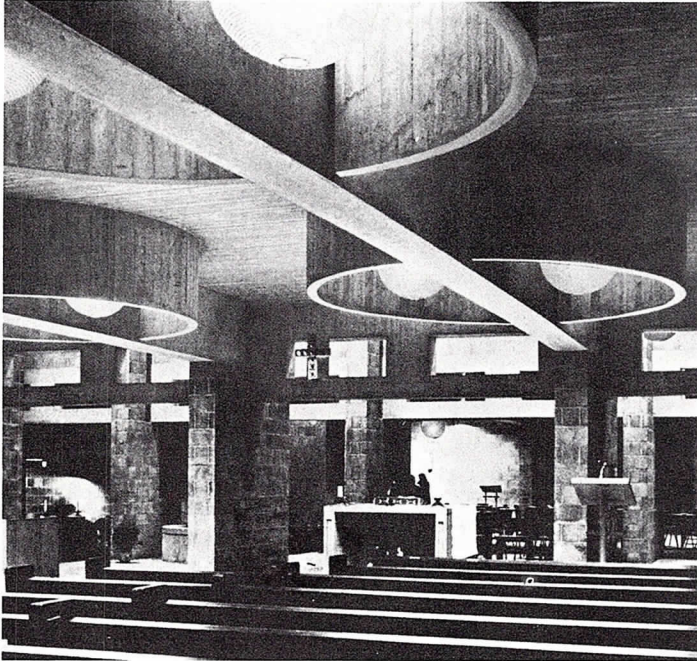
16 Roman Catholic church, The Hague, Holland. Aldo van Eyck, architect, 1968–1970. Detail of the “sacred way.”

18 “Kasbah” housing, Hengelo, Holland. Piet Blom, architect, 1972.

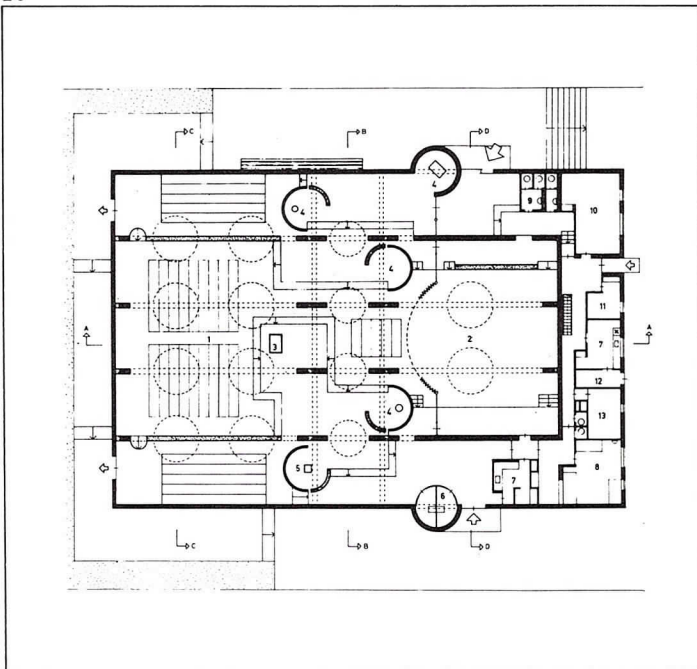
19 Plan.

17 Ground floor plan.

28

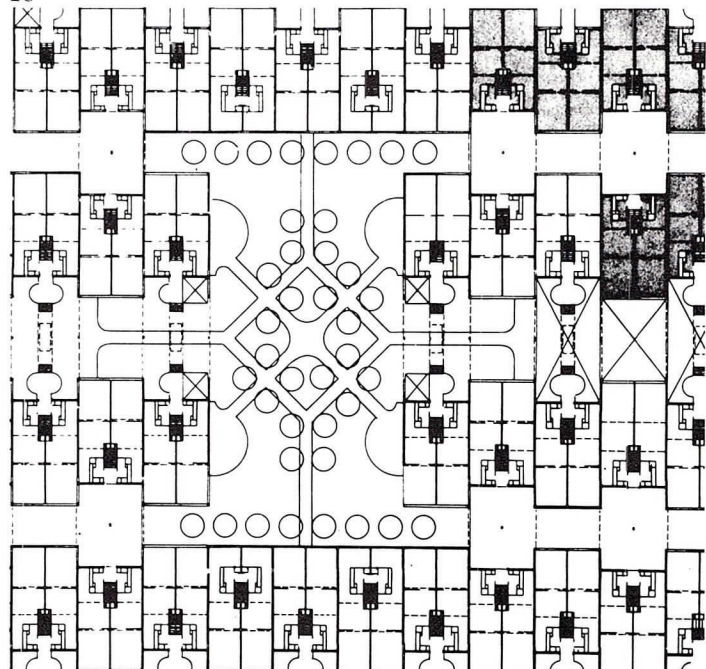


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the Hague of 1968. The module here lost both its structural reference and its functional adaptation and became a purely expressive instrument in the sub-division of the space which, in each instance, was an amorphous and continuous “container.” In all of these examples, Van Eyck played with intersecting circles and rectangles which acquired their symbolic weight partly through “place” elements drawn from anthropological work, and partly through the geometric antagonism of adjacent, non-successive elements, almost as though the work was a tribute to the distant pioneering spirit of Colin Campbell or Robert Morris.

In the Protestant church, the four circular spaces, which correspond to four unities of being, interrupt the continuity of the rectangular space. The remaining space, however, takes on a meaning all its own: not only does it reintegrate and unify the building, but it also acquires prestige and greater meaning by the situation of an altar and a pulpit in its midst, which serve to define the focal points of the whole. In the sculpture pavilion and in the Tajiri Exhibition (both demolished), the circumferences develop interruptions and random surprises in the continuous space, in almost the same way as French Neo-Classic architecture interpreted the logical and natural structure of landscape gardening by “shifting from scene to scene, and by a serpentine or winding path, so one should, as it were, accidentally fall upon some remarkable and beautiful prospect, or other pleasing object.”⁵ Finally, in the Catholic church, the circles appear as spatial interruptions within the linear quality of the whole. These elements are emphasized by natural and artificial light, with lamps whose ephemeral substance disappears into the space that is defined by the concrete rectangles and circles. The remaining space is absorbed into the whole composition. Thus the interrelation between the “sacred way” and the adjacent static spaces is resolved in terms of the total space, and the circles are not only expressive punctuations, but punctuations which are essential to the full meaning of the structure (figs. 16, 17).

The dialectic between module and residual space brings us to the theme of the casbah as a structuring system for both urban and built form. The casbah is a fairly normative

theme within the Van Eyck “school” and derives in part from Van Eyck’s overall attitude toward design. Once the space loses its expressive value, as in the formal scheme of the casbah, the space/module juxtaposition, which may be orderly or confused—that is, geometrically regulated or governed by natural law (which, for an enlightened mentality, remains the same)—is transformed into the definitive image: the disintegration of structural unity. The residential ensemble in Hengelo by Piet Blom (figs. 18, 19), another Van Eyck disciple, and Blom’s more recent design for the city of Helmond are significant in this respect because they systematically underscore a double reference, first to the mode of existence in the authentic African casbah and then to a new way of conceiving the organic continuity of urban life.

As far as formal organization was concerned, Van Eyck’s Amsterdam orphanage was already oriented in this direction, and the image of the building was brought about by breaking up the scale of the module. The modular system was continuous and there was no intermediary space capable of reconciling the form of the building with the profile of its urban context. This was not the case in the churches in Driebergen and the Hague, nor in the sculpture pavilion, works which were characterized by an enclosure that ultimately encompassed the compositional mutability of the interior and which, in a sense, also responded to the unity of the space and the formal entity of the urban or landscaped context.

In the latest works by Hertzberger, the dialogue between unitary form and casbah has been given a new interpretation. Were it not for the intermodular space, the additive method in his De Drie Hoven would have yielded a form with which we would have approximated the typological repertoire of the new districts of Amsterdam. De Drie Hoven is certainly Hertzberger’s best work and the one wherein the potential contradiction between the internal order and a peripheral coherence with respect to the urban form is most effectively resolved. On the other hand, in his Centraal Beheer, where the proposal is more adventurous, the whole is less resolved. The three-dimensional casbah—as Blom originally projected it—is virtually over-

30 overwhelmed by the expressive role of the intercellular space. Here the dominance of this space, visible only on the interior, is not capable of providing the building with exterior form. The stepped roof line, the placement at forty-five degrees to the urban plot, and the unnecessary emphasis of the small scale cells make this work a rather questionable experiment, a building which finally is neither a casbah nor a building.

In the presentation of his work, Blom frankly asserts that the "roof of dwellings" (Hengelo) and the "forest of dwellings" (Helmond) are not only answers to a morphological problem but also embody a socio-anthropological statement. Since, as Blom argues, total self-determination is not yet possible, "architects and urbanists should provide no more than the infrastructures. Thus equipped (gas, electricity, transport systems, streets), the ground would be prepared for an act of self-building with collective control prevailing over the interests of the individual. . . . The experimental dwelling is too often an authoritarian fact. The inhabitants themselves should be able to experiment. The administration should limit itself to fostering the participation. Things would gradually become uglier, more uncomfortable, more human. Long live self-construction."⁶ Not until Marx's prophecy is fulfilled is this possible: "At the end of history every man will be a poet." For the time being, however, structures like the casbah or the forest, deliberately unusual solutions, tend in Blom's view toward a new situation of exchange and participation. This morphological approach acquires its critical significance by virtue of its very unconventionality. This position, while appearing to be popular and democratic, lies dangerously close to that new bucolic mythification of technology and even of technocracy that we witness in Habraken's study *Supports*.⁷ The participation theme stems ultimately from the democratic intent present in the urban work of this group of architects. Aldo van Eyck's and Theo Bosch's rehabilitation of the Jordaan district of Amsterdam (figs. 20–22) (in collaboration with Lucien Lafour and Guus Knemeijer) and their studies for the Nieuwmarkt and Zwolle districts are cases in point. Paul de Ley and Jouke van den Bout have produced similar studies for Bickerseiland. All of these projects are based on a strategy of demolishing a minimum of houses and

thereby avoiding the speculation inherent in radical renewal. Using the methods of adaptive re-use, alteration, and addition, these architects strive to give a new function and a new meaning to the old features of a district. They try to avoid any loss in the district's physical and social structure, and encourage the active participation of its inhabitants in the whole process.

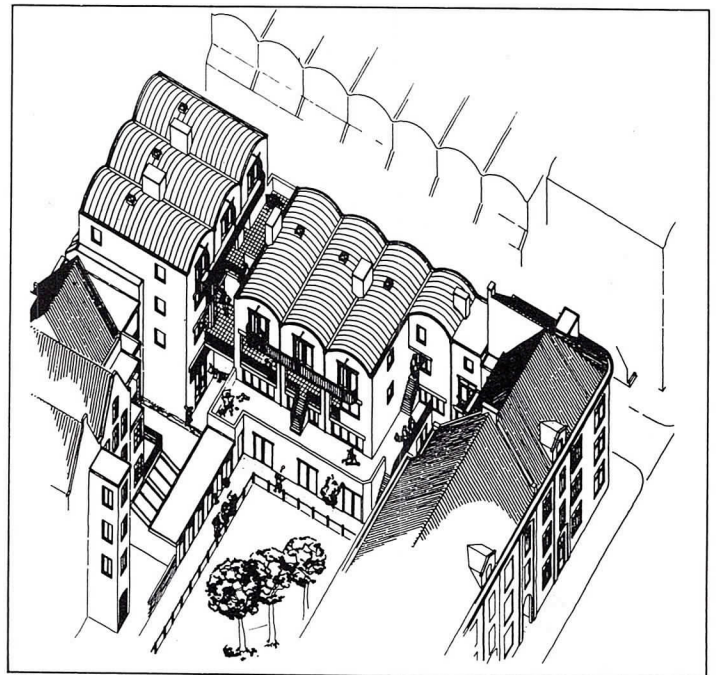
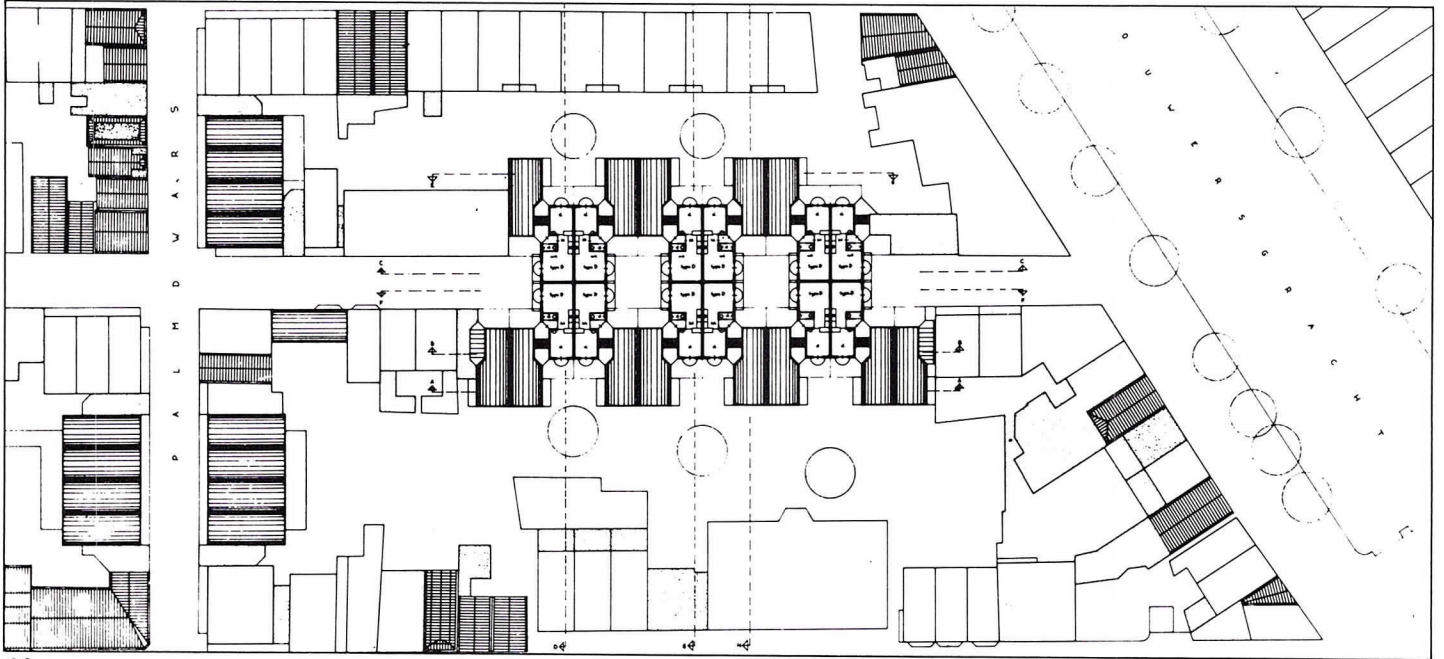
This general approach, although related to an attitude which Van Eyck has long maintained, became manifest in Amsterdam right after the popular protest against the subway extension and the opening of rapid traffic routes. For all of the seemingly democratic stance of the city administration, old sectors were disfigured and their former residents displaced in an effort to clear the way for land speculation. It was an instance which demonstrates how urban form directly influences complex sociological and political processes. In preserving the original physical fabric, few functional considerations are allowed to impinge on the existing social context, and the districts are thus able to remain active in that collective memory which embodies the continuity of urban life. Van Eyck's kaleidoscope city, his "labyrinthian clarity," does not represent chaos, but instead reveals that which is real because it is deeply immersed in natural order.

In districts undergoing rehabilitation, this natural order suggests a new urban dynamic whereby the city is built additively, not from the standpoint of some abstract and hypocritical building code (traditionally so ineffective, or effective only for speculation and disorder), but instead from the standpoint of those whose prime concerns are the social needs and the morphological reality of each city sector.

A parallel attitude is being adopted in the historical center of various European cities. In Bologna, the process of re-adaptation has gone beyond the historical confines in order to treat all the "constructed patrimony" equally. In Portugal, the most radical experiment of this type has just recently been initiated, in which no structure may be demolished before all the possibilities have been exhausted for its re-use. The desire to avoid useless or excessive

20 *Infill Housing and Shops,*
Jordaan district, Amsterdam. Aldo
van Eyck and Theo Bosch (with
Lucien Lafour and Guus Knemeijer),
architects, 1975. Plan.

21, 22 *Isometrics.*



32 expense and the will to maintain social cohesion and to confer decision-making powers on neighborhood organizations are now merged with the struggle against the disappearance of the historical centers whose remarkable structural quality was already becoming impoverished through speculation before the Revolution of April 25.

The same respect for a district's morphological integrity may be found in Van Eyck's other projects. Surely the most significant are his unbuilt design for Deventer City Hall of 1967 and his recent study for a home for unwed mothers in Amsterdam. In both of these proposals there is the same poetic vocation: that of "artistically" utilizing typological constants in order to transform everyday objects. In addition to his affirmation of the permanent value of type and its inherent capacity for re-adaption, there remains the poetic interpretation of space, as represented, for example, in Blom's plan for the conversion of the main nave of the old village church in Jordaan into a public gallery and for the building of dwellings in its lateral wings, which follows a hypothesis of Van Eyck about Diocletian's Palace in Split.

In many of these approaches there is a certain resemblance to arguments outlined in Aldo Rossi's *L'Architettura della Città* and to certain works of the *Tendenza*—to architects who subscribe with varying validity to the notion of a "rational architecture." But as soon as the question of the historical center is broached, there is substantial disagreement. For these Italian architects, intervention means significantly transforming a portion of the city by implanting a building there that will shape it: the strategy of transferring criteria upheld in the old sectors at another scale through an enlightened form of coercion. On the other hand, where Van Eyck and Hertzberger have built outside of the restrictions of an urban context, where they have been unaffected by complex historical layers, they have opted for an object-oriented attitude. In such situations, the architecture cannot form part of the city because it in itself is a "tiny city," almost to the point of being autonomous and self-sufficient. The continuity is lost and the relationship functions in analogous terms rather than in juxtaposed correspondences.

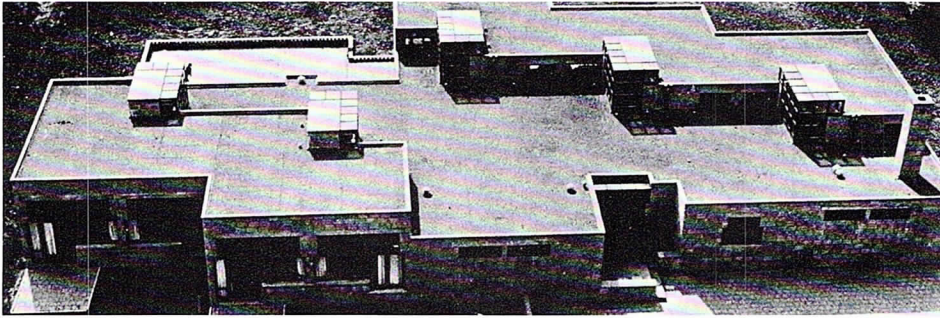
"Tree is leaf and leaf is tree—house is city and city is house—a tree is a tree but it is also a huge leaf—a leaf is a leaf but it is also a tiny tree—a city is not a city unless it is also a huge house—a house is a house only if it is also a tiny city."⁸ This statement is echoed by most of the works of Van Eyck and Hertzberger and almost all of their works have succeeded because they have involved contents in which it has been acceptable to apply the urban analogy. The repeated failure of so many residential layouts that have attempted to assume an urban image has arisen out of the fact that the dwellings they have incorporated have not faithfully represented the environmental and functional totality of the city. An intricate and picturesque means of access to a sequence of dwellings cannot fulfill the role of being a social 'catalyst', a role so aptly satisfied by the traditional street, which unites work, leisure, and transportation not only within the neighborhood but throughout the city. In fact such complex modes of access serve more as barriers to the inhabitant's integration into the urban network.

The proposal 'architecture-city' may therefore only be attempted in subjects in which a condition of permanence or complexity allows the analogy to exist. Hertzberger's student residence hall in Weesperstraat, Amsterdam, of 1959 (fig. 26) has greater possibilities than the "Parkhill, Sheffield" approach because of the social cohesion and the permanence of its users, but it still suffers from that lack of social catalytic power. On the other hand, the complete cycle of a life experience which is analogous to urban complexity occurs in Hertzberger's De Drie Hoven and in his Montessori school in Delft of 1966 (figs. 23–25) as well as in Van Eyck's orphanage. This cycle is even more in evidence in the snack bar and the student center of the Polytechnic School of Enschede, near Hengelo, designed by Blom in a style heavily reminiscent of Van Eyck. Hertzberger's Centraal Beheer, structured around the cycle of 'work' to the fullest extent possible, satisfies similar catalytic conditions.

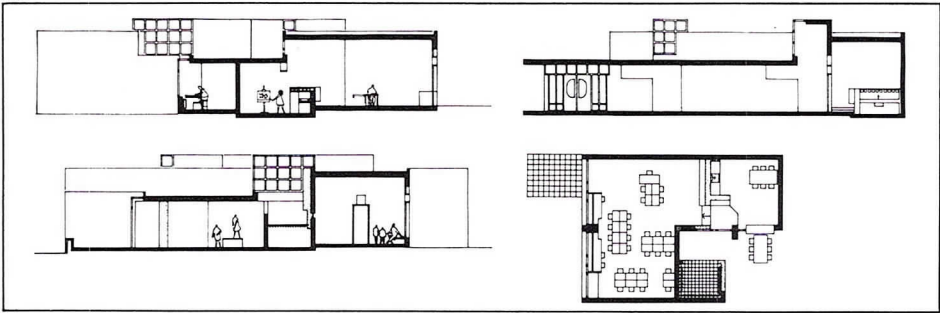
Van Eyck's church in the Hague is an even more carefully blended and possibly more meaningful example. The urban analogy is justified here by a totalizing intent: to find a

23 Montessori school, Delft, Holland. Herman Hertzberger, architect, 1966.

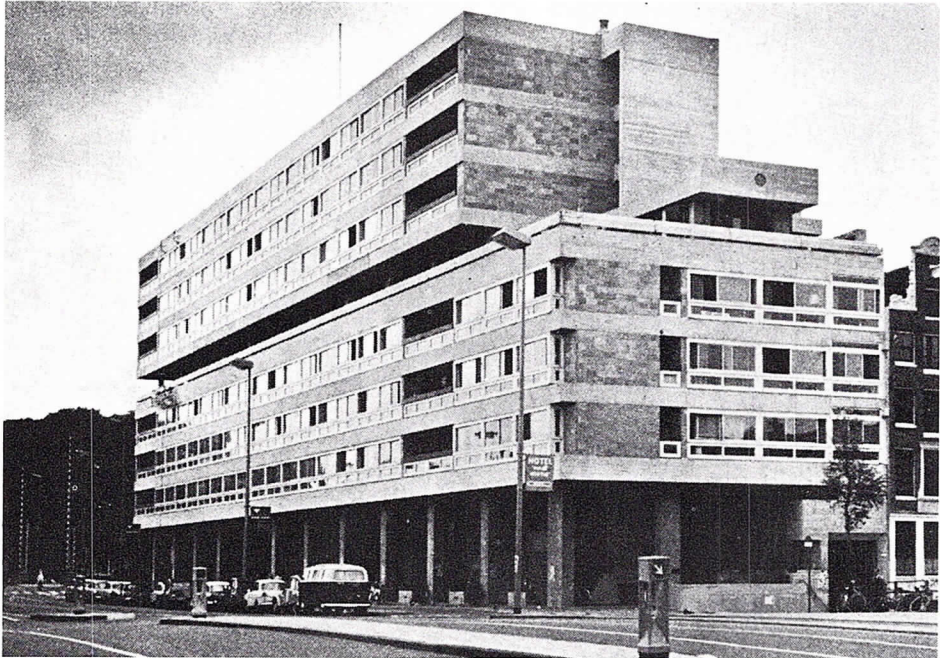
24 Sections and plan of one classroom.



23



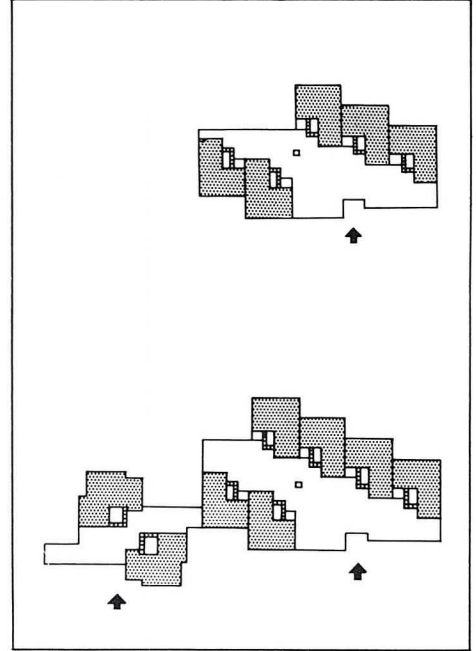
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25 Plan of the extension of the building.

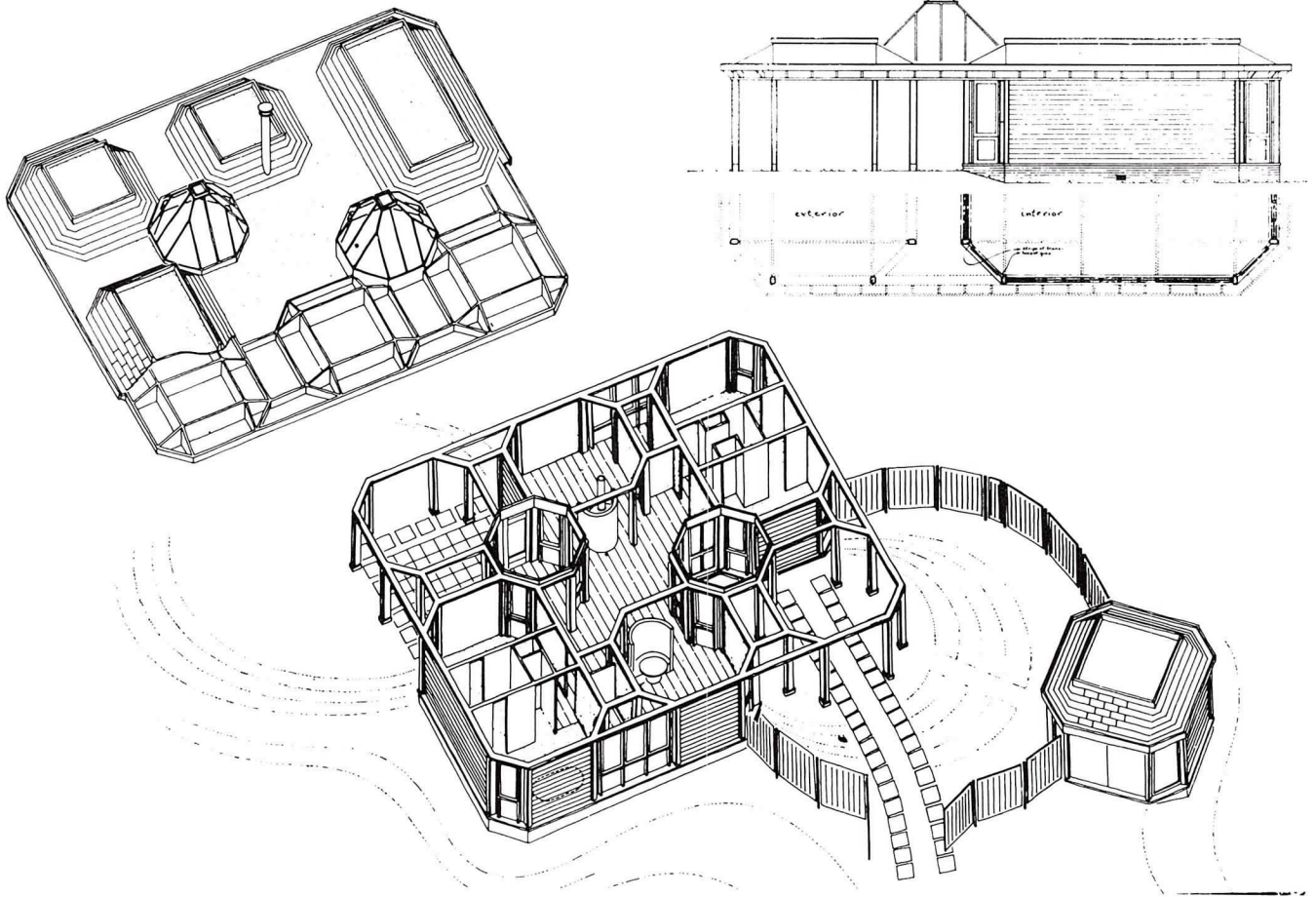
26 Student housing, Weeperstraat, Amsterdam. Herman Hertzberger, architect, 1959-1966.



25

27 *Visser House, Retie, Belgium.*
Aldo van Eyck, architect, 1974-1975.

34



real community whose conduct encompasses all of its experiences at one time and in one place. The clever arrangement of the church interior merely underscores this intention. The gently ascending “sacred way” connecting the articulated space of the altar and the meeting hall is an urban model wherein the complex existence of a coherent community may evolve, much more coherently than in an area of family homes, where the cohesive quality cannot be dictated by the precise structure of the neighborhood.

On the one hand, then, we have architecture as perpetuator of the complex neighborhood structure without attempting to change its image; on the other, we have the architectural object which is not integrated into the city because it is in itself an autonomous city. In both instances, however, there is a concern for the participation of the user—from the Jordaan district with its democratic orientation and its respect for that which exists as an inalienable social product, to the Centraal Beheer, as a license for accidental almost decorative change, where the pretension of freedom is tinged with paternalism. Such regard for the user’s role always represents a moral exigency and always occurs as a consequence of the compositional base of architecture. Architecture continues to be a formal proceeding in which geometry is poetically articulated with the symbolic and into which a certain democratic structure becomes integrated.

Many more elements which have been inherited directly or indirectly by European and American architecture since the sixties may be examined in the work of the Van Eyck “school.” One is the ‘excavation process’, a method of eroding away the building’s external surface according to geometric laws of composition. In the Amsterdam orphanage, this method was already present, but in subsequent projects it has become intensified: the house for Van Eyck’s brother in S. Paul de Vence of 1971 (unbuilt); the wooden house of G.-J. Visser in Belgium (fig. 27); the four-towered house in Baambrugge of 1958 (unbuilt); the Schmela gallery in Dusseldorf of 1959; and the home for unwed mothers in Amsterdam (unbuilt). The formal unity of the building is maintained in each instance by the continuity of the perforated surface or by the suggestion of an enveloping struc-

tural line. The appearance of two characteristic linguistic elements should also be noted: first, the perforated wall which is sometimes a window and sometimes merely the remains of an erosion process stripped of any distinguishing formal treatment—a direct tribute to the compositional tactic of the Villa Savoye—and, second, the forty-five degree cant which, unlike the Smithsons’ use of the formula in the Economist building, represents not a softening of the urban contour but rather a rational means of resolving the contradictions of the erosion on the face of the building. This theme of eroding the mass to describe a symbolic surface continuity has many parallels in recent architecture. Any of the works by the “Five Architects” could be cited as an example—the Benacerraf house by Michael Graves for instance. Various achievements by A. Siza Vieira are also noteworthy in this respect. He, among those of the new generation, is an outstanding follower of Van Eyck, as may be seen, for instance, in the one-family dwelling on the Avenida dos Comatentes in Oporto or in the office for a banking firm in Oliveira de Azemeis. Some other developments in this direction have been made by younger Catalan architects.

The ‘excavation’ of architectonic mass always produces the familiar ambiguity between interior and exterior space, which is quite different from the spatial continuity which the pioneers cherished in the twenties and thirties. However much a portion may be treated as an exterior space, the building unity stands clearly defined, framed, responding at all times to its syntactic structure. The best example of this is the G.-J. Visser house where the entire structure of wooden uprights and girders is very carefully designed so that it may signify both closure and a sign of syntactical coherence. To a certain degree, this ambiguity between interior and exterior space parallels another formal duplicity that occurs fairly frequently in Van Eyck’s work: the coherent superimposition of two different structures. The projected four-towered house and the noteworthy Cultural Center of Jerusalem of 1957 derive from this idea of placing one building inside another. In the first case, this is evident in the towers and in the patios as the leftover space between the two; in the second, we are presented with a cleverly conceived intermediary hall. In a way it is another

36 version of additive composition using intercellular space, this time transferred to a 'compositional' scale.

An equally significant and persistent theme in Van Eyck's work is the textural treatment of architectonic surfaces. The space acts as a protagonist in his work in terms of the way in which various materials are integrated into a single whole. This accounts for Van Eyck's preference for concrete—generally prefabricated—and for the enclosures of cement block, whose texture is invariably recalled in the materials which cover the floor and the ceiling. This also explains the arrangement of many varied elements in the same plane as a way of achieving volumetric continuity. In summarizing these characteristics of the Van Eyck school, it is necessary to mention, however briefly, a singular precedent since this is a school which has arisen directly out of the Modern Movement. This precedent is above all Louis Kahn, and it is Kahn's influence that remains apparent, demonstrating once again that his legacy has been a decisive factor in all recent architectural formation. It is the basis for relationships between different trends that today still seem to be contradictory because they are so close.

Notes

1. See the study on the Dogon, Charles Jencks and George Baird, eds., *Meaning in Architecture* (London: George Braziller, 1970).
2. Aldo Van Eyck, "Labyrinthian Clarity," *Team 10 Primer*, Alison Smithson, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1968); *World Architecture 3* (London: Studio Vista Ltd., 1966).
3. Ibid.
4. Alison Smithson, "How to read and recognize Mat Building," *Architectural Design*, September 1974.
5. Robert Morris, *Lectures on Architecture* (London, 1734-1736), Lecture X, p. 161. Quoted by Emil Kaufmann, *Architecture and the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 27.
6. *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, January-February, 1975.
7. N. J. Habraken, *Supports* (Utrecht: Praeger, 1962).
8. Alison Smithson, ed., *Team 10 Primer*.

Figure Credits

- 1 Redrawn by James Russell.
- 2-4 Reprinted from *Werk*, 49, 1962.
- 5 Reprinted from Jurgen Joedicke, ed., *Documents of Modern Architecture* (Stuttgart: K. Kramer, 1961), vol. 6.
- 6 Courtesy Kenneth Frampton.
- 7, 17, 20-22, 27 Reprinted from *Lotus*, 11, 1976.
- 8, 9, 23-25 Reprinted from *A + U*, March 1977.
- 10 Reprinted from *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, December 1972.
- 11 Reprinted from *Bauwelt*, July 1971.
- 12, 14, 15 Reprinted from *Arkitekten*, 69, 1967.
- 13 Reprinted from *Domus*, 426, May 1975.
- 16, 18, 19 Reprinted from *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, January-February, 1975.
- 26 Reprinted from *Dutch Forum*, 20, 1967.

Anthony Vidler

The linguistic “analogy” has often been raised in architecture, and increasingly in the last two hundred years as architects sought to relate their products to an emerging social and productive order that owed very little, culturally at least, to the classical, humanistic tradition of architecture since the Renaissance. The idea of architecture as language, from the first half of the eighteenth century, was proposed as a communicative, expressive model. Thus, architecture was assimilated to the classical poetics of Horace, and responded to the same rules of suitability and unity, rhetoric, and allegory. It was compared to the original, gestural language of primitive man, directly “speaking to the eyes,” to improve and instruct according to the moral didacticism of the Enlightenment. Finally, the architectural styles were seen as individual languages of their own, each speaking for a particular historical period, and thereby conforming to an “analogous” role in contemporary society. In each case, whether the model of language adopted was that of the general grammar of the late seventeenth century, or the “search for origins” of the mid-eighteenth century, or of the comparative grammar of the early nineteenth century, architecture was seen as having to demonstrate a truth external to itself, as legitimized by its social role. Even as linguists looked outside their own object of study for paradigms of analysis and objectivity in history, physics, and psychology, so architecture looked to these fields, and especially to linguistics itself for the guiding principles of its theory of utilitarian expression. Thus, for example, even as comparative grammar was established according to the model of comparative anatomy developed by Cuvier, so at the very same time, architecture, at least as practised at the Ecole Polytechnique, adopted Cuvier’s constitutional model of the organism (synchronically at one with the form and the purpose of the specific building type) while clothing its constitutionally unified types in the appropriate, relative historical style (a style diachronically emerging over time).

But now two centuries later, following the suspension of the historical styles by the Modern Movement, and the more recent critique of the “building-type mentality,” any “revival” of the parallel between language and architecture must face a profoundly different condition. Disillusioned as to the socially utopian promise of architecture and urbanism, discarded by the very forces of production and consumption it sought to control, architecture is now turning inward and investigating the nature of its own specific practice. Removed from the progressivist currents of social utopianism, as much by the force of a general cultural shift as by the action of its own aesthetic critics, architecture is now engaged on a profound re-evaluation of its status, internally in the forms of its own *metier*, and externally in the dimensions of its ethical responsibility toward the criterion of a mechanistic functionalism. In this condition, questions as to the “meaning” or signification of the architectural gesture are bound to be, and for the last ten years have been,

38 referred to the dominating linguistic model—in this case either the field defined in 1906 by Saussure as semiology, a part of the general semantic investigation of the last quarter century, or alternatively, to the model of syntactics, most recently developed by Chomsky. Which is to say that architecture increasingly finds common ground with that general current in analytical and critical thought which emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century with—as Jonathan Culler has recently pointed out—the work of those exact contemporaries Durkheim, Freud, and Saussure: the current we now call “modernism.” Such a modernism proposed a completely new vision of man in the universe. Entirely different from the “modernity” assumed by architecture in the twenties as it projected the avant-garde premises of humanist reformers like Saint Simon into the conditions of mass production and mass society, this modernism introduced new forms of expression into almost all the arts in the first years of this century. The celebrated aphorism of Braque—“I do not believe in things, I believe in relationships”—can be seen to hold in painting, in music with Schönberg, in poetry and literature with the Futurists and later with the Formalists, in philosophy after F. H. Bradley and Nietzsche.

In formal terms it searched to replace holism by the fragment, certainty by chance, temporality by atemporality, pyramidal composition by serial, unitarian structure by episodic. Modernism emerged by the mid-twenties as the dominant mode of all the arts—all, that is, except for architecture. Architecture, set apart by its socially functional ethic and its specific mode of production, alone rejected the overthrow of classical humanism implied by modernism and stood fast with all its contradictions as a *social* art.

In a recent editorial (*Oppositions*, 6), Peter Eisenman posited that modernism in this sense, has, in fact, *never* been fully incorporated into architecture. We would add that until architecture was forced to face the condition of its ultimate *uselessness* to and within industrial society, there was no possibility of it conceiving its practice in terms that derived chiefly to adopt the formulation of Clement Greenberg, from the medium itself. “The pure preoccupation with the invention and arrangement of spaces, surfaces, shapes, colors, etc., to the exclusion of whatever is not necessarily implicated in these factors,” was, that is, inconceivable in architecture as long as the social realist, functionalist project still engaged the assent of most architects.

If now, however, we find a belated receptivity within architecture to an analysis of its own technique, it is hardly surprising that this consciousness is drawn toward the terms of linguistic structuralism as set out by Saussure between 1906 and 1911 and developed by the Russian and Prague schools of criticism and linguistics from 1914 on. For this structuralism, far from being

the modish affectation that irredentist functional architects have assumed, was in fact the very essence of modernism—a symptom of its conditions, and a cause of many of its side effects in different analytical and synthetic disciplines. Its central importance to modern thought was underlined by Ernst Cassirer who compared the “new science” of structural linguistics to the Galilean revolution in science itself. One has only to note the complete interdependence of the Prague linguistic school under Jakobson and that of the Russian Formalists represented by Victor Shklovsky and Boris Eichenbaum—the close rapport between the literary *devices* isolated by Shklovsky as specific to poetic language and the linguistic forms analyzed by Jakobson—to be convinced of the primacy of linguistic science within modernism. These devices, themselves partly inspired by the intuitive experiments of Marinetti, Mayakovsky and the Futurist poets, in turn became the watchwords of Dadaist and Surrealist alike as they inverted and re-constituted the language of poetic expression.

A resume of these devices, or techniques, reads like a primer in modernist aesthetics: making strange, difficult deformations in syntax, euphonic inversion, the transposition of poetic and prosodic modes, rhythmic experimentation, and so on. All in some way proposed the critique, or self-reflective character of the artistic work. All rejected absolutely the traditional duality between form and content, as implying that form was an arbitrary construct filled with some formless content like water in a jug. Rather, the duality proposed by the Formalists—that of *materiality* and *device*—stressed, in contrast, the materiality of tones (music), pigments (painting), words (literature), and the structural reshaping of this material through the application of certain devices.

Behind the application of these techniques was, of course, a cultural *strategy*, a critical endeavor that placed a high value on the forcing of a new and startling re-seeing of traditional culture, and the proposition of a new way of experiencing the world—relativistic, shifting, and serial. From Formalism to Dadaism this strategy was assumed to be identical with the cultural project of the avant-garde: the destruction of bourgeois kitsch, whether in the academy or the home.

Such strategies seem particularly appropriate now as the specifically modernist techniques of criticizing the progressivist tradition of the Modern Movement. But the manner in which the “return to language,” as Silvetti calls it in this article, has been accomplished has led to considerable confusion: different ways of applying linguistic theory to an already developed tradition, arguments over the transferability of concepts in one field to the practice of another; the need to examine the conditions of a

- 40 specifically architectural semiotic or syntactic, together with the “controversial” nature of structuralism in an empirically positivistic and pragmatically oriented culture, have combined to produce a series of rapidly developed, but widely divergent, interpretations and applications.

Further, the possibility opened by the revival of “comparative” grammars—first exhibited in that model of eclecticism, Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction*—that of re-incorporating all previous architectures into the material of architecture, has been interpreted in an over-literal and realistic manner. This has led to a naive “sign” language of allusions being adopted by many self-styled “post-modern” architects as the appliqué “motifs” of a new fashion. Such an eclecticism has served to alienate the champions of received Modern Movement orthodoxy as implying an artificiality of language that had seemed once and for all precluded by the moderns’ rejection of the historical styles. The determining analogs of humanism—organicism, unity, harmonics—are seen to be threatened by the danger of a self-conscious concentration on the means of expression. The possibility of a “natural” language stemming from an organic response to programmatic concerns—the hope of the twenties—has been inevitably undermined.

That such an “eclectic realism” is not, however, an inevitable result of linguistic structuralism in architecture has been sufficiently demonstrated by Michael Graves and John Hejduk among others; that alternative, syntactical modes stem from the structural epistemology is clear from the work of Peter Eisenman. And paralleling these demonstrations of a new linguistic model in synthetic design, the analytical work of a number of recent critics has introduced the terms and themes of debate in a responsible enough manner to allow for a deeper conceptual understanding. Indeed the linguistic *analogy* is in a very real sense dissolving into a linguistic ontology for architecture.

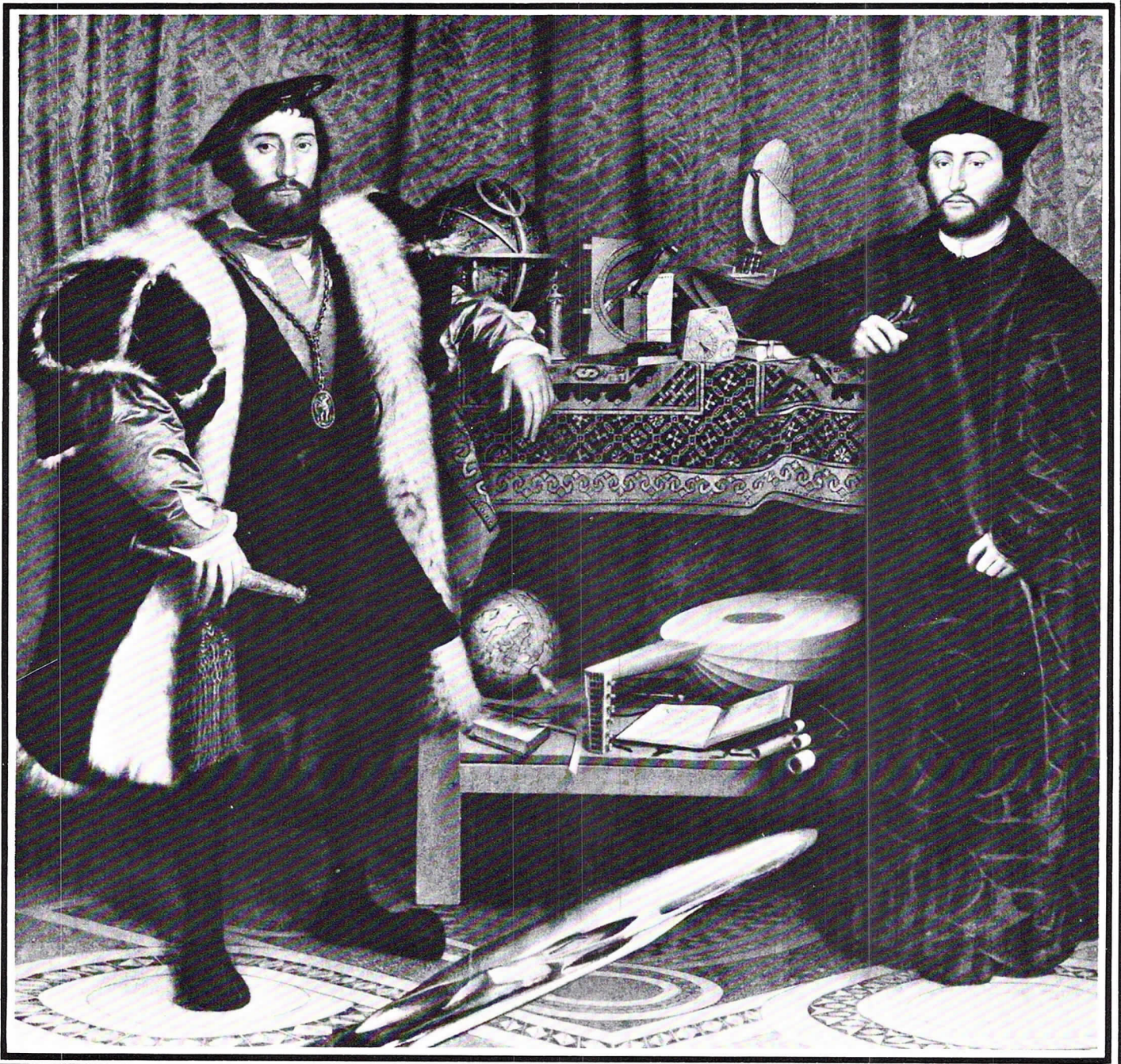
As the field of structural linguistics has itself developed into a level of maturity and the limits and potentialities of linguistic analysis have been explored in a number of fields from anthropology to cinema, it has become increasingly possible to engage in the serious work of developing modes of critical analysis for architecture without the strident polemics that, until very recently, have distorted debate.

It is with this theoretical “calmness” that Jorge Silvetti approaches the subject of “criticism from within,” assessing the course of discussion over the last ten years and providing a synthetic view of the nature of criticism generated from within the tradition of architecture and by means of its internal technical transformations. These transformations are examined in one of their most evident contexts, that of the Mannerist period, and then in

modern architecture. The mechanisms of transformation and the place of such mechanisms in design procedure are explained.

Silvetti realizes, of course, that the simple exercise of manipulation and transformation for its own sake leads to infinite permutation and a corresponding loss of that re-semanticization sought by the operation of “making strange” in the first place. This is especially true of this phase of modern culture, where all rule systems, no matter how recent, seem open to challenge or absorption. While in the twenties, the very manipulation of traditional culture was itself seen to be strategic according to social revolutionary program of the avant-garde, now such strategies of cultural terrorism have to be more carefully prepared, more explicit. Recognizing this, Silvetti proposes, at the very end of his essay, the idea of type as in some way embracing, non-deterministically, the formal and cultural relations he wishes to set in motion.

Subsequent articles in *Oppositions* will explore this notion of typology in architecture more extensively; here two points only should be noted. First, the very need for *strategy*—a need that was easy to elide or suspend by the formalists of the twenties in the assumed common aim of social renewal—would be denied by some contemporary formalists, who would argue that the very idea of an externally justified strategy is extraneous to the formalist project, a hold-over from the traditional alliance of social realism and technological progressivism. In such terms, as Clement Greenberg has noted, Hans Hofmann criticized surrealist art as a “reactionary” tendency attempting to restore “outside” subject matter. Second, the transformation of a received typology by the Modern Movement, however much it superficially resembled the formalist application of devices—Palladian villa to Corbusian villa, Fourierist commune to Unité d’Habitation—was, in the end, part of a positive program to renew the institutional structures of the nineteenth century on behalf of the Second Industrial Revolution, and thereby an integral part of that progressive utopia explicitly rejected by criticism from within. Indeed it might seem that the very proposition of a typology is so *positivistic* an act that any internal criticism is doomed from the start. Certainly, in learning from the devices of Mannerism and of modern architecture, the contemporary formalist should be well aware of their ideological burden. The increasingly ambiguous relations of Aldo Rossi’s “typologies” to a revisionist version of social realism only further cautions against an indiscriminating enthusiasm for “type” without taking into account the extreme differences in *things* that a single *word* might overlook. It should be remembered that the “third typology” is modernist only insofar as it re-integrates the discrete elements of its lexicon into the general, systematic grammar of a reconstituted language.



1 *Hans Holbein the Younger. The Ambassadors, 1533. Oil on panel, 81½" × 82½". National Gallery, London.*

44 "There is nothing more essential for a society than to classify its own languages," wrote Roland Barthes in 1966.¹ This imperative seems to underly much theoretical work of the present decade in the fields of literature, music, and particularly in architecture. What follows is an attempt to discuss and reaffirm the validity of contemporary inquiries that focus their attention on architecture as language: that is, architecture as a specific ideological practice concerned with the production of cultural symbols; architecture understood or "read" as a "text," as material that supports a signification which includes but goes beyond the functions it involves. Specifically, this essay seeks to contribute to such classificatory tasks by concentrating on one mode of architectural discourse of which we have become recently aware: architecture as a discourse critical of itself. Such a discourse does not itself make use of language, but instead places itself at the very moment of producing an architectural object, aiming through this at a critical reading of the system of architecture. The idea of "criticism from within" is not a new notion, and indeed it has been equated at times with the very notion of art. What is new, however, is the possibility of defining it more clearly by using new conceptual tools.

As defined, this type of criticism seems to differ from other more conventional and well established types of criticism by virtue of the instruments it uses. We shall see later that its identity depends on many other characteristics that include the type of "effects" it produces as well as its relationship with theory. For the moment, we need only make clear that the "realm" of criticism has traditionally been divided between two opposing modes: one that tries to evaluate the degree of "fitness" or "non-fitness" of a solution to a particular architectural question and another that attempts to see both the question and that solution as parts of a larger historical, cultural, or ideological process. The former, typical of architectural journals and chronicles, is mainly concerned to "evaluate facts"; it is in the end trapped within its own ideological perspective. This kind of critical discourse constitutes in most cases an obstacle for theory, and should perhaps be better termed "technical" or "evaluative" criticism. The latter is related more to historical and scholarly endeavors and has theory, to which

it is a prolegomena and constant check, as its final aim. This is indeed the only discourse that can safely claim the name of criticism in that it enjoys the more "comfortable" situation of being distanced from the act of making.²

Undoubtedly, the third type of critical discourse which I am introducing here, and which I shall call "criticism from within," does not appear to have the same conceptual clarity as these two traditional forms, particularly in its relation to theory and ideology. By placing itself within the act of making and by not using the instruments of language but those of architecture itself, it becomes compromised by the ideological nature of all objects produced by culture; but, at the same time, paradoxically, the very identification of this type of criticism depends on the fact that these same objects possess the capacity to expose certain meanings of the work that are otherwise obscured by ideological veils.

One might expect that among the copious writings that have appeared in the last decade which have attempted a description and explanation of architecture as language, attention would have been given to this third type of criticism if only because it is itself, as a criticism of architecture, one of the many discourses of language itself. Following the logic of the analogy between architecture and language (and noting that important contributions on this area of theory have concentrated heavily on the problems of theory versus ideology), the parallel contains the possibility of making, or at least proposing, the existence of such a criticism in architecture. But few have analyzed this notion of criticism, while many have abused the usage of the term.

Manfredo Tafuri has recently attempted to evaluate the historical significance of internal criticism, particularly for the present time.³ In his writings, Tafuri takes a rather pessimistic view both of the historical and the cultural value of an attitude that concerns itself with the problem of language—"the return to language," he writes, "is a sign of failure"⁴—an attitude to which "criticism from within" belongs, and especially of the critical intentions that he sees as pervading the objects of present production. And yet, one of the central conclusions that emerge from his argu-

ment is that there are no fundamental differences between such architects as Aldo Rossi, James Stirling, Peter Eisenman, Robert Venturi, since they “all return to language.” One may suspect that such frustration might well be a typical initial reaction to a work of criticism of such stature and originality that it shatters hitherto unchallenged systems of ordering and classifying and subverts our previously held values, rearranging what is known according to a more enlightened conceptual framework and thus transforming the object of analysis into a new, unexpected reality.

Nonetheless, such classifications as Tafuri’s, which polarize the objects of analysis into categories that are too broad, thus erasing significant differences, or into trivial labeling systems as in the case of the originally amusing but by now boring chromatic grouping into “the whites,” “the grays,” and “the silvers” (a taxonomy which has retarded any serious understanding of the problem of architecture as language), are in the end still frustrating in themselves. Further treatment of the subject seems warranted, if for no other reason than because there has been no systematic discussion of the nature of “criticism from within” and its relation to a more general “return to language.” As yet I do not know what mechanisms and operations it uses or how it differs from other types of work on language. Indeed, to test and evaluate Tafuri’s macroscopic, global view it is indispensable to shift attention to the internal workings of language and to possess a clear model of its structure. I will begin my discussion at a microscopic, yet generalizable level, describing certain mechanisms and operations, which I hope will later enable me to establish the role that such “criticism from within” might play today in the development of architecture in its relation to theory, criticism, and ideology.

I would like for the purpose of my analysis to follow an opposite path to Tafuri and start with a general characterization of the common traits shared by most contemporary production concerned with architecture as language, ending with a more particularized analysis that is intended to help differentiate what is “criticism from within” from what is not.

Let us begin by assuming that the “return to language” has indeed occurred (a trend that seems to characterize the seventies, as has been said, but which also can be traced back to Kahn and even to the early Johnson). That is, this “return to language” is marked by an unusual degree of self-consciousness in architecture, which starts with the recognition that architecture, like any other cultural product, can be studied as a system of signification, establishing different levels, accumulating layers of meaning and sense, and constituting one of the many symbolic spheres instituted by society. As a consciousness of itself, architecture can only, and only willingly, operate with the known: its past, immediate or distant, and the existent world. It is, then, a work of reflection, essentially anti-utopian, one which automatically establishes a basis for criticism since criticism is a speculative reflection on the known.

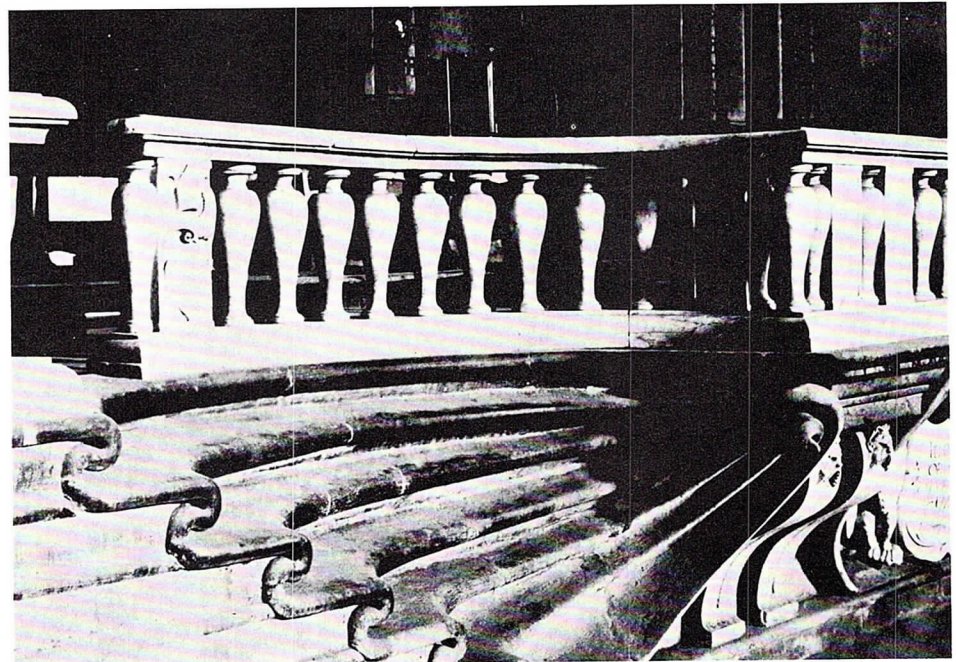
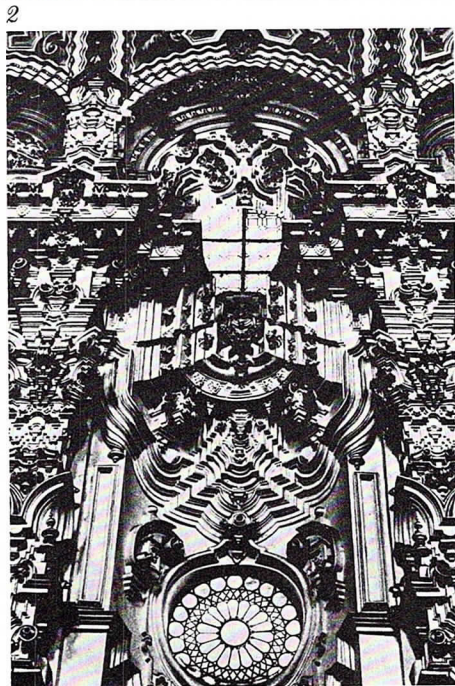
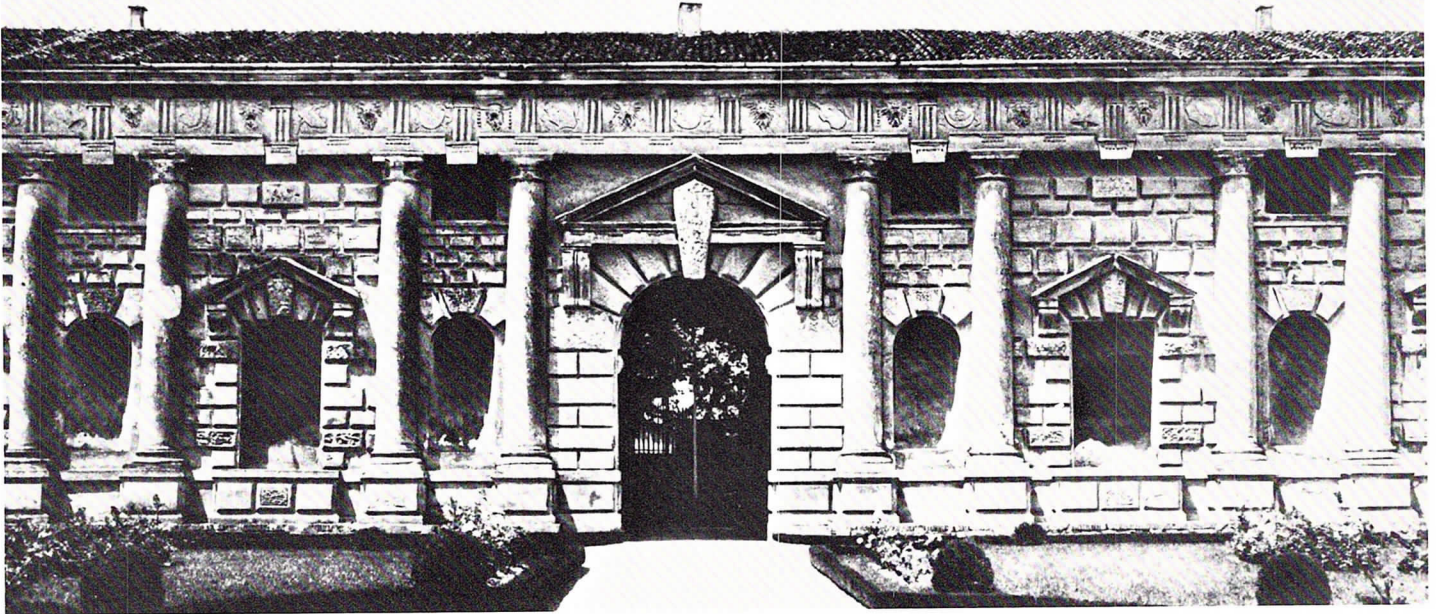
It is undoubtedly for this reason that on so many occasions we hear the analogy drawn between the present moment and that of Mannerism, that “universal malaise” as Colin Rowe called it, that appeared in Italy during the Cinquecento.⁵ This is probably because, for the first time since the twenties, we find ourselves looking back on the Modern Movement itself from a real historical perspective. Its “classicism” has by now been experienced, its effects sensed, and its postulates questioned; yet with all this nothing seems to have appeared to replace it. Like the Mannerist architect we can only manipulate the known. Such is, in my view, all that can be said in general terms about the state of architecture today.

But as soon as we begin to scrutinize these modern “manners” and their mechanisms for the production of meaning, we realize that the conscious reference either to past architectures or to contemporary realities can be established and expounded in many forms (some of them of antagonistic character), so that self-consciousness and the “return to language” are not sufficient categorizations upon which to reject or accept them; that there might be specific differentiations, much more useful than Tafuri’s universalist label, to be made between Charles Moore’s “wit” and Aldo Rossi’s “silence”; that, in short, as a parallel to the general treatment we need to establish with clarity: 1) how opera-

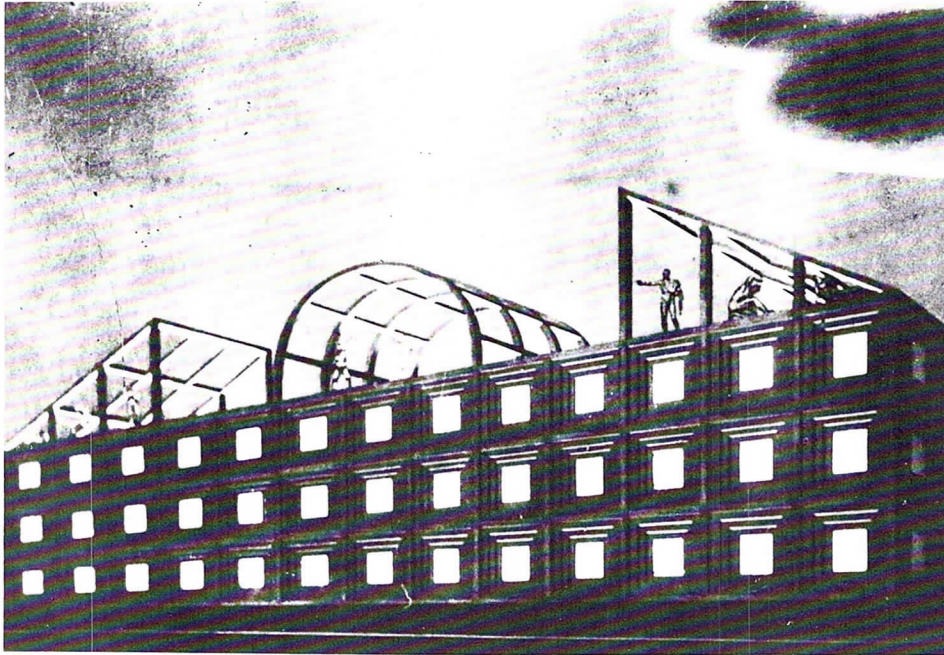
2 Palazzo del Te, Mantova, Italy.
Giulio Romano, c.1530.

3 Cartuja de Granada, detail of
sacristy. Francisco de Hurtado and
Francisco de Acero, 1732-1780.

4 Choir of the Church of Santo
Stefano, Florence. Bernardo
Buontalenti, 1536-1608. Detail of
stair.



5 *Palazzata di Messina, Rome, competition entry. A. Libera, M. Ridolfi, M. Fagiolo, architects, 1931.*

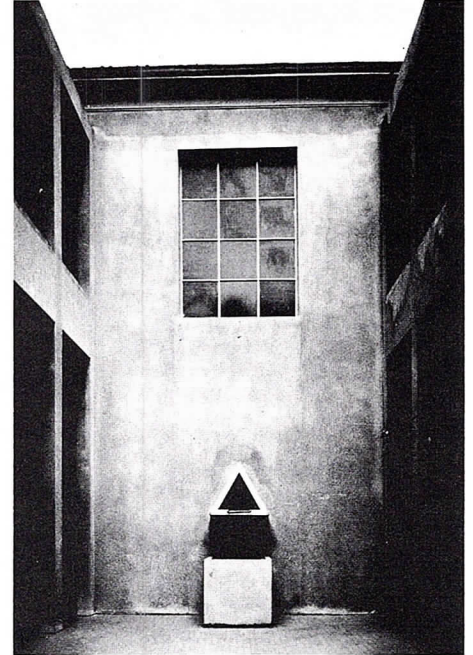


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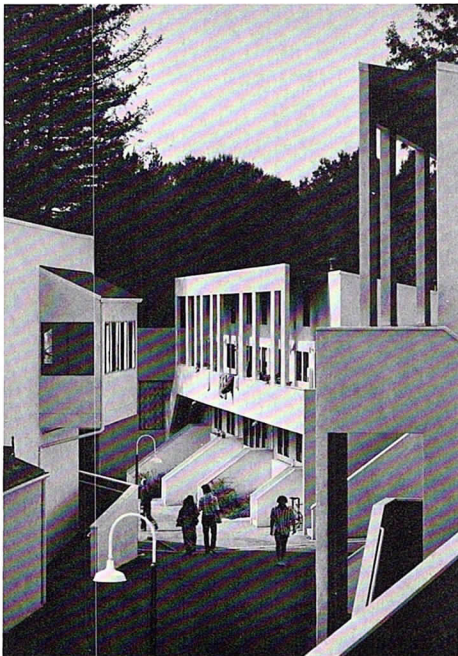
6 *Elementary School, Broni, Pavia. Aldo Rossi, architect, 1969-1970. Detail, courtyard.*

7 *Kresge College, Santa Cruz, California. Charles Moore and William Turnbull, architects, 1974.*

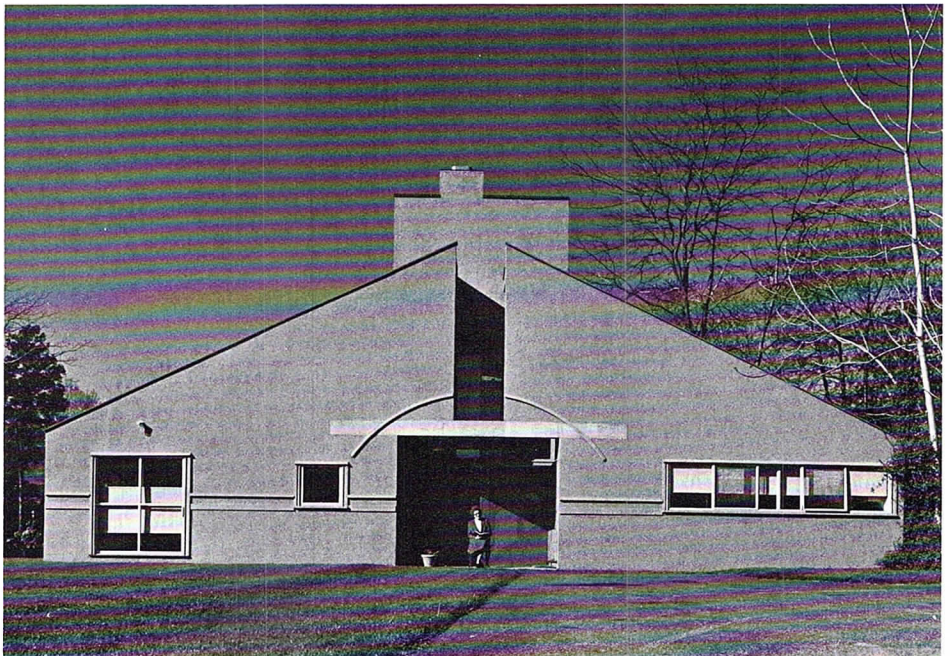
8 *Vanna Venturi house, Philadelphia. Venturi and Rauch, architects, 1963.*



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48 tions on language work; 2) what their relations to theory and ideology are; 3) what their historic-cultural status is.

What then is it possible to do with an established code, or how can we operate on it? Without risking much, we could say that it is only possible either to transform it or to reproduce it. By transformation we mean those operations performed on the elements of a given existent code which depart from the original, normative, or canonical usage of the code by distorting, regrouping, reassembling, or in general altering it in such a way that it *maintains its reference to the original, while tending to produce a new meaning*. (For the purposes of our discussion, we need not enter into the problem of reproduction.)⁶ From this very general point of view, the Renaissance becomes a transformation of Antiquity, Mannerism of Quattrocento architecture, Neo-Classicism of Classicism, eclecticism of the past as a whole, etc. We might usefully illustrate these transformational operations by means of an analogy with the classical figures of rhetoric. We can see, for example, the “hyperboles” to which the architect-monk submitted the classical code in the Cartuja de Granada (fig. 3), the “paradox” which Bernardo Buontalenti presents to us in the stair of the choir of Santo Stefano in Florence (fig. 4), the “ironies” in Giulio Romano’s Palazzo del Te (fig. 2), the “metaphors” of most of the work of Charles Moore (fig. 7), the “ellipses” of Fascist architecture (fig. 5), of Robert Venturi (fig. 8), and of Aldo Rossi (fig. 6).⁷ All these examples exhibit the same general characteristics: they all operate with known architectural codes, and they all re-deploy these codes by effecting some easily perceivable changes. Yet all the resulting effects are different; for while in one case we might be induced to smile with a certain condescension, in another we are puzzled by what seems an impossible mistake, and in another we might even need to close our eyes to imagine what is not there. An almost endless list could be compiled for the purpose of showing how powerful rhetoric can be in assisting a theoretical and hence systematic classification of these architectural operations, and for demonstrating the similar structure of production of meaning of most of man’s products. My interest here is to concentrate on specific effects produced by some of these transformations. For this, it is enough to say that

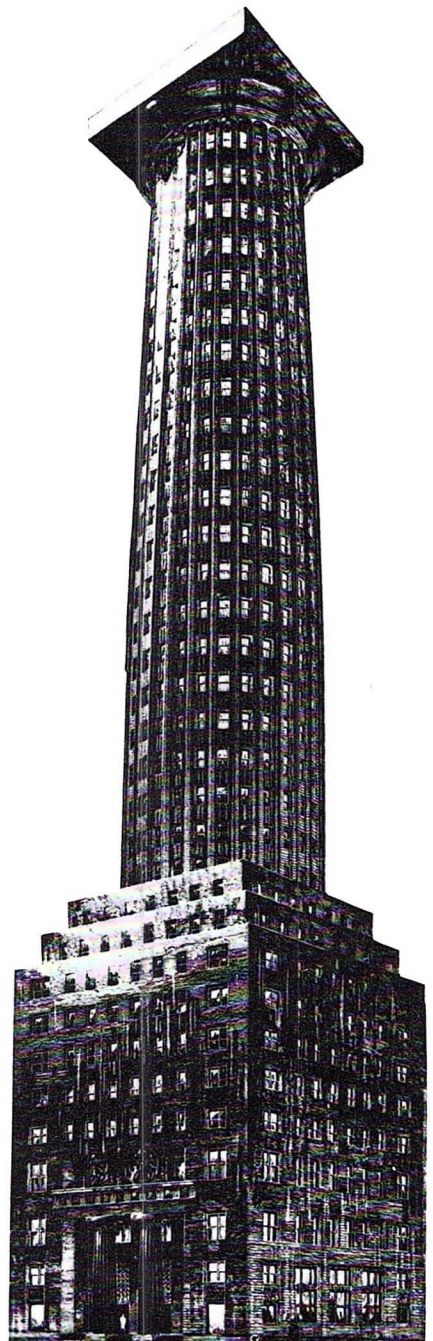
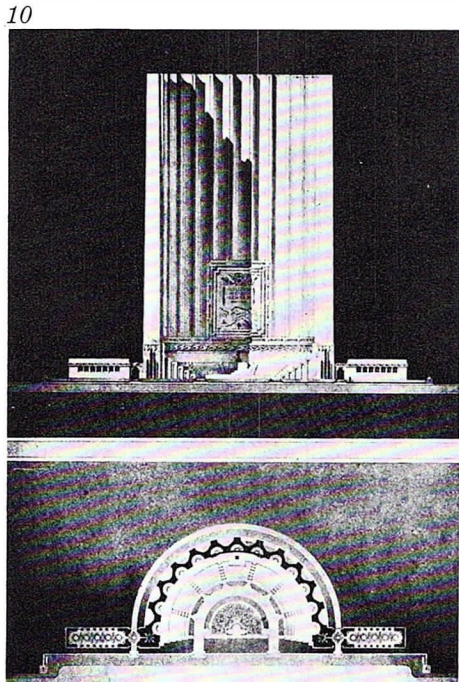
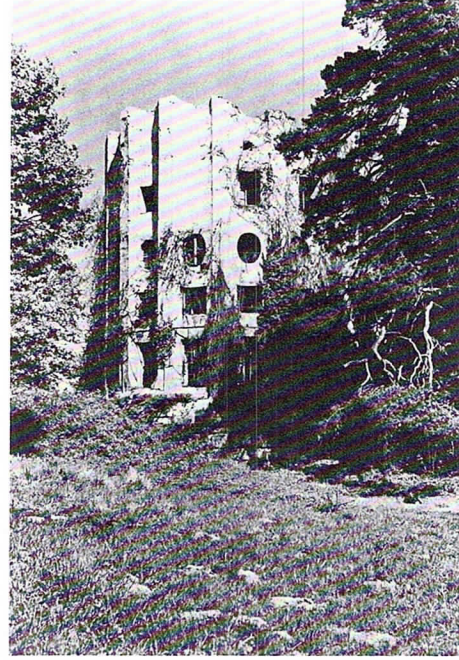
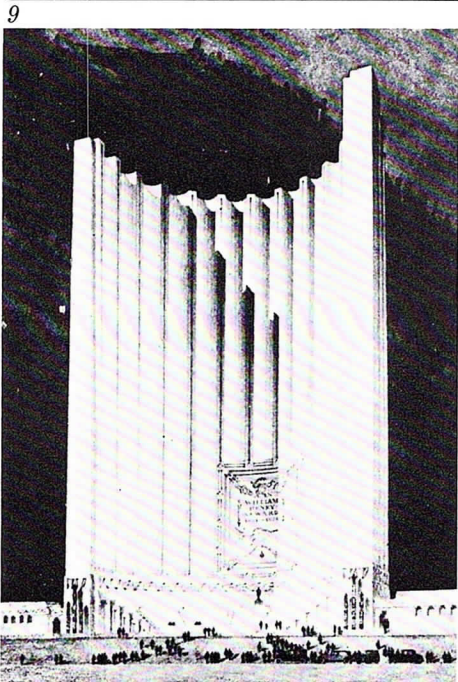
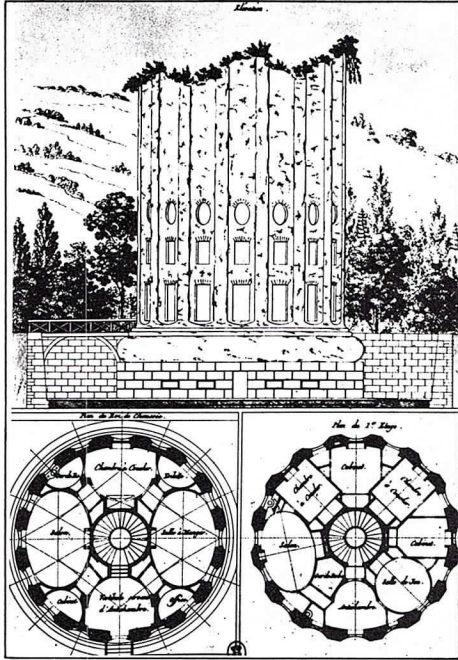
rhetoric is a *metalanguage*, a discourse built on another discourse. As we will see later, this concept that comes out of logic and semiotics provides us with a tool that will help us understand and delimit the problems posed at the beginning of this paper in relation to “criticism from within.”

To begin with, it is clear that much of what is produced today in architecture consists of a discourse that comments on other already constituted architectural discourses: that is, the very special case of metalanguage in which both discourses belong to the same practice; architecture commenting on architecture, architecture “speaking” of itself. One way to clarify the concept of metalanguage in relation to our subject is to classify the range of possible object-languages; that is to say, the codes or elements that can be referred to or commented on by the metalanguage. For example, the metalanguage may refer to or comment on *the formal codes*; it may also refer to the functional codes, that is, the set of systematized, normalized functions (the program) and the uses they promote. Because they are the most conscious codes of modern architecture, both of these seem to have been rather thoroughly explored. But it is also possible to conceive of a commentary on the rhetorical codes themselves, and on the moral codes. In reality, these commentaries seem to concentrate on *elements of the codes*. This can be illustrated by the example of the column. The column has undoubtedly been one of the most significant elements of architecture, and as such it has become one of the favorite elements of architectural language, attracting commentaries of metalinguistic nature, as illustrated by the Desert de Retz by François Barbier of 1771 (figs. 9, 10), the inverted half shaft column of the William Henry Seward Memorial by Hornbostel & Wood of 1929 (figs. 11, 12), and by Adolf Loos’ Chicago Tribune competition entry of 1923 (fig. 13). These examples all refer, on the first reading, not to the body of referents peculiar to the classical code, but to the element itself or to the code itself (in this case the column, in its denotative state). Thus, these examples refer not to the supposed contents of classical architecture (beauty, the human body, proportions, etc.) but to the classical element, column; that is to say, all these examples (each of them a fully constituted significant sys-

9, 10 Désert de Retz, France.
Francois Barbier, architect, 1771.

11, 12 William Henry Seward
memorial, Seward, Alaska. Henry
Hornbostel and Eric Fisher Wood,
architects, 1929.

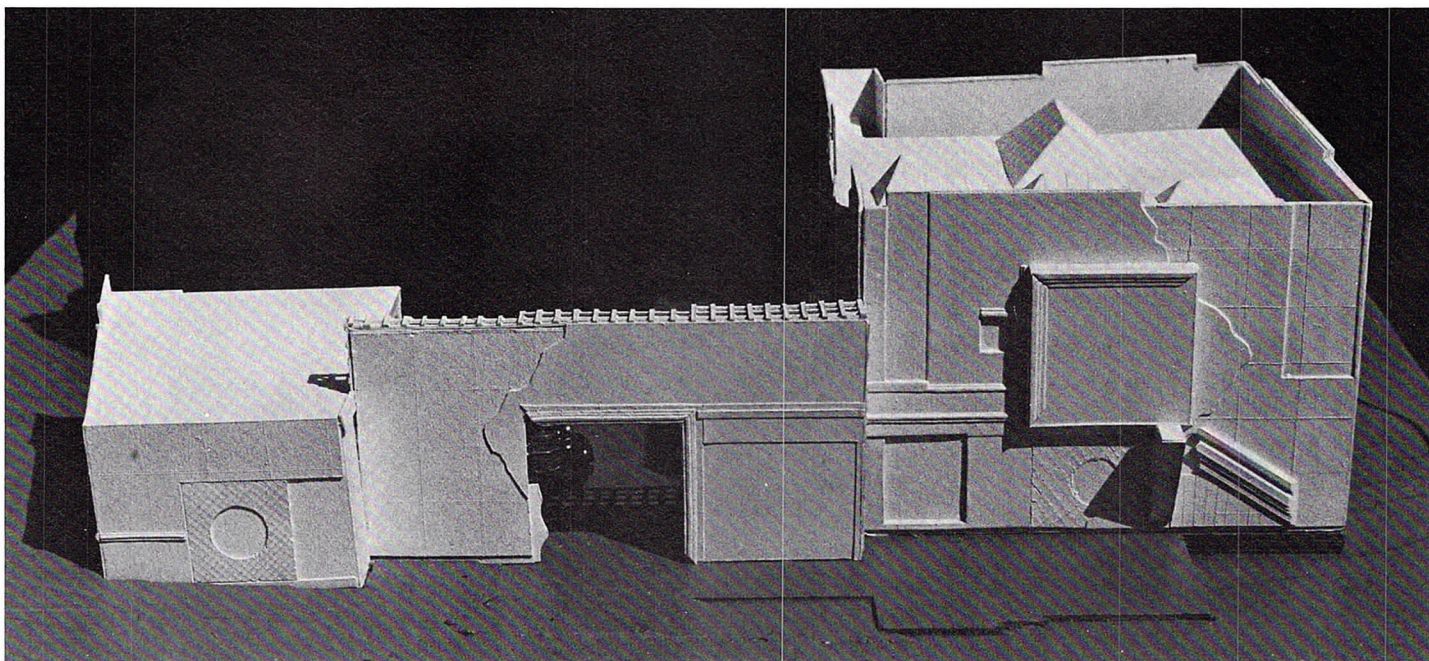
13 Chicago Tribune, competition
entry. Adolf Loos, architect, 1923.



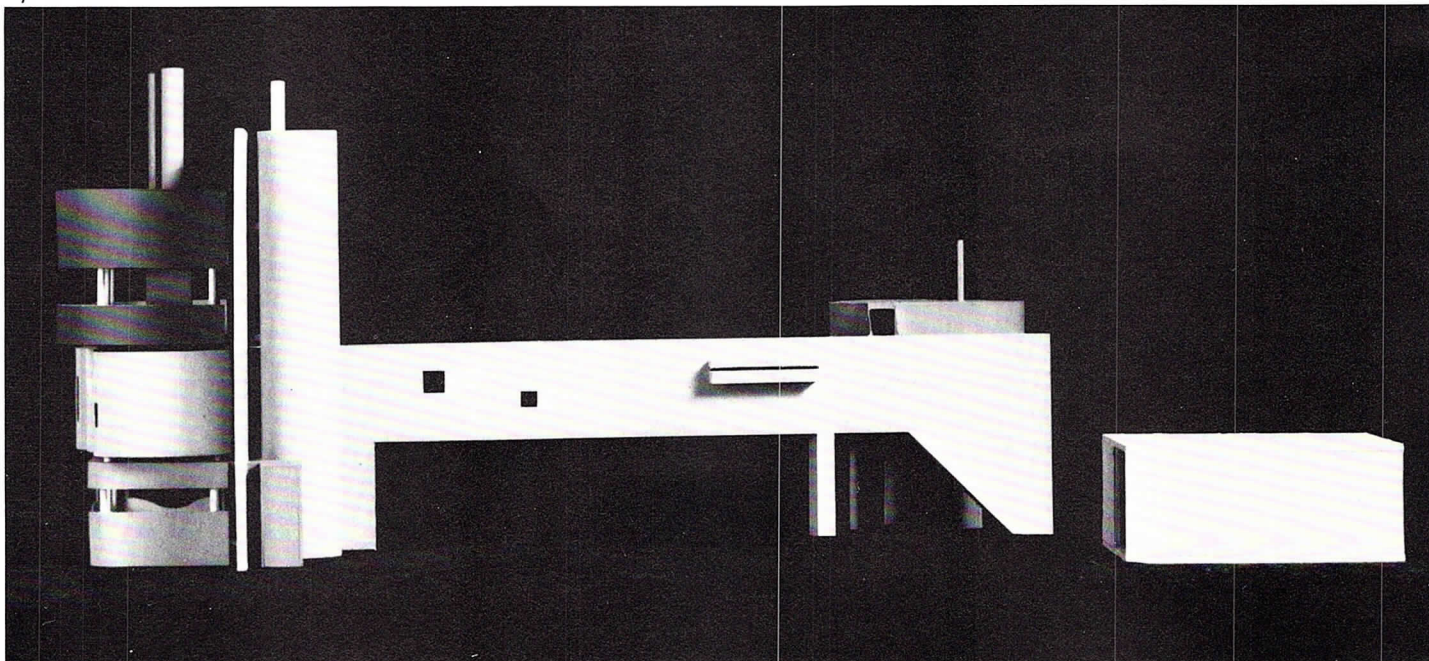
14 Crooks House, Fort Wayne,
Indiana. Michael Graves, architect,
1976. Model.

15 Bye House. John Hejduk,
architect, 1972.

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tem of signified/signifier) contain in themselves another significant system previously constituted (i.e., the classical column). In most of these cases the metalinguistic operation is constituted by a simple change of scale or the substitution of a different function for the original one. Again, it is interesting to note that all of these displacements do not produce the same effect. In some cases, a certain surplus of meaning appears beyond the simple commentary, and in some cases this “beyond” approaches a dimension of *criticism*. The famous triglyphs of Giulio Romano might serve to further the analysis (see fig. 2). The heresy perpetrated by Giulio Romano against the classical language seems to be more than a heresy, more than a trivial game: in it we find it extremely difficult to experience the principles of humanism. We are forced to refer back to architecture itself, since the disordered order within the order disturbs us. There is no change of scale, no inversion, no second stage; we are confronted with a wall conceived *within* a canon. However, if only one triglyph were loose, we would not see it; it would be an accident. It is precisely the insistent and systematic disorder within the order which disorders the old one, and which forbids us to experience the transparent effect of what it should have been—something classic. Giulio Romano thus invents, in a single heretical gesture, a new meaning—perhaps proving that the impossible is possible—by showing up the conventionality of the classical code. The operation is one of altering syntactic relationships. The rhetorical figure is irony, and its effect can be interpreted as critical. It is only at the end of this process of deciphering that we turn back to the original referent (beauty, the human body, proportions, etc.) in order to sense the strength of the new effect; but now we accept the reference only after de-mythifying it. This results in a de-naturalization of the code that has been interrogated. The object-language is thus questioned *in its own terms*. Indeed, this is an apparently trivial detail if considered by itself. It is only as part of the spirit that pervades the entire work that we can establish its place in a more complex system of critical meanings. Giulio Romano’s building acquires a startling power when we discover that a similar attack has been carried at all levels, intentionally profaning the integrity of all the iconographic, compositional, structural codes of the classical language.

Shocking at first, the object impatiently unfolds before us a universe of meanings hitherto hidden from us; and our initial feeling of disturbance gives way to a pleasurable sensation of intellectual complicity between the architect and ourselves after we have, not without effort, succeeded in disclosing the building’s arcane messages. The object appears as a revelation, not of sacred but of heretical nature because it confronts us with a subversive meaning whose opaque effect proposes and obliges us to perform a certain intellectual task of deciphering. The object cannot be consumed, but must be interpreted; indeed, we must wander along the same path that the architect followed; we must work with it.

Although we cannot place ourselves at the same comfortable distance with the present that we are able to do with the Italian Cinquecento, perhaps it is possible, tentatively, to propose a similar reading of some recent architecture. We can recognize in some works of Charles Moore, for example, the same type of transformations to which we have alluded. Kresge College (see fig. 7) *re-presents* the known and all too familiar in a disjointed, unexpected, disturbing manner, and we can apply our previous remarks in relation to the effects of the “criticism from within” to describe what we are told through these buildings.

The effectiveness of such “criticism from within,” however, does not necessarily depend on such ironic manipulations of architectural codes. Rather, the critical effect depends on a subversion of known meanings and on the production of knowledge itself;⁸ and to that end no rhetorical operation, per se, can offer guarantees. Levi-Strauss, commenting on Duchamp’s “ready mades,” expresses eloquently the complex mixture of operations and effects in these types of works: “You then accomplish a new distribution between the signifier and the signified, a distribution that was in the realm of the possible but was not openly effected (in the primitive condition of the object). You make then, in one sense, a work of learning, discovering in that object latent properties that were not perceived in the initial context; a poet does this each time he uses a word or turns a phrase in an unusual manner.”⁹ It is this test, and not the simple manipulation of known codes, which the work of

52 “criticism from within” must pass. Thus, works like those of Rossi (see fig. 6) and Graves (fig. 14) that are neither ironic nor paradoxical nonetheless impose on us an *oeuvre de connaissance*, make us discover latent properties, and open to us a poetic dimension. And, recalling Barthes, we may use and interpret the notion of “anamorphism” as a metaphor that can help us to circumscribe even more precisely this still evasive notion of “criticism from within.”¹⁰ In fact, anamorphism expresses almost literally the mechanism, effects, and dilemmas of this type of criticism. For example, the techniques used widely in painting during the sixteenth century and illustrated here by the “skull” depicted at the bottom of Holbein the Younger’s *The Ambassadors* can be read in two different ways (figs. 1, 16). We can see them as tricks, games, diversions; but it is also possible to read in them a much more subversive content than can be apprehended if we concentrate only on the technique of distortion employed. In this case, it is necessary to understand the implications of perspective as “symbolic form” (in Panofsky’s sense) to see that the technique of anamorphism effects also a criticism of a mode of representation, making explicit the illusion of perspective and producing, if only for a moment, a condensed knowledge that must be unraveled by the beholder.

We can, then, base our understanding of the nature of “criticism from within” on this constellation of attributes, and this, in turn, helps us to differentiate it from other types of transformation. This distinction is important because there exists another possibility of transformation, which is opposed to criticism, an understanding of which should help us in the task of clarifying contemporary productions. If we analyze, for instance, some current architectures that abound in historical allusions and quotations, we find that neither the operations nor the effects produced belong to the category of criticism described, in spite of sharing with it a certain self-consciousness and transformational character. In these cases the material that supports meaning is not substantially altered in order to bring out any latent properties; rather, it is strategically marked—simply “quoted”—with the resulting effect of veiling, covering, wrapping as it were, the original sign in a new meaning. It tends to emphasize features of the already

known, seeking an external, larger association. It seeks a connotation. And paradoxically, in the cases of historical quotation, it denies the history contained in it by erasing the contingencies by which it is or was determined; by denying history it naturalizes the object. It is a process of mythification of the known.¹¹ As such, this type of transformation is often found in the architecture of mass consumption, where nothing could be more alien to its aim than the deciphering activity which characterizes “criticism from within.” But it is also, and at a more profound level, at the root of many of the present attempts to consciously work with architecture as language. Examples could be listed endlessly, but suffice it to say that it is probably the effect sought after by most of the iconographers of the present, so-called “populist” tendencies. For it is not history in its most profound sense that is the desired object of exploration, exposition, and unraveling, but rather the immediate, uncritical, almost urgent rapport between the architecture and the beholder.

Thus, in terms of mechanisms of transformation, we can differentiate clearly between “criticism from within” and mythification. “Criticism from within” is a signifying system in which the content is in itself a signifying system; that is to say, the form and the content of the original object are both, in turn, the content of another form (the transformed object). Mythification, conversely, institutes a new signifying system in which its form remains almost untransformed, but by subtle accents, a new content covers the object. The respective effects can also be seen as dichotomous: criticism generates opaqueness, intrigue, questioning, subversion; mythification generates transparency, complacency, naturalization, and conformism.

Using this reading, one cannot any longer group the members of the New York “Five” together simply on the basis of their use of similar superficial elements. Of all of them, only John Hejduk and Michael Graves seem to achieve the effects produced by critical operations. Hejduk does so by elevating certain architectural components to the category of signs of themselves, and by virtue of this, he achieves an architecture almost devoid of any metaphorical or representative value except that of itself; plans and facades

become the vehicles for unprecedented discoveries, while the myths of function and structure are dissipated by poetry (fig. 15). Graves, on the other hand, concentrates insistently on the metaphorical dimensions of architecture and thereby brings about a completely new reading of all the elements implicated (columns, walls, ceilings, colors, etc.), and as a result his architecture yields as surplus an enrichment of a vocabulary and mechanisms that were deemed exhausted (see fig. 14). In both cases, our reading of the early work of Le Corbusier and of general architectural notions is both demythified and enriched.

We see then that the “return to language” deserves more than the merely perfunctory treatment which discards it altogether as senseless. In rather schematic fashion, we have been able to establish the existence of at least two opposite effects resulting from different ways of constructing the architectural discourse that reflects upon itself: the possibility of criticism and that of mythification. This analysis suggests other levels of investigation. As both criticism and myth produce a certain type of knowledge—criticism by digging into the object itself in a relentless search for fundamental meaning, mythification by re-presenting the object as a confirmation of our previous knowledge and then by naturalizing it—we must ask what kind of relations this very special type of criticism “from within” establishes with theory and ideology, what its locations are in regard to these two realms of human knowledge. We might even ask whether, indeed, this type of “production of knowledge” deserves the label of criticism. The consideration of this question seems imperative, since, as we said at the beginning, we are confronted with an apparently blatant contradiction: we assume that an object produced by culture (and as such marked by ideology) also has the capacity to present a critique of itself (and as such to contribute to theoretical knowledge). But, at the risk of constructing a tautology, it is this paradox itself that constitutes its own explanation and is the foundation of its own richness and uniqueness. For it is senseless to ask of this “criticism from within” a guarantee that it will discover some “truth” of scientific nature. As a discourse it can only be read through the object in which it is rooted and not through language, which manipulates concepts that are or-

ganized logically and provides the “matter” that science and theory transform. As criticism contained in an object (whether a painting, a sculpture, a work of architecture), it proposes itself to us as a totality, which cannot be reproduced or tested as a scientific or theoretical proposition. Once it has appeared, its own critical nature is compromised by its very object-nature, and it cannot escape the destiny that our culture reserves for its objects: its critical meaning becomes consumable after its operations are discovered. It is possible to transform these operations into techniques, or into normative principles (as, for example, in the efforts of Venturi to institutionalize irony), and *l'enfant terrible* becomes a desired connotation with time. This condition thus defines the difference between this type of criticism and the criticism involved in the production of scientific or theoretical knowledge: while both are subversive at the beginning, one becomes the object of consumption, the other, of systematic knowledge. “Criticism from within” is, then, a short-lived phenomenon in the continuum of knowledge, its initial power being recoverable only through exegesis and archaeology, although never to be experienced again with its own original vigor and authority. But this limitation only serves to clarify its role, not to suggest that it should be dismissed. Because of this specific and unique condition, there is a liberating effect: not being able to exercise the power of “truth,” criticism from within institutes in its place the domain of art as poetry. The consequences of acknowledging its dependence on and its contradictory, ambiguous relationship with ideology becomes its force.

It is especially at such a time of questioning as the present that the mass of ideological formations cracks, that “criticism from within” penetrates the solidity of mythical constructions with the aim of exposing the multiplicity of meanings that lie hidden in it. Perhaps what is most promising about this type of criticism is precisely the awareness that we will not gain from it access to objective, scientific knowledge (a task that returns to the discipline where it belongs: history), but rather that through it we may aim at unfolding the imaginary-symbolic universe that architecture simultaneously proposes and represses. The clear objective of such criticism should be the production of a kind of

54 “qualified” knowledge, even if short-lived, which will emerge as an “apparition” against a background of transparent myths. It should not be expected that the effects of a theory will be achieved. However, the poetical dimension which finds in this criticism its natural realm in the present moment may be rediscovered. And perhaps through the exercise of this criticism it will be possible to produce the “subtle subversion” that Barthes suggests as a possible solution to the contradictions of art;¹² that is to say, the subversion that does not accept the play with opposites that are merely accomplices within the same structure (i.e., the endless oscillation between formalism and functionalism), but one that seeks another term beyond the game of oppositions, a term not of synthesis but of an eccentricity that frustrates false oppositions. Therefore, one cannot conclude with Tafuri that “behind this laborious digging into architecture’s own existence, there is a constant fear of an authentic critical process.”¹³ Both “criticism from within” as well as the criticism of theory and history have, de facto, a precisely delimited field of action, so that it is not necessary to engage in a discussion as to which criticism is “authentic.” “Authentic” is too loaded a term to be useful in defining the boundaries of different practices. But if the possibilities of inquiry offered by historical criticism are not the same as those offered by the work of art, the distinction between them does not preclude their dialectical relationship. History aims at scientific explanation, and it has, consequently, an undeniable lead in the field of knowledge. It helps the artist to establish and become conscious of his own location. This consciousness has consequences for the artist’s work, although these consequences are not automatic. But conversely, the artist’s products provide the material for theory, and theory must wait for their appearance; for no matter how advanced a structural model of society theory might possess, it cannot forecast and depict the artistic products that that structure will produce.

Our inquiry into the nature of “criticism from within” cannot, however, be concluded here. In addressing the questions of its place in the sphere of knowledge, we found that some aspects of it are neither explained by a description of its internal mechanisms nor by its relationships with

theory and ideology; more specifically, we implied that there is some temporal aspect to “criticism from within.” It seems, then, that in order to understand the paradoxical nature of this criticism, we need to consider its relation with both of its coordinates: not only the structural, which we have just touched upon, but also the historical-cultural, which we will consider next.

As the concept of “criticism from within,” or even the general notion of transformation implies, its operation requires the existence of well established codes on which to work. It is not, then, surprising that throughout history its appearance has been rather discreet and sporadic. In this context we might re-invoke the analogy of contemporary architecture to that of Mannerism, an architecture that responded to the “very human desire to impair perfection when once it has been achieved.”¹⁴ Mannerist architecture was, like the works of today, essentially a reflective task, a critical experimentation with Classicism, which effected the subversive dismembering of the classical language through the heretical and revealing work of Giulio Romano, Michelangelo, Serlio, and the like, at the same time as it unfolded an unexpected treasure from which the classical language could re-emerge renovated and ready for its most fulfilling moment, pregnant with a seemingly inexhaustible richness.

This sporadic nature of “criticism from within,” which appears as it were as an irregular necessity of history, forms its principal historical differentiation from other types of transformational work, and specifically from that type we have defined as its opposite: mythification. Mythification appears as a continuum in history; it is the most basic, rudimentary, and unavoidable manner of signifying of any object of the material culture. The prevailing forces in architectural ideologies, throughout history, are those that try to “naturalize” the cultural constructs of architecture, to justify and rationalize it through mythification. The forms of objects are thus constantly wrapped and veiled with secondary meanings, establishing chains which can only be interrupted momentarily by the reversing act of criticism. But it is important, since we are testing these arguments against the historical coordinate, to differentiate

within mythification the existence of two different and opposed modes of effecting the naturalization of historical contingencies, two clear and typical forms that correspond to two very well differentiated historical moments: one (and this applies specifically to recent history) is the avant-garde moment, and the other, the moments that correspond to crisis or disbelief. Firstly, mythification (which attempts to achieve a particular transformation in men's consciousness—that of transforming the contingencies of the cultural and the historical into the natural) acquires in the avant-garde a positive value insofar as it is a genuine act of creation and insofar as it represents an intentional break with the past, placing the language in question within new terms and establishing its own parameters of production and criticism. Since no artistic movement can precede a general change in the historical determinants, the ideological work of the avant-garde—its mythification—consists precisely in making intelligible these determinants within a new ideological discourse; thus, for example, the aesthetics of the machine is a mythification, a naturalization of the historical *contingencies* of the machine itself, which does not explain it but rather borrows it uncritically, yet which, however, performs the role of establishing an iconography that symbolizes a positive utopia that is historically correct and forward looking. Now, this discourse that tells us about a new reality, that makes that reality legible and intelligible, is, because of its ideological nature, a distortion of those historical determinants. But although this fact is proven by time, it does not provide an automatic knowledge of what has been falsified; this is the work of criticism.

Secondly, in periods of disbelief, such as that which began in the late fifties and culminated during the sixties, mythification acquires the role of a cynical accomplice because it has nothing to propose and yet it continues to mimic the gestures of creation. At this point, there is only one positive option as to what to do with the “classic” language, and that is to demythify it. This act, together with theoretical work, can close a historical period. The counterpart of this proposition is—if I may be permitted the term—the mythification of myth, and as such it represents a reactionary force. It invariably implies a degradation of what is being transformed.

The type of mythification that is of interest for an analysis of the present moment then, is that which converts an already established architectural language into the material support of a sign which connotes what has already been sanctioned, approved, and digested by the system of architecture; that is to say, not into a language that connotes itself, but into one that seeks as a unique objective to signify the value that the system has acquired already in history. Hence, in many cases, the uses of the International Style, rationalism, “Corbusianism,” etc. do not necessarily imply an intent to continue the tasks set forth in the heroic period of modern architecture or an attempt to realize the program of the avant-garde; rather, the style is often selected because of the connotations of “art” and “modernity” that it carries, and finally because it permits the architect to play safely within architecture.¹⁵

At this point it might be of help to introduce a more specific nomenclature, one that might serve to differentiate even further and with more precision the possibilities of work with language. These are the notions of “criticism” and “commentary” as elaborated by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*: “Since the classical age, commentary and criticism have been in profound opposition. By speaking of language in terms of representation and truth, criticism judges it and profanes it. Now as language in the irruption of its being, and questioning it as to its secret, commentary halts before the precipice of the original text, and assumes the impossible and endless task of repeating its own birth within itself: it sacralizes language. These two ways by which language establishes a relation with itself were now to enter into a rivalry from which we have not yet emerged—and which may even be sharpening as time passes.”¹⁶ For, to interrogate a language as to what, how, and why it represents, as criticism does, is to begin to disturb it at the very point where the ideological operation takes place; it is indeed to attempt to “profane” its inner sanctum and to judge its truth. Commentary, on the other hand, reproduces language, represents it with no other intention than to sanction its truth. And without attempting to generalize these two notions for the history of architecture, Foucault's categories are useful in separating present productions precisely and in regulating the use of the two

It is possible now to respond with more clarity to some of the questions that were posed at the beginning. We know it is possible to discern two types of discourse that are based on transformations of existing architectural codes, and that they are opposed in their mechanisms and in their effects. While one—criticism—attempts a reading of architecture in depth, unfolding the latent layers of meaning, the other—mythification—slides on the surface of the veils with which it has covered architecture. We have found that, historically, this seemingly simple duality is in fact a more complex, asymmetrical cultural phenomenon, since it is possible to sketch for the latter two opposing pictures, corresponding to two different historical moments, and for the former a sporadic appearance.¹⁷ What our analysis has also yielded is the conviction that the critical reflection of language upon itself, “criticism from within,” although sporadic, appears as an inevitable part of the architect’s endeavor, in turn part of a more general phenomenon of a “return to language.” Hence, as such, the phenomenon implies neither advancement nor regression. It is a historical reality, a common background against which we find ourselves working today. Within it, the searches, means, and objectives, which are marked by the subject and its contingencies, can be as varied as in any historical moment. Of course, it is not only possible, but necessary that the theoretical/historical criticism that analyzes these phenomena be carried out with different focuses and at different scales. Thus the general view that Tafuri offers is more than necessary: it is indispensable to talk about the “return to language” and to try to disentangle the historical meaning that such an attitude, as a whole, might have as opposed to other historical possibilities, contemporary, past, or hypothetical. But such a view, when expounded in disregard of the meaning of the nuances and eccentricities that the historical material offers, might become unconstructive if not informed dialectically by an internal analysis of such an attitude toward architecture. Tafuri’s principal theoretical objective justifies his level of generalization because in his analysis he seeks to oppose the architect as a “producer” to the architect as an “expert in language”;¹⁸ however, his analysis of these two categories, which might have impor-

tant theoretical consequences, is not altogether convincing because of his ambiguous use of the concept of “production.” It is confusing because both types of work imply the “production” of something and as such both are historically and theoretically relevant; both operate upon and transform a given material by using and manipulating determinate means of production; both are related to ideology as well as to technique. Therefore, if it is true that a critic may find that some of the products of some of the “experts in language” have no cultural or historical relevance, obviously the same may be found for some of the producer’s products, so that it is simply incorrect to try to establish the supremacy or importance of one over the other. Tafuri may consider that the work of certain contemporary architects is, in the end, irrelevant, but to generalize in such a way as to say that “the return to language (in this moment) is a proof of failure” obscures this fundamental principle: *the production of “building” and the production of “meaning” are both parts of the production of architecture.* Of course Tafuri would agree with this, but he seems to imply that the problem of the language of architecture (“as a system of communication . . .”) should be left aside, to “happen” as it were, and that it is more important to concentrate on the nature of “building construction in reality.”¹⁹

But what is building construction in reality? It does not stop at the moment when all economic, managerial, and political problems have been taken into account. The building still has to be created, and at that moment, whether the agent involved is an architect, a planner, a politician, a builder, or a layman does not matter: the whole problem of architecture as language, architecture as symbol, architecture as material culture, starts all over again; the dialectical process between creativity and history is again put into motion; and however uncultivated or under-developed the agent is, the problem of the transformation of a language is posed.

It therefore seems that this consciousness about “language” which characterizes the present moment, these attempts at a real criticism “from within,” are a positive step. To extend Tafuri’s own parable of the magician,²⁰ an under-

standing of the position where the architect-critic places himself might help us to understand more fully “the tricks of the magician” since these tricks can only be explained from both vantage points; from “behind the scene” (as Tafuri would want it) one sees the *techniques* of the tricks, and from the “seat in the audience” one sees the way in which the trick is delivered and the effects it produces. Both positions are needed to explain the magician and his tricks. If this is true, then there is no way by which we can escape our involvement with language. And regardless of whether or not one agrees with the view that the architect may be a “producer” such a view is not an “either/or” option when considered in relation to architecture as language.

It is important now to move a step forward, to change the level of discourse and enlarge the focus as it were, in order to establish the place of the “concern for language” and specifically of “criticism from within” within the system of production. We should recall that we started our work by assuming that what characterizes architecture today is its capacity to be studied as a system of significations that establishes different levels and layers of meanings and sense and constitutes one of the symbolic spheres instituted by society. If our assumption was correct, we can further conclude that architecture defines its place and role in the spheres of the production of knowledge and the production of meaning, as well as in the technical production of artifacts, as being within the social practices, and that as such it can be regarded mainly as a technical-ideological practice insofar as it transforms both matter and man’s consciousness and utilizes both techniques and human relations. But within the realm of the production of meaning and knowledge—that with which we have been specifically concerned in our analysis of “criticism from within”—it is necessary to establish with certainty what role and place this criticism occupies, its extensions and limits.

For it is clear, as has already been implied in our discussion of the multi-layered nature of the phenomena of meaning in architecture, that this aspect of “criticism from within” cannot be the only discourse proposed by architecture. This peculiar discourse, as is obvious to many and disturbing to

most, concerns mainly the most hermetic level of meaning that architecture can articulate. What may be read in this architecture of “criticism from within” pertains only to the closed domain of architecture itself as a discipline, and requires a trained reader, one who knows the symbolic universe proposed and instituted by it, and one whose intimate knowledge of the universe of, for instance, classical and modern architecture enables him to decipher the depth of the critical messages of Giulio Romano and John Hejduk respectively. Thus, this “hermetic” language of “criticism from within” must be understood and used as an internal disciplinary mechanism, whose social value is delimited by the boundaries that any specialized language establishes in society. It is pointless, then, to argue about “elitism” or “hermeticism” as the socially and politically undesirable results of these internal elaborations, since they are by their very nature “hermetic” and “elitist” in their relations with the collective realm. However, that they are only as hermetic as any internal criticism of any contemporary discipline is a fact that we can easily test, for example, by attempting to decipher the communications among physicists. But if we can refrain from discarding physics for its seemingly “hermetic” quality, we should at the same time demand that its products have a more positive collective value. This also goes for architecture where the issue seems even more pressing because of the unavoidable impingement of its products upon the public realm. So there should be no controversy over whether architecture language should deal with one *or* the other. The two discourses, the hermetic and the collective, seem to define the two poles of the scale of possible discourses that architecture is capable of handling. Considering these terms as dichotomic and exclusive is an error that seems to explain much of the confusion and poverty pervading architectural discussion today—confusion insofar as there is no awareness that architecture operates, communicates, and speaks at many levels as a polyphonic composition, and poverty, as a consequence, because most seem to want to suppress this potential richness in favor of a monocord discourse which “speaks” solely the language of “the people” or of “the elite,” as if such a thing were possible. It is only after establishing with clarity the place and limits of “criticism from within” in the system of production as an inescapable,

58 indispensable, "elitist" language that we can assess more thoroughly and correctly some of the architecture produced today. If there is something to be questioned in architecture, it is not its preoccupation with language, which is a concern that it can rightfully display and dutifully respond to; rather, it should be questioned on its lack of articulation between the internal, speculative discourse implied by the return to language and the domain of architecture as a collective discourse.

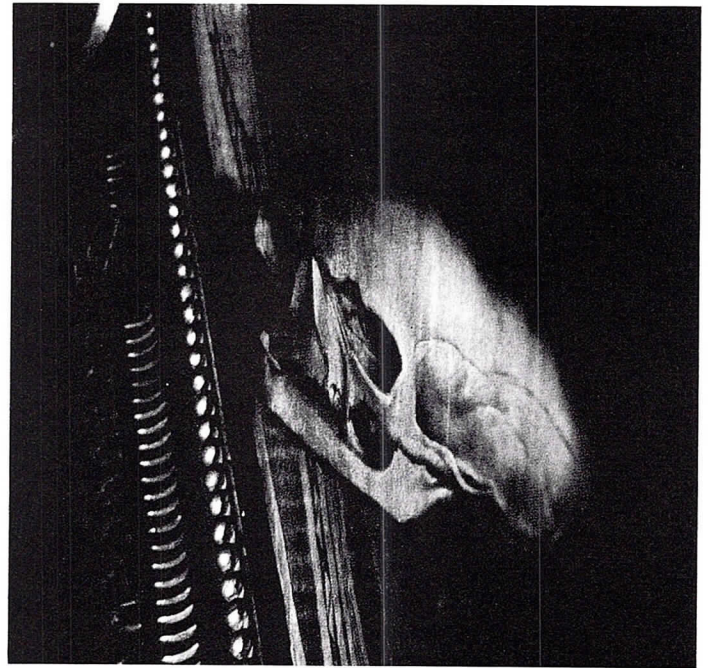
At this point we return to the problem of Mannerism. It was precisely a moment of profound moral and intellectual crisis that produced the reflective attitude, the "signifying consciousness" and critical mind of the Mannerist artist of the sixteenth century. This chapter of history has been thoroughly explained, but what is important to note is that the magnificent Baroque explosion that followed it could only have happened after Mannerism demonstrated to what limits the classical language of architecture could be extended. The excesses and heresies of Mannerism cleared the way for the majestic and sure moves of the Baroque architect, opening the path to one of the most successful chapters in the history of architecture, when the bonds between a political and social program (the Counter Reformation) and an artistic program (based on the rhetoric of persuasion) seem to have been stronger than they are today. The optimistic conclusion that might be drawn from this analogy as far as our own future is concerned is not necessarily convincing, and one can only wish it were true. But we believe that one must, at the least, accept the necessity of this reflective moment, when architecture turns into itself to recognize its signifying nature and to search for its limits, as indispensable for any future. The period that followed the heroic years of the Modern Movement did not produce much knowledge about its own nature, but rather a pragmatic, over-optimistic and simplified application of its universalist principles. Slowly it withdrew into the most banal forms of consumerism, undoubtedly as a result of this uncritical application of its principles. Whereas some serious theoretical and historical criticism was produced, the practice of architecture proceeded with blind confidence in its language and its ethical codes, and culminated in stagnation and in premature failure.

As often with historical parallels, their value lies not so much in the points where coincidence occurs, but rather where the analogy no longer holds; indeed, it is at the moment when a difference appears that we can begin to gain knowledge. For this reason, the analogy between Mannerism and the present can only be stretched so far. The two moments in fact derived from two very different methodological commitments, each consciously established: the classical view was *typological*, the modern view was *programmatic*. The former furnished a symbol to be operated upon, the latter supposedly furnished a set of social demands from which a form could be derived if reason and the spirit of the age were invoked. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze further the contradictions inherent in this last distinction, but some observations are possible. The tenets of modern architecture, simplified to pure formulae, continued to champion the programmatic approach at the same time that they generated architectural typologies, rooted in culture in the deepest sense, and instituted in practice but unacknowledged as such. This fact prevented and even forbade any conscious attempt to investigate the language of architecture "from within." The trap of the "form/function" ideology which reappeared, renovated and transformed into all the variants that characterized the dispersion of architecture during the sixties—"systems analysis," behaviorism, planning, "problem solving techniques," etc.—prevented any consideration of architecture as a fact of culture. (In this country, the work of Kahr stands out as a powerful reaction to it, although his work had to be wrapped in obscure and metaphysical rationalization.)

It is tempting to think, then, that a reconsideration of the implications of a typological approach in architecture today might suggest a possible articulation between those two unavoidable discourses that architecture must institute. For if we look at the problem of a typology of architecture as not just functional recipes or formal dictionaries, but rather as an ever changing, symbolic discourse articulated by culture as a whole and from which we can nurture our search, it becomes clear that it is *only* with a *conscious* "return to language" that we can successfully operate upon, transform, and invent *from architecture*. For this reason:

this approach, and the consciousness that arises from it, can establish the basis for a new type of creativity, one that allows us to depart from a collective intelligibility and to accept consciously the notion of transformation as a means of operation, thus dissipating the anguish that results from either “scientific” demands or from the myth of the genius. It seems possible, then, to find place for both internal speculation and social responsibility, “criticism from within” and “collective myths,” the two inescapable voices that are uttered through architecture. This new consciousness does not stop with the memory of the type, but begins with it only to forget it at the moment of poetic transformation. It furnishes us with the conceptual foundations upon which it is possible to reestablish an intelligent discussion about representation and iconography in architecture, two subjects that have been denied or treated obliquely by modern architecture. Finally, such a typological approach to architecture, which recognizes the multiplicity of meanings of the built world, also affords the possibility of accepting and incorporating the ever present and unresolvable contradictions between myth and critique, the two substances that inform the space in which we inescapably act.

If these very tentative conclusions seem to pose more questions than answers, and to cast some doubt upon the exactitude of some of the previous speculations, at least this last fact of the double, paradoxical nature of architecture together with all its implications, seems to be undisputable. Through asserting this fact, we have attempted to erase the remaining traces of the false dilemma of “scientific versus intuitive” that still haunts us. Neither pure fact nor pure myth, architecture must unashamedly depict its ambiguous nature. It seems appropriate to recall Barthes in closing: “There are those who want a text (an art, a painting) without a shadow, without the “dominant ideology”; but this is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity, a sterile text. . . . The text needs its shadows; this shadow is *a bit* of ideology, *a bit* of representation, *a bit* of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds: subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro.”²¹



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1. Roland Barthes, *Critique et Verité* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 45. Translation by the author.
2. For a substantive discussion on the concept of ideology and its implications for architecture see D. Agrest and M. Gandelsonas, "Semiotics and Architecture: Ideological Consumption or Theoretical Work," *Oppositions*, 1, 1973; see also M. Gandelsonas, "Linguistica nell'architettura," *Casabella*, n. 374, February, 1973.
3. Manfredo Tafuri, "L'architecture dans le Boudoir," *Oppositions*, 3, May 1974; Manfredo Tafuri, *Teoria e storia dell'architettura* (Bari: Laterza, 1971), ch. III.
4. Tafuri, "L'architecture dans le Boudoir," *Oppositions*, 3, May 1974, p. 55.
5. Colin Rowe, "Mannerism and Modern Architecture," *Architectural Review*, May 1950. "(Mannerism) that universal 'malaise', which in the arts, while retaining the externals of classical correctness, was obliged at the same time to disrupt the inner core of classical coherence," p. 292.
6. I leave aside the general problem of which reproduction and transformation are part: a larger system that includes the invention of a code. In the context of this article I will avoid a discussion of invention as well as reproduction and the problems they pose for theory.
7. Hyperbole: rhetorical figure that consists of an exaggeration of the terms.
 Anacoluto: rupture in the syntactic structure.
 Elipse: grammatical figure which consists of suppressing necessary element as far as intelligibility can be maintained.
 Irony or Antiphrasis: rhetorical figure that consists of expressing the contrary of the meaning intended (it is a connotation): "irony goes together with a sentiment of superiority."
 Metaphor: rhetorical figure of substitution of one term for another both of different classes. The term present in the sentence stands for the one that is meant but is absent. Based on association.
 Paradox: rhetorical operation that consists of presenting a meaning contrary to common sense. Absurd and shocking affirmation at first, it should conform to reality after analysis.
 These definitions, which are a sample of rhetorical figures and operations have been taken from Henri Morier, *Dictionnaire de poetique et de rhetorique* and Roland Barthes, "L'ancienne rethorique," *Communications* 16 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970). It is interesting to note that at different times in history, architects and artists were well versed in the arts of rhetoric, which they tried consciously to apply to their work. See, for instance, Giulio Carlo Argan, "La Retorica e l'arte barroca," and "Retorica e Architettura," *Studi e Note. Dal Bramante al Canova* (Rome: Mario Bulzoni Editore).
8. We talk about subversion in very precise terms, as the discourse whose purpose or effect is to unveil the fallacies of another well established ideological discourse. In that sense, Galileo's theories were as subversive in their moment as Marcel Duchamp's work on its own. The efficiency of subversion is diverse, and we will see later the differences of effects between the type of Galilean subversion (science) and that of art.
9. George Charbronier, *Entretiens avec Claude Levi-Strauss* (Paris: René Julliard et Librairie Plon, 1961). Translation by the author.
10. Barthes, *Critique et Verité*, p. 64.

11. For a suggestive treatment of the idea of myth and mythification in present west society, see Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957).

12. Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973).

13. Manfredo Tafuri, *Teorie e storia dell'architettura* (Bari: Laterza, 1970), p. 161.

14. Rowe, "Mannerism and Modern Architecture," *Architectural Review*, p. 292.

15. Although it would be possible to trace this process of degradation back into history, probably to the moment in which the notions of progress and change became active in history, it seems peculiar and characteristic of our present times, a result of the structural changes in society that have occurred in this century, which shifted the emphasis from us to consumption, from aesthetic contemplation to stylistic degradation. Degradation and consumption, these two words in this context recall the modern notion of kitsch—the operation which entails an uncritical debasement of the work of art, oriented toward an easy consumption. It takes very little effort to discover that the definition of kitsch applies to what we have been discussing in terms of mythification in architecture, and only the classic content that the artistic elite has attached to the notion of kitsch to defend its own lesser works has so far prevented us from seeing the parallel. It is only a matter of how inclusive one wants this notion to be. And, if we only take into account the type of operations involved in it, we might surprisingly find that kitsch is not only a reproduction of Mona Lisa on a towel, but also much of the present exquisite architecture.

16. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Vintage Books, 1973), p. 81.

17. And while this theoretical model seems to account for both Mannerism and the present, we need at this point further discussion and clarification because of the immediately apparent contradictions that a comparison with other views of the same problem produces. Particularly for its historical importance and the brilliance of its arguments, Colin Rowe's "Mannerism and Modern Architecture" needs to be discussed in this light. Rowe's contention that it is possible to understand not only some of the products of the early Modern Movement, but also the "mental climate" that produced them by drawing a parallel between this time and that of Mannerism, is at least in opposition to what has been said here about the avant-garde, insofar as it is a period of positive ideological impetus, while Mannerism is one of critical reflection. I believe it is not a case of two opposing tenets, but rather one of different focus: in my view what characterizes a "Mannerist" period is the absence of any attempt to produce new codes and rather to operate with them (as in Rowe's words: "it demands an orthodoxy within whose framework it might be heretical") in a critical fashion, which in turn eliminates the heroic period of the Modern Movement as the candidate for the Mannerist label (it was *mainly* concerned with a new codification), it is also true that some of Rowe's arguments and parallels help us to understand unequivocally at what levels modern architecture was still dependent on a pre-existing order and that modern architecture does not represent a total break with its past. The divergence in interpretation seems to arise from the fact that Rowe's impeccable

characterization of Mannerism seems not to include the notion of criticism that is central in the present argument. While my present use of the term "criticism" seems to imply a degree of consciousness and intention on the part of the artist that might not indeed be consciously manifest neither in the late Cinquecento architect nor in the present one, the actual effect produced by these operations on the codes of architecture in both cases, belong unquestionably, in my view, to the category of "criticism from within" as characterized so far. And this differs widely from the effect produced by early modern architecture. It seems that the work of deciphering proposed by these works of the heroic period had to do with discovering the new relationships between form and content, trying to match the symbols with their intended meanings, whereas today this interpretative task concentrates on the questioning of the nature of those bonds. In the end, as we will see later, what is important is not how far the analogy can be carried between two historical periods, but rather what type of knowledge its use might produce, and in this respect, Rowe's discussion of modern architecture continues to be a model of anti-empirical criticism, that type of criticism that relentlessly unfolds the object of analysis, uncovering its hidden meanings, and which, by its implacable scholarly precision, transforms that object into a treasure of knowledge.

18. Tafuri, "L'architecture dans le boudoir," *Oppositions*, 3, p. 57.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.* "We can only answer that, wishing to discover the tricks of a magician, it is often better to observe him from behind the scenes rather than to continue to stare at him from a seat in the audience."

21. Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte*, p. 53.

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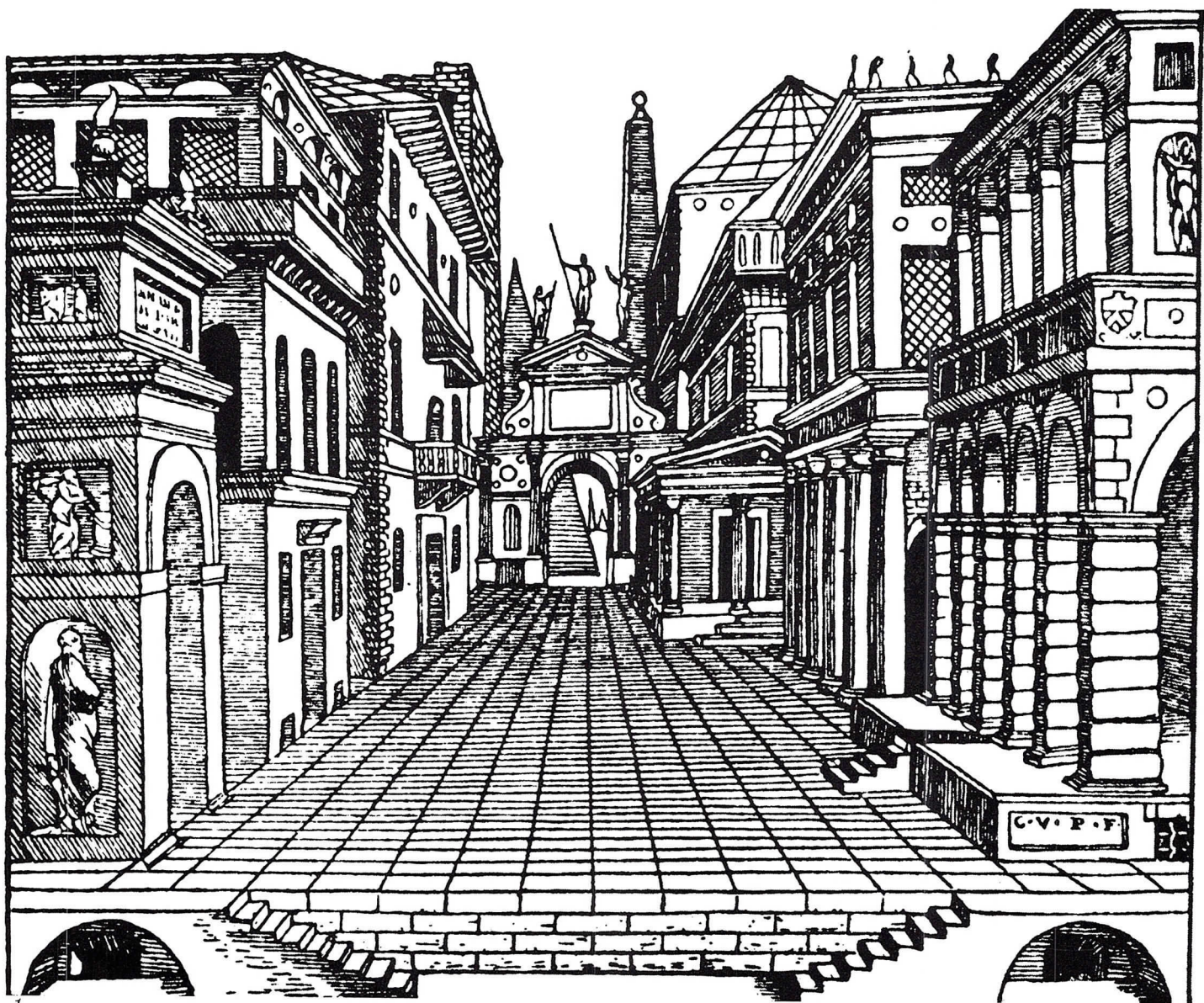
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Stagecraft and Statecraft:
The Architectural Integration of Public Life and Theatrical
Spectacle in Scamozzi's Theater at Sabbioneta¹

Kurt W. Forster





Theaters as we know them began to take shape only in the sixteenth century. They belong to that exceedingly rare kind of building which had to be conceived afresh, comparable to such entirely new and highly specialized categories of structures as factories and railroad stations. Cinquecento theaters are similar to these both in their novelty and in their degree of specialization. As with modern counterparts, the narrow definition of purpose limited the useful life of theater buildings in the Renaissance. Performance practice and the patron's expectations changed, making the buildings casualties of the rapid development they helped engender. Consequently theaters are today the least well preserved of all major categories of Renaissance architecture. As crucial as they were for the development of a public consciousness and the formation of certain architectural concepts, so rare are the surviving examples today: only two are still extant, one because an institution of patronage continued to exist and with it the fame of the architect; the other survived centuries of neglect by a stroke of luck. The former, Palladio's Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza, has come to be identified with Renaissance theaters *tout court*, when even then it was a highly unusual structure; but the latter, the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta, is a seminal example of the fully-fledged, separate theater building. 65

The modern theaters of the late sixteenth century emerged from the encounter of two entirely different traditions and their architectural genesis responded to highly contradictory demands. The significant early experiments in play-writing, production, and design of scenery occurred at major courtly centers like Ferrara, Urbino, Rome, Mantua, and Milan *without* permanent theater buildings. While the itinerant tradition of play-acting continued in improvised settings and temporarily adapted spaces, courtly patrons began to desire the construction of permanent theaters. The architectural models for these fixed theater structures were sought in antiquity. What architects were able to reconstruct from Vitruvius and the rather scanty remains of Roman theaters had, of course, only the most tenuous connections with contemporary theatrical practice.²

From Raphael's neo-antique theater planned in 1518 for

66 the Villa Madama (fig. 3) to Vignola's project of 1560 for the Palazzo Farnese in Piacenza, permanent theaters tended to be treated as open-air spaces, amphitheatrically tiered but oriented on a proscenium or courtyard.³ Though recognizable as a generic reconstruction of antique Roman theaters, they found their place within princely residences where they served as the site of courtly pageants rather than for intimate play-acting. That neither the Villa Madama nor the theater at Piacenza was ever built matters little in the long-term history of the theater, for others, such as Serlio's temporary theater of 1539, and the ducal theater at Ferrara in 1565, continued the adoption of amphitheatrical seating and combined it with one of the most distinctive elements of recent invention, the large built and painted stage architecture of perspectival construction.⁴

Late in the sixteenth century theaters were enlarged and preferably housed in separate buildings that occupied conspicuous urban sites. This change of site—from the private courtly residence to the public urban setting—also brought about important changes in the internal structure of theater buildings. Archaeological interest on the one hand, and lively contemporary practice and appreciation of stagecraft on the other, each contributed completely diverse elements which were to be mounted together in the early modern theater: while the arrangement of stepped tiers in the shape of a halved amphitheater basically returned to an antique Roman component of permanent theater building, the stage with its steeply receding architectural sets, chiefly representing urban spaces, constituted the distinctively Renaissance element. How this combination came about, what the reasons for its immediate and lasting success may have been, and why it carried such significance in its age is the subject of this essay.

Scamozzi's Theater at Sabbioneta

Scarce and partial as the architectural evidence of Renaissance theaters is, it suggests an investigation from hindsight, beginning with the only surviving example that gathered the results of a century of experimentation and thrust them onto a historically consequential path. The theater at Sabbioneta (fig. 2) is an integral part of an entire new town which Vespasiano Gonzaga (1531–1591) had laid out accord-

ing to an intricate set of considerations.⁵ He commissioned Vincenzo Scamozzi to design the theater in 1588 and saw it inaugurated two years later. The architect left the following record of the commission: "a few years later [after the completion of the Teatro Olimpico], we had the Odéon or Theater for His Excellency Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga built from new foundations in his city of Sabbioneta, capable of accommodating a goodly number of people, along with several rooms for various purposes on both ends of the building, and with an orchestra and stepped rows for seating. The proscenium and the perspective of the set represent a large square with a stately street in the middle and others to both sides, with many and varied edifices also built of wood and painted in imitation of real buildings."⁶

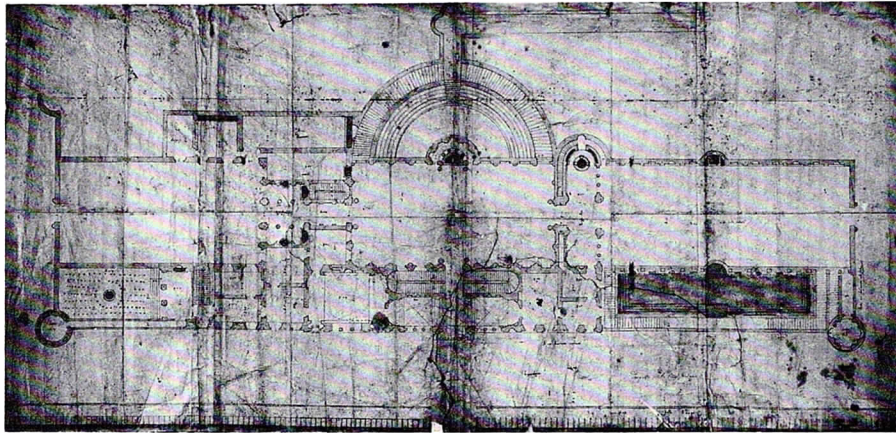
A small autograph copy of Scamozzi's design (fig. 4) has long been known, but a critical comparison with the physical evidence of the building should be made.⁷ Bounded by streets on three sides, the theater consists of a simple block roughly three times as long as it is wide. On the north and south sides, auxiliary spaces are set aside on the street level and on the upper story, while the space of the actual theater remains undivided through the full height of the building. On the north side a doorway leads into the ante-rooms or foyers, which connect vertically via a stairwell housed outside the actual theater building. On the south side, the ground plan is identical and the use of spaces likewise differentiated. While the foyer reserves the upstairs for *gentildonne* and the ground floor for *gentilhuomini*, the service spaces on the south flank are assigned to the musicians above and the actors below. In addition to the north and south entrances, a centrally placed portal on the long west facade gives access to the orchestra. The installations for the seating of spectators and the stage with its permanent sets are inserted into an otherwise undivided space of some eighty-eight feet in length and thirty-seven in width, reaching a total height of almost forty-two feet. The curving *cavea* rises over five tiers to one third of the interior height toward an elevated loggia with twelve columns which carry an entablature crowned by twelve Olympian deities (see fig. 2). Three columns on each side are partly engaged in a stucco wall that curves away from the straight surface of the bearing wall.

3 Neo-antique theater planned for the Villa Madama, Rome. Raphael, architect, c.1518. Detail of a working drawing, Florence, Uffizi A 273. The hemicyclical cavea of the theater was to be dug from the hillside of Monte Mario. In a further development of the plan, documented in the Uffizi drawing A 314, the cavea was to be cut more deeply, the orchestra

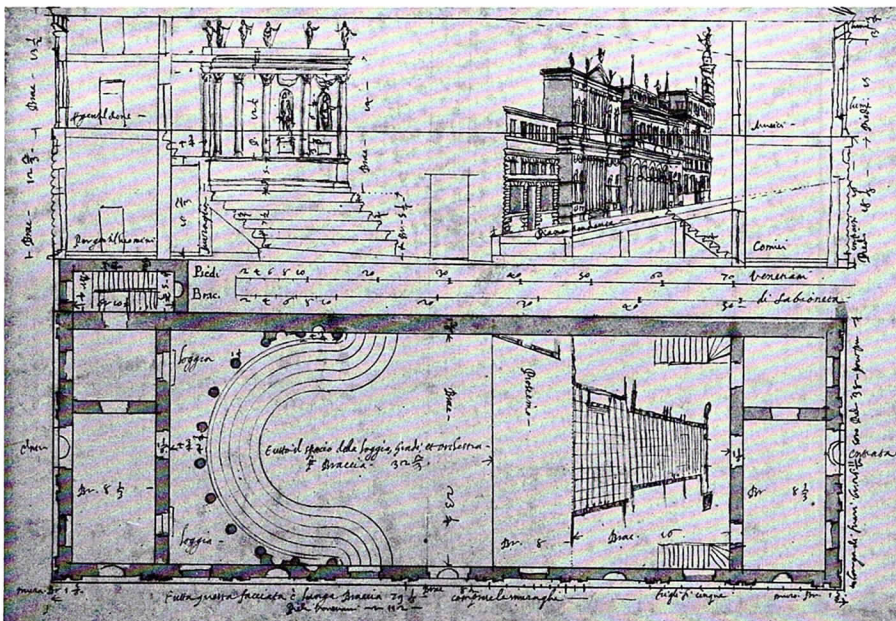
extended and the straight proscenium lined with a colonnade; in short, the later stage envisaged a more Vitruvian solution.

of the drawing renders the theater building in longitudinal section, the lower half in plan. North is to the upper left.

4 Autograph copy of Scamozzi's design for the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta, 1588. Pen and wash drawing, detail of a sheet in Florence, Uffizi 191A. The upper half



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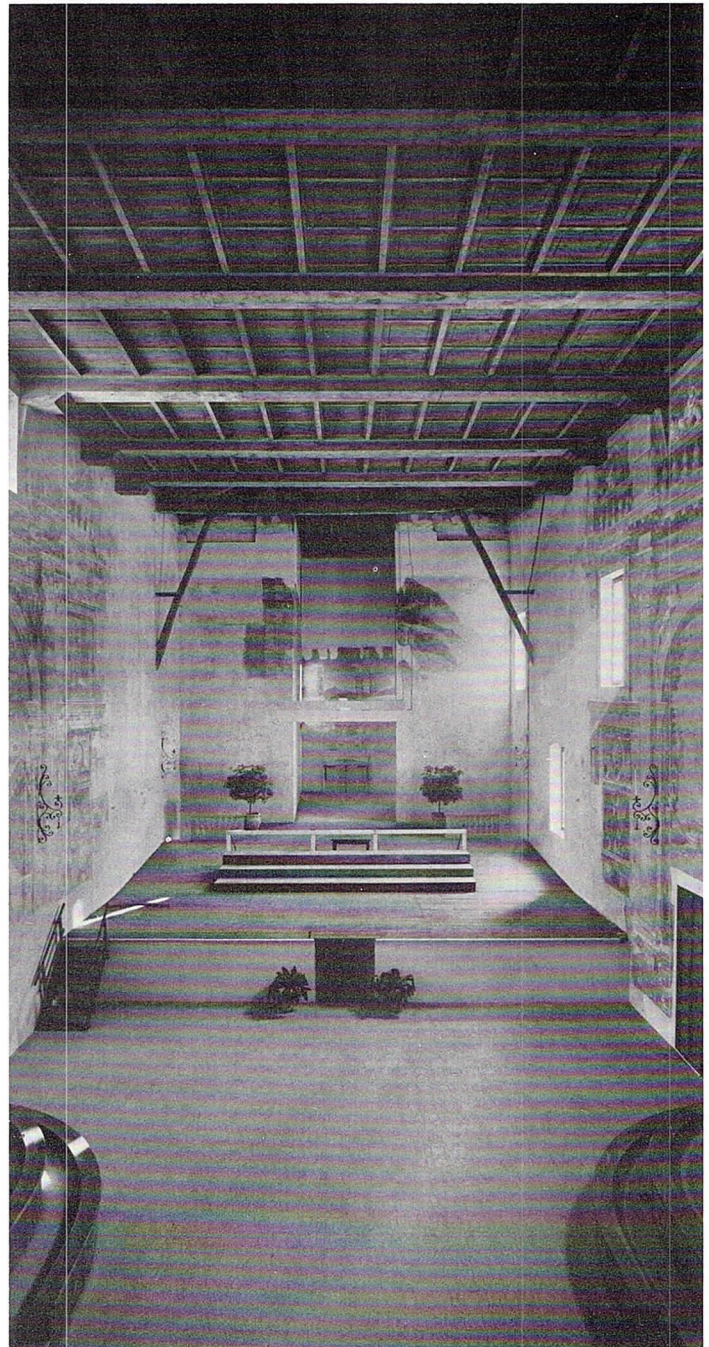
5 *Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta.*
View of the stage area from the
elevated loggia. The sets are lost.
Their deep stage avenue terminated
in the central recess where the
frescoed horizon and towers are still
visible.

68 The amphitheatrical recess of the *cavea* finds its complement in the deep perspective of the permanent stage set. As the loggia appears to merge with the long walls of the theater, so the lateral houses of the set were to emerge from these walls and to extend into illusory depth. The complementary relationship between the auditorium and the stage is further strengthened by the counter-slant of the orchestra floor with respect to the inclination of the stage, and, above all, by the optical calculation of the stage architecture toward an elevated central viewpoint.

Three functionally and socially different spheres were each served by separate access: the *gentilhuomini* and *gentildonne* entered through the north portal, the plebeians gained separate access to the orchestra and tiers through the west entrance, and the actors and musicians used the south door. Separation and hierarchy of access were even more pronounced when it was possible for the ducal party to reach the theater over an elevated walkway or *cavalcavia*.⁸

Before going further, it is necessary to compare the copy of Scamozzi's design with the theater's actual state. Virtually abandoned as a theater soon after construction and later used as a warehouse and temporary hospital, the theater fell into complete disrepair. The stage substructure and set are totally lost, the wooden tiers have been entirely and not very reliably rebuilt, a central entrance into the orchestra, bisecting the *cavea*, has been opened arbitrarily, while the newly raised stage floor and the slanting orchestra floor only approximate the originals.⁹ The simple wooden roof is a replacement; in part, and certainly above the stage, it may have been covered with stretched cloth in the manner of antique *velaria* so as to enhance the sense of an outdoor space.

As it stands the building varies in one essential respect from Scamozzi's drawing: the backstage rooms have been reduced allowing the central alley of the set to be nearly doubled by its extension to the south wall of the building (fig. 5). This was clearly a change of plan Scamozzi made during his supervision of construction and decoration.¹⁰

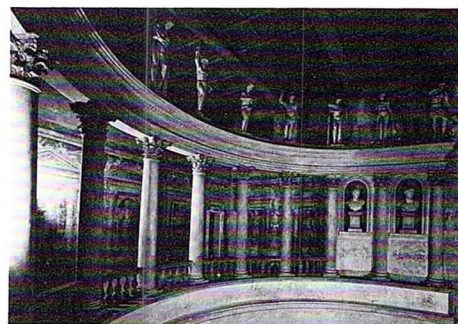


The copy of Scamozzi's design includes no references to painted decorations and is sparse in its indication of sculpture and stage decor, but the architect's intentions speak clearly nonetheless: spectators and actors, *cavea* and stage, were to be brought together in one unified, but highly differentiated space. The interior of the theater building was to be treated like an exterior. Painted facades and the columnar loggia recalled courtyard elevations, and the stage represented, in Scamozzi's words, "a grand square with a stately street." Such late Renaissance theaters challenged architects to design interior spaces in the guise of public exteriors. Since the interior of the theater consisted primarily of false facades, the transition from the *cavea* to the actual walls of the building (fig. 6) and the link between them and the false architecture of the stage became crucial¹¹—all the more so as stage sets were to be treated according to the criterion of perspective.

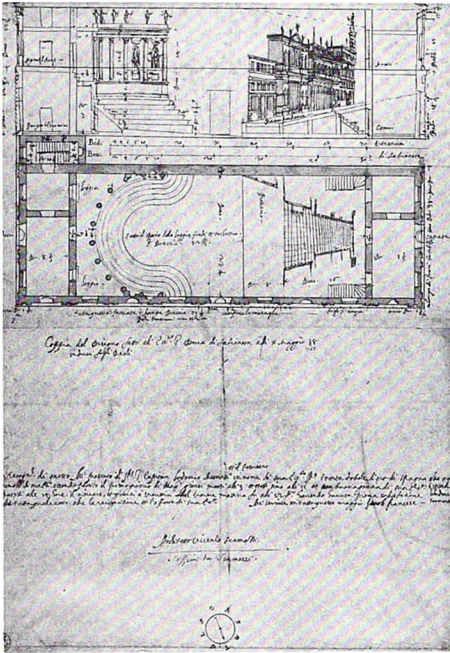
The Genesis of the Modern Theater

Scamozzi's design for the theater at Sabbioneta assembled its various component parts almost in the manner of an architectural collage. Each element has its own history and functional qualification. A brief historical evaluation of these parts will trace the coordinates for the development of Renaissance theaters.

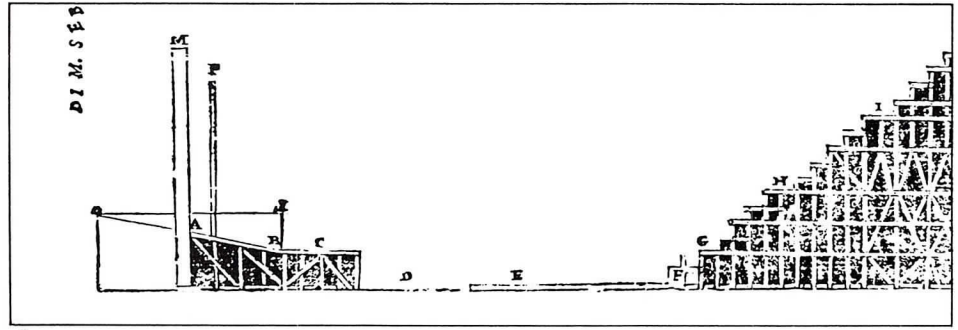
The history of late medieval stage practice shows that theater meant performance long before it designated a building. The first elaborate stage architecture and machinery were no doubt constructed in churches for liturgical drama, while secular plays were performed in the open or under cover according to circumstance and convenience. Several elements became prominent in the early Renaissance for temporary yet very elaborately mounted productions and for those with more stable arrangements in courtyards and indoors: a confrontation of actors and spectators within an increasingly narrow space, a hierarchy of view provided from stepped seating, and an actual or suggested columnar enclosure. The consequences of these arrangements are readily apparent and they are born out by the later development of theater architecture: first, the tendency toward a stable hierarchy of spectators 'fixes' their eyes on the open and sharply limited area of the stage; second, only at



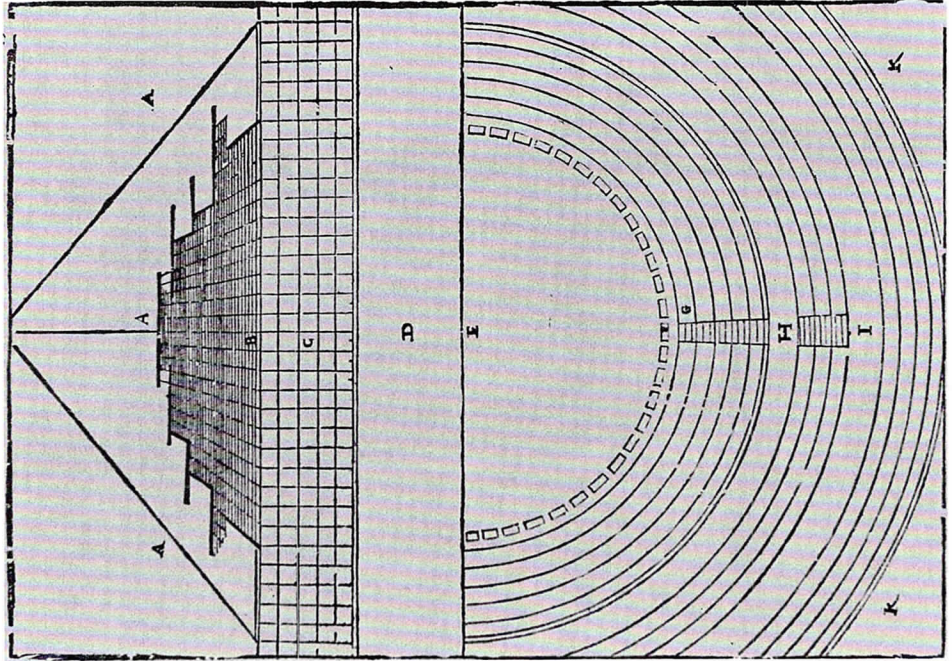
6 Detail of the east wall in the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta. The elevated loggia appears to merge with the wall. Before the extensive loss of sculptural decoration and wall painting, the transition, aided by carefully coordinated orders and ledges, must have been very gradual.



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7 Ground plan of the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta. Sketch by Scamozzi (detail). A comparison of figs. 7 and 9 conveys the similar disposition of Scamozzi's and Serlio's theaters. In contrast to Serlio's temporary construction Scamozzi encased cavea and stage in a permanent building where manifold correspondences and controlled gradations between auditorium and stage could be established. Scamozzi reversed the hierarchy of seating, greatly extended the depth of the stage and the perspective of the set.

composed of the horizontal proscenium (C) and the inclined stage (A-B) for the foreshortened sets. The area corresponding to the classical orchestra is marked D and E. The noblest spectators have their seats in the first (or lowest) rows. The others are assigned to the upper rows of the cavea in descending social order as one ascends the ranks of the theater.

9 Ground plan of Serlio's temporary theater for Vicenza. (From Serlio's Libro secondo, fol. 45.)

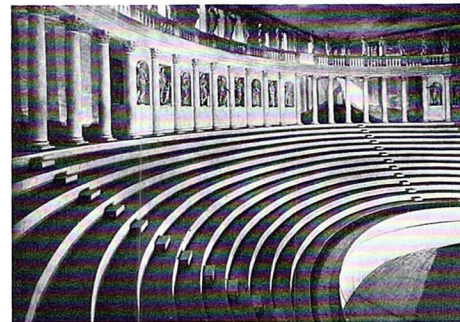
8 Longitudinal section through Serlio's temporary theater, set up in the courtyard of the Palazzo Porto in Vicenza in 1539. (From Serlio's Libro secondo, fol. 43v.) The stage is

this point could the stage acquire a tableau-like character permitting the design of scenery to become an important branch of art; third, the concept of theater interiors as exterior spaces leads logically to a new relationship between spectator and stage. In the early productions the scene tended to be fixed and reasonably permanent, while the seating of spectators was either variable or temporary, or both.¹² Later, with the establishment of specialized theaters, the seating became rigidly fixed according to ranks and rows, while the scene became the prime locus of change and impermanence.

The theater at Sabbioneta has one of its principal antecedents in the temporary construction Serlio¹³ devised at Vicenza in 1539 (figs. 8, 9). He inserted his wooden structure into a courtyard that had a larger seating capacity than Scamozzi's at Sabbioneta, but was very close to it in size and disposition. Both are roughly eighty feet in length and divided into a slightly larger half for the auditorium and a smaller one for the stage. The arrangement of Serlio's stage (see fig. 8) is particularly pertinent to Scamozzi's work: the proscenium (C) is raised to about the eye level of a person standing in the orchestra (D). The proscenium is kept completely open in its entire width—as Serlio's woodcut of the *Scena comica* indicates—whereas the houses to both sides are steeply foreshortened so as to suggest “superb palaces, grand temples, diverse houses, and, seen from close by and at a distance, spacious squares surrounded by various buildings, the straightest long avenues intersected by others, etc. . . .”¹⁴ So obvious are the similarities between Serlio's and Scamozzi's plans that the dissimilarities need emphasis. First of all, the hierarchy of spectators and the *cavea* are thoroughly revised by Scamozzi. At Sabbioneta (fig. 7), the auditorium is strictly divided into amphitheatrical tiers and an upper semicircular loggia. This arrangement is also more hierarchical than Palladio's in the Teatro Olimpico (fig. 11). The continuously tiered auditorium of the Olimpico is topped by a colonnade but provides no seating precisely in the important central segment of the arc. At Sabbioneta Scamozzi accommodated the ducal family in the loggia and rendered it physically inaccessible from the tiers (fig. 10). In addition to this hierarchical distinction of spectators, he also altered the connection between them



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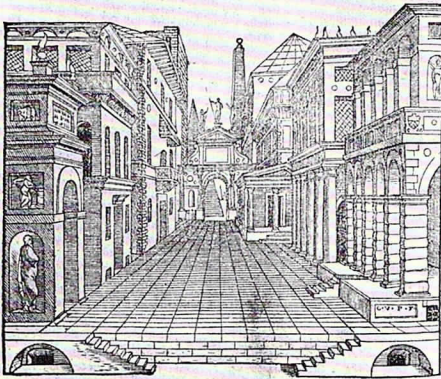
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10 View of the cavea in the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta. Scamozzi, architect, 1588–1590. The loggia of the Gonzaga Theater is reserved for the most prestigious spectators and it remains inaccessible from the ranks of the cavea. In Palladio's Teatro Olimpico the colonnade on top of the amphitheatrical steps is largely closed and the best seats are close to the orchestra (cf. also figs. 18, 21).

11 View of the cavea in the Teatro Olimpico. Palladio, architect, 1580.

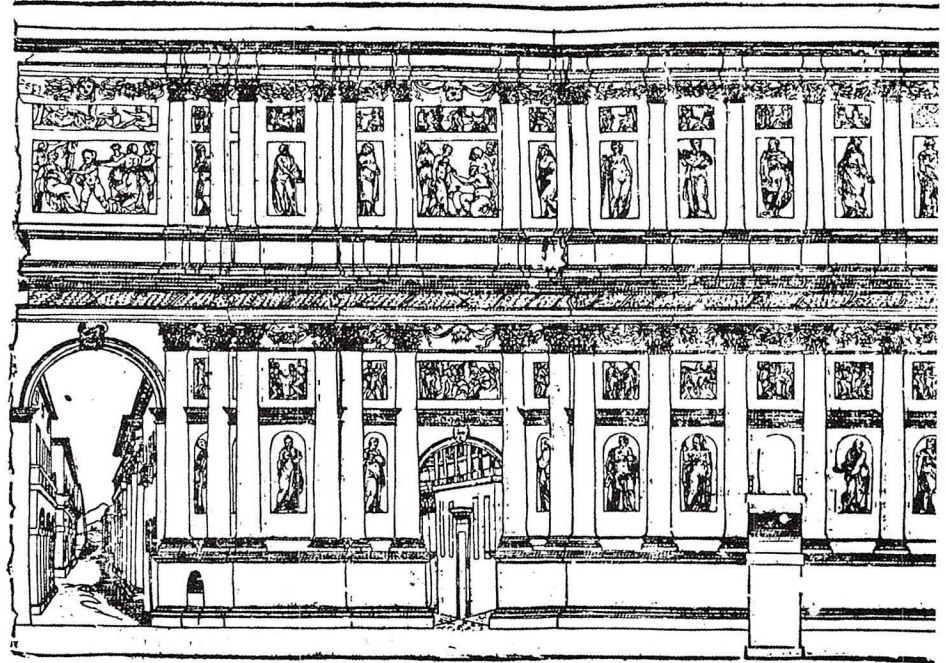
DI M. SEBASTIAN SERLIO

personaggi, che rappresentano il vino, come furia una femina ad un balcone, & dentro d'una porta, et andio qualche animale: queste cose non configlio che si facino, perche non hanno il moto & pare rappresentano il vino: ma qualche persona che dorma à buon proposito, ouero qualche cane, & altro animale che dorma, perche non hanno il moto. Ancora si possono accomodare qualche statue, & altre cose finite di marmo, & altra materia di alcune li sculture, si fauola dipinta sopra un muro, che in ludo si sempre si faccia così. Ma nel rappresentare cose uiae, le quali habbino il moto: nell'estremo di questo libro se tratterà, & darò il modo come s'habbino à fare.

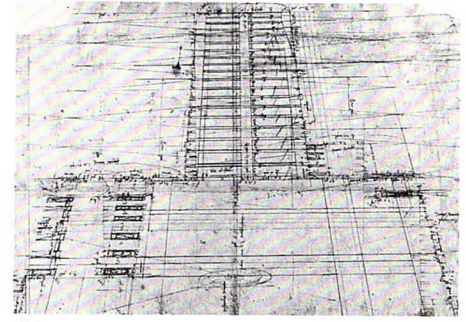


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12 Model set for the Tragic Scene, woodcut from Sebastiano Serlio, Libro secondo, fol. 46v. (See also fig. 1.) In the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta Scamozzi was to extend the perspective set of houses on both sides so as to create the impression of a stage architecture gradually merging with the lateral walls of the theater (cf. fig. 4).



13 Scene Front of the Vitruvian Theater as reconstructed in Daniele Barbaro's translation of Vitruvius, Ten Books on Architecture (Venice, 1556). Woodcut designed by Palladio. Daniele Barbaro and Palladio based their solution of the Vitruvian theater on their studies of the Teatro Berga at Vicenza. The antique scene front is reconstructed with three arched niches in which prismatic movable periacts are mounted. A different perspectival view is painted on each of their three sides. Palladio's plan for the Teatro Olimpico did not include the deeply recessed stage avenues that were only added after his death, altering profoundly the neo-antique character of the theater as Palladio had conceived it.



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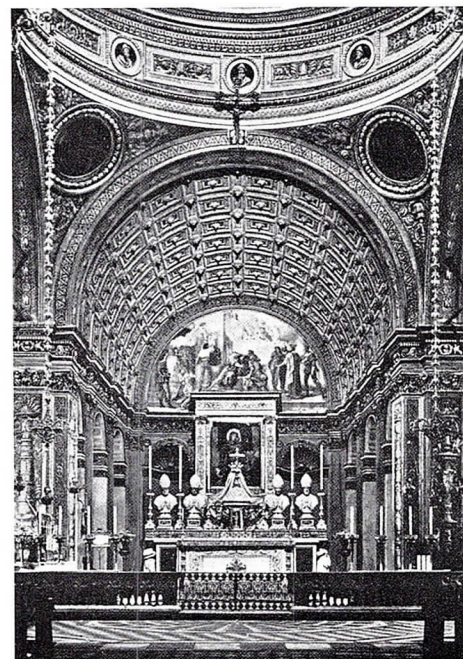
14 Baldassare Peruzzi, construction drawing for the stage set of Plautus' Athenian comedy The Bacchides. Florence, Uffizi A 269.

and the stage. He removed the scene front altogether, merged the stage architecture laterally with the decorations of the theater's interior walls, and greatly extended the depth of the receding stage set. Consequently, the area of the stage was now continuous and unified, even more so than Serlio had anticipated with the illustration of the *Scena tragica* (fig. 12).

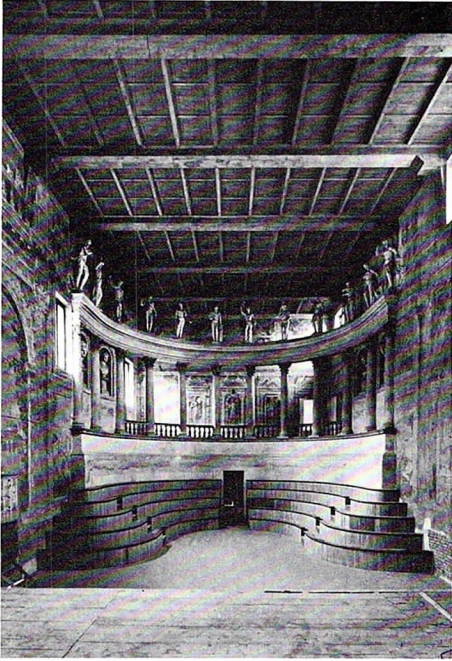
Serlio knew very well that he proposed “sets and theaters as they are customary in our time,” whereas many of his contemporaries, especially architects and writers, were more interested in the reconstruction of the Vitruvian or antique theaters in general.¹⁵ But contemporary interests left their mark on the various reconstructions of the Vitruvian theater as well; for example, the Renaissance preoccupation with perspective is largely responsible for the odd combination of an elaborate neo-antique scene front with illusionistic perspective views in Daniele Barbaro's reconstruction of the Teatro Berga as we know it from Palladio's illustrations (fig. 13).

There is no doubt that elaborate perspectival representations and backdrops became one of the major attractions of theatrical productions during the sixteenth century. Bernardo Prosperi's awed description of a Ferrarese stage set during carnival in 1508 is particularly eloquent on this point: “But what has been best in all these festivities and plays are the stage sets in which they were acted; there was a street in perspective . . . with houses, churches, towers, and gardens, in such a fashion that one will never tire of looking at them for all the many things which they contain, all of them ingeniously conceived and well executed; and I believe that they will not let them be destroyed but will save them for another occasion.”¹⁶

Bramante's and Peruzzi's connection of real and fictive spaces—above all Bramante's false choir in S. Maria presso San Satiro (fig. 15) as a kind of monumental stage set for the theater of the liturgy and Peruzzi's illusionistic wall decorations—stood behind the swift development of perspectival stage design of the High Renaissance (fig. 14). Serlio's Second Book of 1545 and Daniele Barbaro's *Pratica della prospettiva* . . . of 1569 merely codified a widely ac-



15 *False Choir in the church of S. Maria presso San Satiro, Milan. Bramante, architect, 1479–1483. When the Oratory was to be enlarged on a small parcel of land, there was no space to accommodate a chancel. Bramante resolved this difficulty with a virtuoso piece of architectural illusionism. The priest is officiating on a kind of liturgical proscenium while the tunnel-vaulted chancel reaches into a purely optical depth. The stucco imitation of the coffering is physically in a plane with the altar itself.*

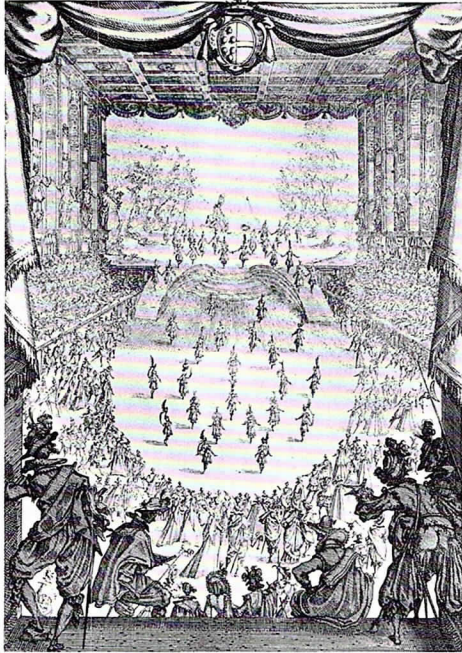


16 *Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta.*
View from the ducal loggia toward
the stage.

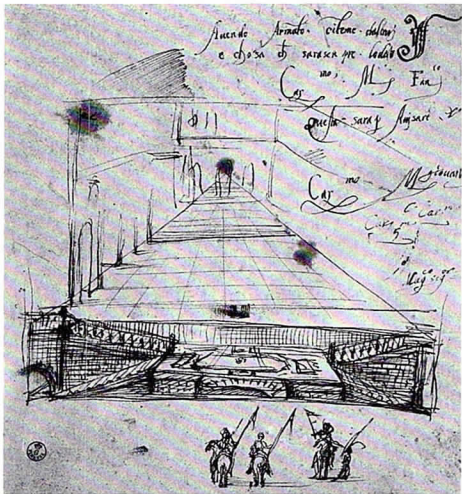
cepted practice in which the gradual transition from the wood-cloth-and-stucco architecture of the set to the painted perspective of the backdrop was a main concern. The design of illusionistically convincing sets required, in Daniele Barbaro's words, "a method of reconciling the stage buildings with the paintings on the walls so that the painted architecture appears like actual buildings."¹⁷ Such continuous transitions were obviously intended at Sabbioneta. Both Serlio's woodcut and Scamozzi's drawing indicated an ideal horizon, and they were appropriately different. Fixing his perspectival horizon in relationship to the bodily scale of the actors, Serlio treated stage and actors as a *tableau* unto itself. The most privileged spectators were still seated in the front rows, but their particular view of the stage did not determine the design of the set. This uncertainty troubled many theorists and practitioners during the sixteenth century. Scamozzi may have contributed to the resolution of the issue with his design for the theater at Sabbioneta. He reserved the elevated loggia for Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga and his retinue, and he calculated his stage architecture accordingly. In this way the entire stage decor was visually anchored in the eyes of the duke. As Klein and Zerner have observed in their discussion of Renaissance stage design, "to the degree that the system [of perspective] establishes itself, its correlation with a privileged spectator is made more deliberate."¹⁸ From his loggia (fig. 16) above the crowd of spectators, Vespasiano overlooked the urban square of the stage and the movement of actors as if he were standing on the balcony of his palace with its commanding view of the nearby square.

The novel character of Scamozzi's 'absolutist theater' deserves some further consideration. Conceptually it rested on a privileged spectator whose elevated central position allowed him to overlook both the audience and the stage. Viewed from his loggia, the socially inferior spectators were ranked on the tiers and spread across the sloping orchestra floor toward the stage where the orthogonals of its set began to recede to infinity. Scamozzi's sketch for the theater makes this plainly evident and a closer examination of the decorative program can explain its ramified significance.

17 *The Medici Theater in Florence on the occasion of the wedding of Ferdinando Gonzaga and Caterina de' Medici. Etching by Jacques Callot, 1616.*

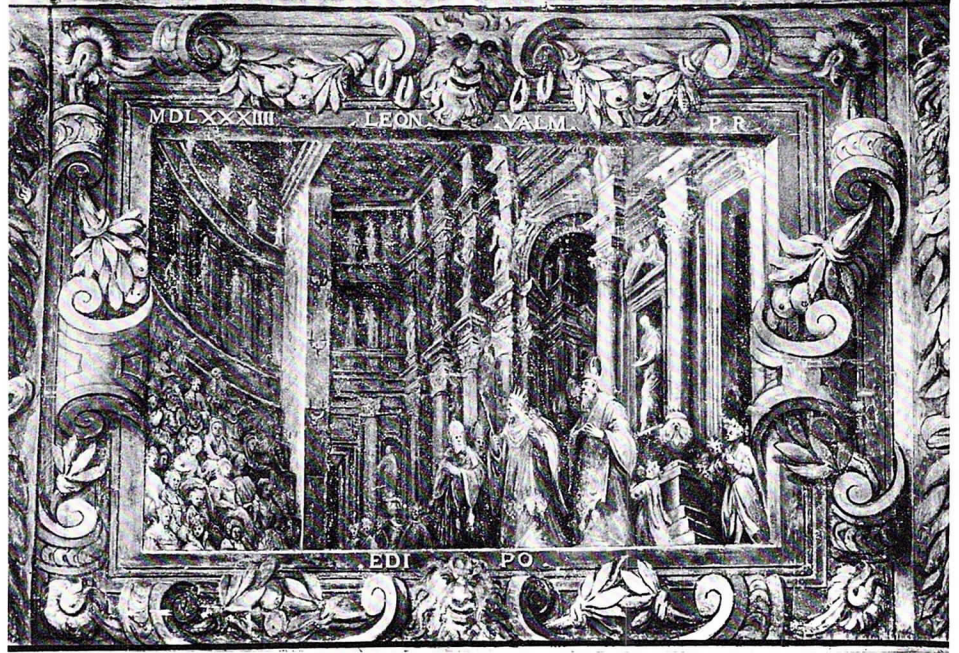


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18 *The Inaugural Performance of Oedipus Rex in the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza. Fresco in the anteroom of the theater, late 1580's. Figs. 19 and 17 starkly illustrate the change of preferred view: the neo-antique*



18

19 *Perspectival study of a stage with proscenium stairs, probably for the Medici Theater in the Uffizi, Florence. Bernardo Buontalenti, architect, c.1586. Florence, Uffizi 2306A. Buontalenti's sketch of the stage assumed an elevated point of view as did Callot's etching (fig. 17) and Scamozzi's project for the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta.*

tradition revived the privileged seating in the front rows around the orchestra, while the experimental new theaters of the later sixteenth century manifested a predilection for the elevated viewpoint.

76 Taken together the *cavea* and stage resemble an elongated tear-shape, as the conical neck, corresponding to the deeply recessed stage, opens into the curving loggia. The transition between stage and auditorium was as gradual as possible so as to establish their complementarity. Another princely theater, Buontalenti's in the Uffizi at Florence (fig. 19), was still under construction when the Venetian envoy reported in 1576 that the Grand Duke Francesco the First "is building . . . a hall for the representation of comedies, the floor of which is going to be higher on one end than on the other so as not to block the view of those who are placed further back."¹⁹ This rational explanation did not tell the whole story. Equally as important as convenience were hierarchy and the structural equivalence between the area of the spectators and that of the actors. Jacques Callot's engraving of the Medici Theater, on the occasion of the wedding of Ferdinando Gonzaga and Caterina de' Medici in 1616 (fig. 17), assumed a point of view slightly above the princely spectators.

Earlier traditions had established a very different relationship between privileged spectators and the action on stage. Frescoes in the Teatro Olimpico recorded productions which the Academy sponsored in the decades before the construction of Palladio's theater, as well as of the inaugural performance in 1585, all of them from the preferred vantage point in the 'senatorial' front rows (fig. 18). The viewer's position at the verge of the proscenium, slightly below the median level of the stage, excluded other spectators from the field of vision and made stage and actors loom larger. Seen from the front rows the stage architecture of the Teatro Olimpico assumed a towering quality and the stage action was physically 'elevated' above the spectator.

Scamozzi's plans for Sabbioneta are, therefore, in sharp contrast to the Olimpico, but analogous to the Medici Theater in Florence. Having prepared a now lost treatise on perspective in 1575 and visited Rome extensively in the late seventies and mid-eighties, Scamozzi certainly knew Florentine developments. If we also consider Mantuan experiences, which include the grandiose spectacles produced by Leone Leoni,²⁰ the seemingly sudden leap taken by Scamozzi will appear as only the last in a series of steps

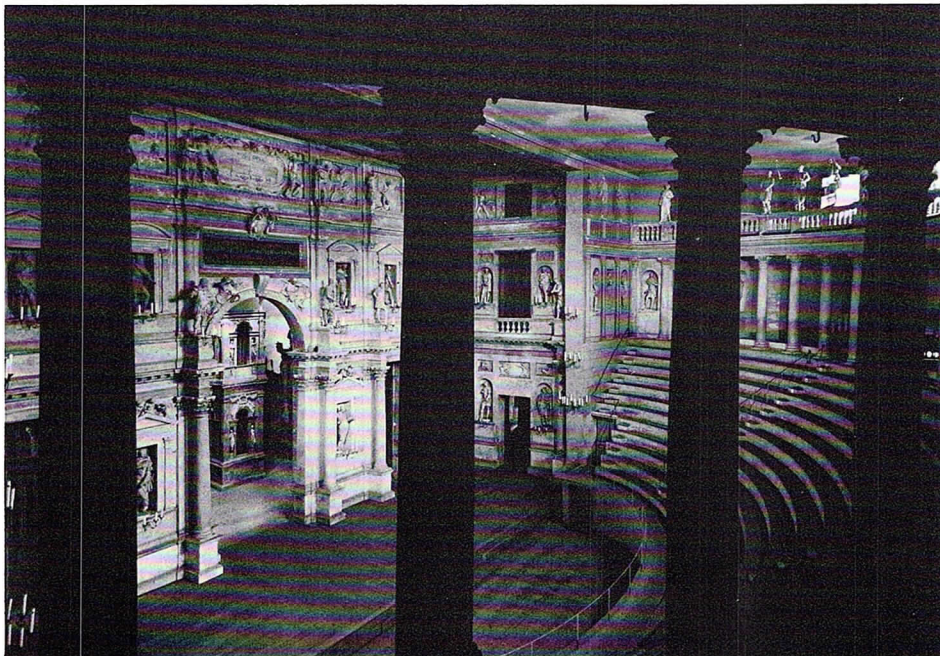
toward the solution of the Sabbioneta theater.

The reciprocal coordination of auditorium and stage in the theaters of the later sixteenth century did not aim for a superficial unification of their disjunctive parts, nor did the increasing use of stage machinery and lighting effects serve to satisfy purely sensationalist curiosity. Well before the stage technicians went overboard with mechanical contraptions for fantastic *intermezzi* that seemed capable of setting heaven and hell in motion, the psychology of the new theater began to be well understood. Contemporary stage practice experimented, still rather innocently, with the new media psychology. Leone de'Sommi, the Jewish stage director at Mantua, reminisced in his *Fourth Dialogue*: "once I had to produce a tragedy, and, while the stage was brightly lit during the happy events, as soon as the first sorry accident occurred—the unexpected death of a queen—and the chorus began to lament that the sun could not bear to shine on such evil, I contrived (in advance, of course) that at this instant most of the stage lights not used for the perspective were covered or extinguished: this caused a profound impression of horror among the spectators and was universally praised."²¹ Around the mid-sixteenth century, aided by the new theater buildings, stage productions began to acquire a new dimension, a richer shading and characterization in which the use of lighting held special significance. Such inward animation not only enhanced the reality of the action, it also directed the spectator toward a more private experience of stage events than he had been accustomed to. Nevertheless, the psychology of Cinquecento productions still remained predominantly a class psychology which put social significance ahead of private meaning. Hence the stage was kept *public* as much as possible, and, in architectural terms, public was almost synonymous with *urban*. Scamozzi's theater at Sabbioneta represented perhaps the ultimate solution for the princely theater as a public stage. Leone de'Sommi speculated on the etymology of the term 'scene' and suggested ingeniously that the sound of *scèhonà* made the Hebrew word for "street" or "closed ranging of houses," so that he considered it likely that public spectacles had been held since time immemorial.²² This made sense at least within the general framework of Leone de'Sommi's and his pa-



20 Design for the scenery of *La Vedova*. Pen and wash, 1569. Florence, Uffizi 404P. A telling example of the established tradition of using well-known townscapes as stage backdrops sometimes, as in *La Vedova*, representing the very town where the play was produced.

77



21 View of the scene front through the columns above the cavea in the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza. Palladio, architect, 1580.



22 Part of the stage set for the Teatro Olimpico. The set with its five radial avenues leading into perspectively exaggerated depth was designed by Vincenzo Scamozzi in 1584 as a Tragic Scene in the tradition of Peruzzi (fig. 14) and Serlio (fig. 12), but realized at a monumental scale for the performance of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex in 1585 (see fig. 18).

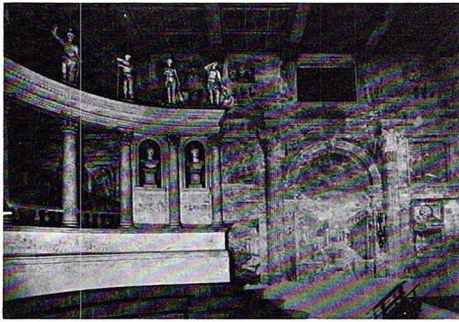
tron's concept of the theater, and, one should add, of the world, "which they considered . . . nothing other than a stage or theater where a continual spectacle is made of our actions."²³

Within the limited but symbolically infinite sphere of the theater the ruler was fully present in public but the stage world subjected to a controlling will as only he could exercise it in reality. In the publicly staged plays the prince was at once the ideal spectator and a subject of attention for others.

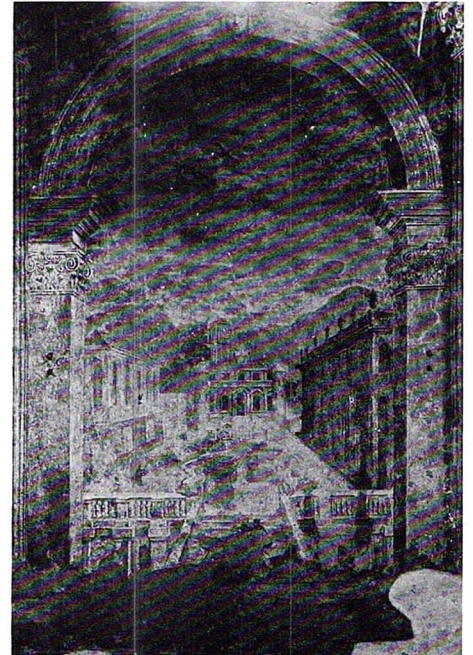
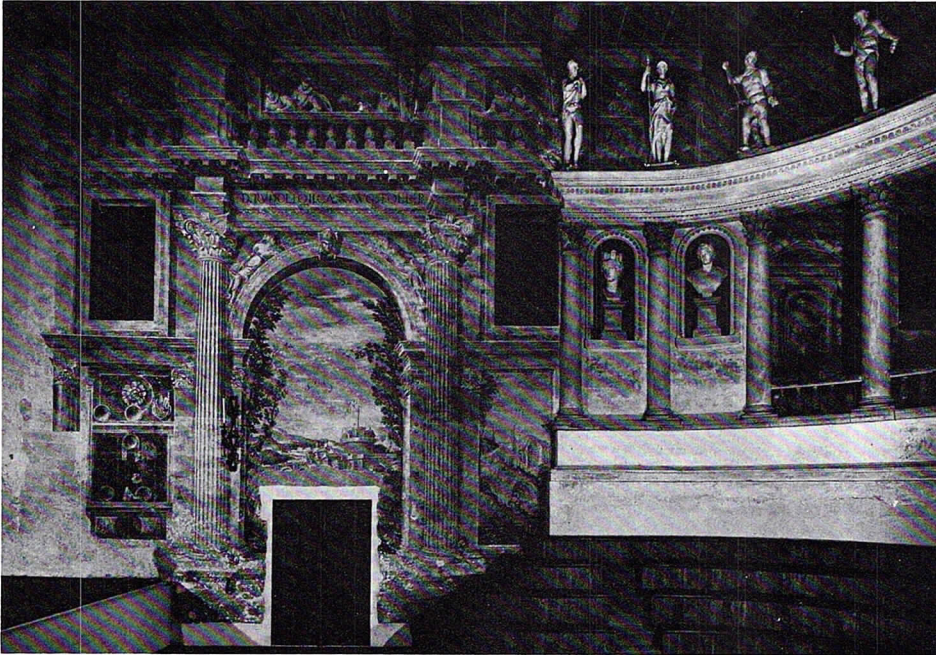
City and Theater

It is a clear indication of the Renaissance view of human affairs that the cityscape should have become the favored theatrical scenery (fig. 20). Even the conservative interest in the Vitruvian theater hardly affected this attitude; in fact, the palatial scene fronts like that of the Teatro Olimpico (fig. 21) only emphasized the grand urban character of stage architecture, an aspect that was especially praised by the stage manager Ingegneri for scenes of royal pomp.²⁴ Descriptions and drawings for stage prospects leave no doubt that cityscapes, a totally man-made world, were both naively admired and considered the only adequate setting for events of great historical import. Stage architecture, like real building, was fraught with public significance. Serlio was very explicit when he suggested an irregular jumble of houses for comedies dealing "with private citizens, lawyers, merchants, parasites, and other similar folk," in contrast to the *Scena tragica* (see fig. 12), where "the buildings need to be those of great people: because the great love affairs and unthinkable accidents, violent and cruel deaths, have always occurred in the houses of patricians, dukes and princes, or kings, and therefore one does not represent buildings in such scenery without giving them a noble aspect. . . ."²⁵ It was a question of adequacy or decorum, not only for the architect but also for the theorist and stage director (fig. 22).

By the time of Scamozzi's theater in Sabbioneta, the *regista* Ingegneri ranked decorum, richness, and ornament right below verisimilitude, but decorum took precedence over verisimilitude when Ingegneri dealt with eminent and priv-

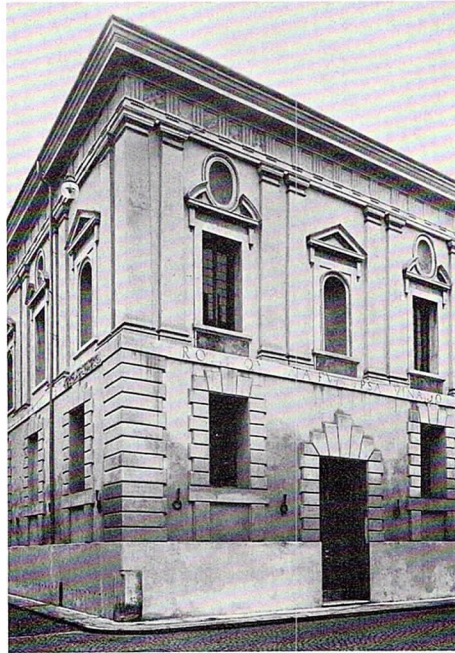


23 Veduta of the Capitoline Square in Rome. Fresco on the east wall of the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta, c.1587.

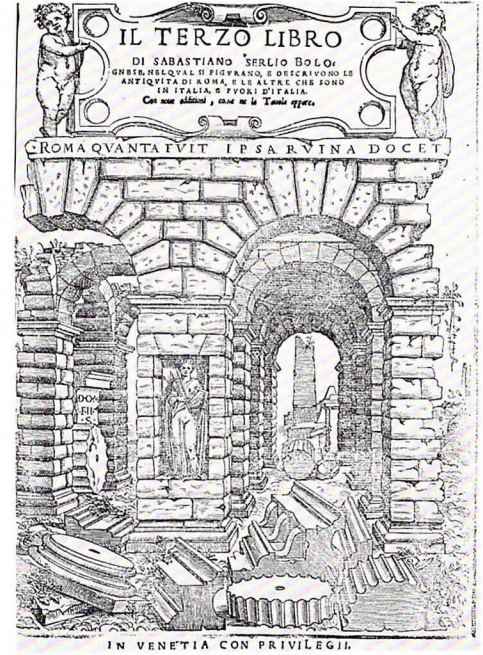


24 Veduta of Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome. Fresco on the west wall of the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta, c.1587. These views of prominent antique monuments in Rome provide the ideological stage for the affirmation of rule in Sabbioneta. Note the continuity of fictive architecture as well as the contrast between the Roman views and the still-life 'genre' of the painted windows marking the transition to the architecture of the set.

25 The Capitoline Square. Detail from the fresco on the east wall of the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta, c.1587.



26 Exterior of the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta. Scamozzi, architect, 1588–1590. The elevation, especially the vertical proportioning of the windows, betrays the fact that the interior is undivided in height. Originally the niches alternating with the upper-story windows and the shell-niches in their pediments were adorned with sculptures. The pictorial decoration has completely disappeared and only fragments of the repeated inscription *ROMA QVANTA FVIT IPSA RVINA DOCET* have survived.



27 Frontispiece to Sebastiano Serlio's *Terzo Libro [On Antiquity]* (Venice, 1540) with the inscription *ROMA QVANTA FVIT IPSA RVINA DOCET*.

ileged characters in ancient and modern plays. While he reserved the right to disagree with ancient authority, he was also ready to defend such means as the buskin, “the reason being that since the poet must make things appear as they ought to be rather than the way they actually are, so if others seek to represent a king or grand prince, they will have to make him the most beautiful, the tallest, and most handsome of all. . . .”²⁶ Another yardstick was used for princes, and though the events of his life, as Serlio said, may have been bloody, cruel, and tragic, their setting and the prince himself were to be treated with highest respect. These considerations were all the more important if stage design and acting were addressed directly to the prince on his special dais or in a loggia above the other spectators. The practice of direct address introduced courtly etiquette on stage. Leone de’Sommi admonished actors “to gravitate to center stage and to the proscenium,” and obeying a “universal rule,” never to “turn their shoulders to the audience.”²⁷ Even in their stage roles actors never ceased to be subjects, and lowly subjects they usually were offstage as well, as one gathers from an unpublished document concerning payment of *comedianti* at Sabbioneta in 1590: “actors and carpenters, bricklayers and others who are paid by the day.”²⁸

Scamozzi gathered the many diverse strands that came together in the historical genesis of the theater at Sabbioneta for a purpose: his design proposed the theater as a metaphorical place of rule and as a site of heightened princely experience. That this was indeed the case emerged from the total iconography of its decorations and from its calculated place within the entire town.

The complementary relationship between audience and stage was carried beyond the architecture into the entire decorative scheme and it extended naturally into performance practice. At Sabbioneta the theater received this inner lining not only to accent the relationship but also to chart its ideal topography. In simple terms, the stage signified ‘city square’, the ducal loggia indicated ‘urban palace’. They were held in balance, but reality was on the side of the princely spectator who stood among real columns against a representation of Roman emperors (see fig. 10), while

the fake architecture of the stage was entirely conditioned in its perspectival distortions by the princely point of view. Perpendicular to this sight-line connecting loggia and stage, Scamozzi had a cross-axis marked by huge triumphal arches frescoed on the long walls between the *cavea* and the stage. Entering the orchestra through the west portal, one confronts a view of the Campidoglio on the east wall (fig. 23), enframed by the central arch of the triumphal gate. The opposite, west wall shows a corresponding *veduta* of Castel Sant’Angelo (fig. 24). These frescoed arches are correctly foreshortened only for a viewer in the orchestra. The square of the Campidoglio is illusionistically reached over a central flight of stairs leading to the level of the highest tier in the *cavea*.

These *vedute* of the Campidoglio (fig. 25) and of Castel Sant’Angelo afford lateral views into a different kind of ‘stage’ that corresponds to but is marked off from the actual scene. Two large inscriptions provide a key to the significance of these representations: one, above the west portal, is dedicated to Emperor Rudolph II, the other, above the Campidoglio, is a variant of the familiar ROMA QVANTA FVIT IPSA RVINA DOCET. The inscription is repeated on the outside of the theater building, too, running along the ledge which separates the two fictional stories of the elevation (fig. 26). This dictum about the grandeur of Rome being demonstrated by its ruins appropriately adorns the title page (fig. 27) of Serlio’s Third Book *On Antiquity*, published in Venice in 1540.

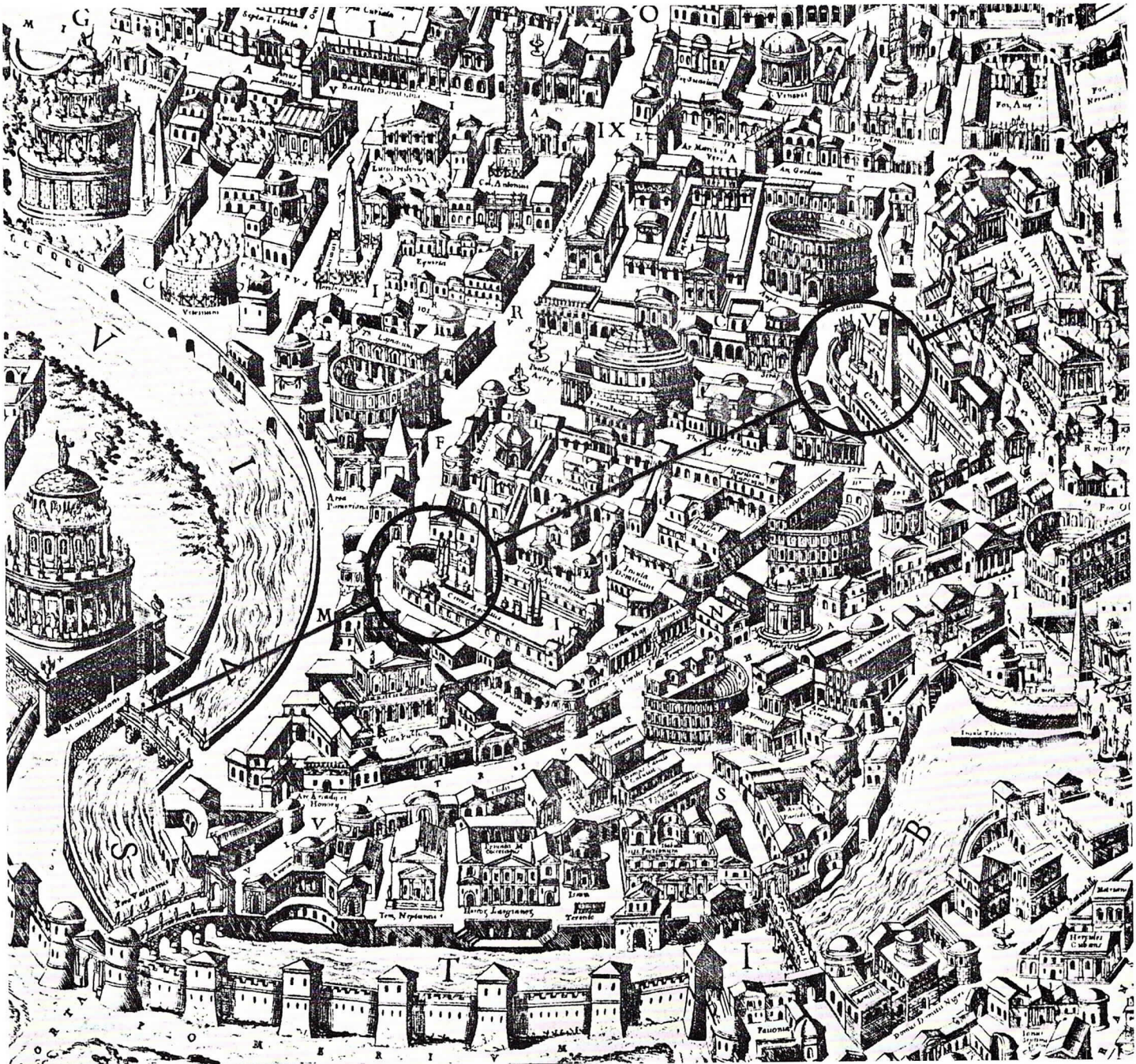
The two Roman *vedute* open up, as it were, the historical dimension of Empire and Rome. The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Capitoline Square are images only, physically inaccessible but ideologically present as the poles of rule and city. These images correspond to the physically real components of the theater itself, to the princely loggia and the urban square on stage. The north-south and east-west axes, intersecting in the middle of the theater, represent two dimensions of *instauratio* at Sabbioneta: the ideological origin in Imperium and Roma, and the political reality of Vespasiano Gonzaga’s rule and dominion of Sabbioneta.

The topographical metaphors had a dual purpose: on the

28 In sixteenth-century reconstructions of ancient Rome a straight line connecting the Mausoleum of Hadrian (Castel Sant'Angelo) with the Capitoline Square passed through both the Circus Agonalis (present Piazza

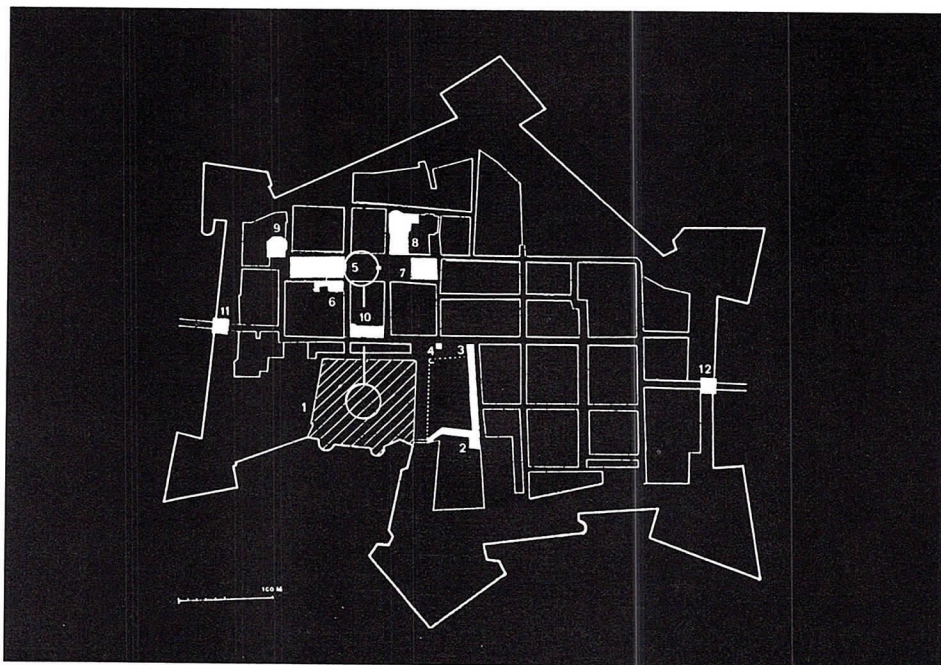
Navona) and the Circus Flaminius. The analogy between theater and stadium was so current in the sixteenth century that the scene front of Palladio's Teatro Olimpico carries the representation of a circus with the inscription HOC OPVS. In the

Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta the vedute of Castel Sant'Angelo and the Capitoline fall into the place corresponding to the lateral gateways of the Circusses. (After Stefano Dupérac's View of Ancient Rome, published in 1574).



29 The topographical relationship of the Gonzaga Theater to the nearby fortress and main square at Sabbioneta. Figs. 28 and 29 illustrate the transfer of an ideal Roman topography onto the configuration of principal buildings at Sabbioneta. The images of the Roman sites in the theater (figs. 23, 24) have their real counterparts in the Gonzaga fortress and main square at Sabbioneta.

- 1 Area of former fortress
- 5 Main square
- 10 Gonzaga Theater



30 View of the northwestern quadrant of Sabbioneta. In the left background stood the Gonzaga fortress, the right-hand foreground is occupied by the ducal palace facing the main square. Between them, parallel in its length to the long axis of the main square, stands the theater. What the ducal palace is to the main square, the loggia is to the urban stage in the theater.





31

31 View from the balcony of the ducal palace onto the main square at Sabbioneta.

32 View from the colonnaded loggia in the Gonzaga Theater at Sabbioneta.

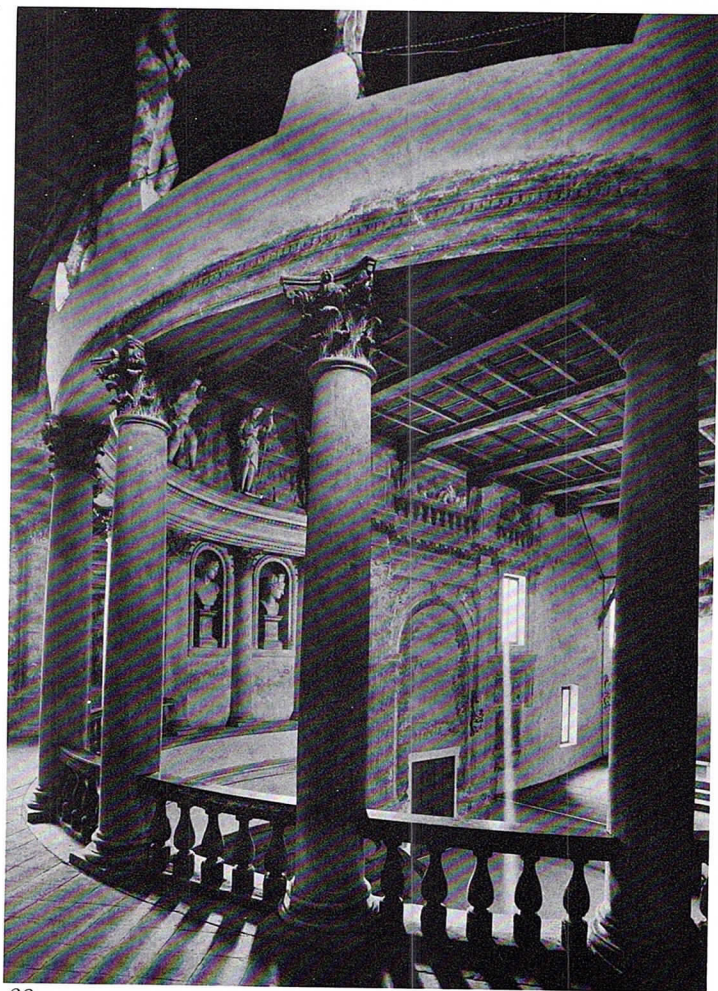
one hand, they were meant to be taken as indications of actual sites, and, on the other, as references to transposed connotations. In sixteenth century reconstructions of ancient Rome a straight line connecting the Mausoleum of Hadrian (Castel Sant'Angelo) with the Capitoline Square passed through both the Circus Agonalis (the present Piazza Navona) and the Circus Flaminius (fig. 28). At Sabbioneta the cross-axis through the orchestra extends eastward to the town's main square and westward to Vespasiano's fortress (fig. 29). A short distance behind the *image* of the Roman Campidoglio lies the 'capitol' square of Sabbioneta, and a few paces west of the frescoed Castel Sant'Angelo rose the real castle of Sabbioneta (fig. 30).

These painted views are therefore nothing but ideal Roman prototypes of the major urban foci in Sabbioneta. Their presence in effigy effects a transposition which, precisely for being imaginary, establishes the ideological dimension of Vespasiano Gonzaga's urbanistic enterprise.

The theater conjoins three different spheres: the princely loggia is a fragment of real architecture within which the real personages of the court made their appearance in order to watch a play on a stage which, though more magnificent than the real town, was still its ideal counterpart, while the painted triumphal arches on the long walls frame views of Sabbioneta's remote Roman origins.

In my study of the urban layout at Sabbioneta I have dealt at length with the insistent correlation of real and metaphorical sites. Even today's visitor to Sabbioneta will rarely fail to perceive the highly theatrical nature of the entire town. The similarity between the real town and a stage set was noticed already in the sixteenth century. Such a reversal of terms is not so surprising, for just as artificial townscapes were the favorite theater set, real townscapes were transformed and lavishly adorned for festive entries and processions.²⁹

When we imagine Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga reaching the theater halfway between his fortress and his urban palace, we readily grasp the metaphorical equivalence between his appearance in the theater loggia to observe, beneath the



32

86 statues of Apollo and Mercury, the poetic actions on a calculated urban stage, and his appearance on the elevated balcony of his actual palace nearby. From his palace (fig. 31) Vespasiano could see the main square of Sabbioneta geometrically petrify his political will; in the theater (fig. 32) he witnessed a poetic life as permeated by his power as the stage architecture was controlled by the vanishing orthogonals of perspective. From the loggia in his theater the ruler, an actor immobilized in his own sphere, watched the "play which is nothing but an imitation of human life."³⁰

1. The substance of this article was first presented in a lecture at the *Corso internazionale di storia dell'architettura*, A. Palladio, at Vicenza in 1974 (but withheld from publication in the *Bollettino del C.I.S.A.*) and at Columbia University in the same year. For present purposes I have kept documentation to a minimum. All translations are my own. The bibliography on Italian theater of the Renaissance is vast; for a recent assessment of some fundamental aspects see the *Bollettino del Centro Internazionale de Architettura*, A. Palladio, XVI (1974), published in 1976.
2. The traditions of play-acting have been investigated but theater buildings as architecture are only rarely connected with our knowledge of theatrical practice. This neglect makes the buildings appear as carcasses and stage practice as an activity curiously suspended in historical memory. The foundations for a systematic study of stage practice have long been laid by Alessandro D'Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano*, 2nd ed. (Turin, 1891).
3. For the most recent discussion of the theaters at the Villa Madama and at Piacenza see Christoph L. Frommel, "Raffaello e il teatro alla corte di Leone X," and Christof Thoenes, "Vignola e il teatro Farnese a Piacenza," *Bollettino del C.I.S.A.*, XVI (1974), pp. 173-187, 243-256.
4. See Marco Rosci, "Sebastiano Serlio e il teatro del cinquecento," *Bollettino del C.I.S.A.*, XVI (1974), pp. 235-242; the ducal theater of 1565 at Ferrara is briefly discussed by Adriano Cavicchi, "Il teatro Farnese di Parma," in the same volume of the *Bollettino* (p. 334) where archival references are given, but Ferrarese theaters of the sixteenth century have not received the attention they deserve.
5. Cf. Kurt W. Forster, "From Rocca to Civitas; Urban Planning at Sabbioneta," *L'Arte*, n.s., V (1969), pp. 5-40.
6. Vincenzo Scamozzi, *L'Idea dell'Architettura universale* (Venice, 1615); T. Temanza, *Vite dei più celebri architetti, e scultori che fiorirono nel secolo decimosesto* (Venice, 1778), I, p. 433. For the theater building see esp. Tomaso Buzzzi, "Il 'Teatro all'antica' di Vincenzo Scamozzi in Sabbioneta," *Dedalo*, VIII, 8 (1928), pp. 488-524. Note the doubtful qualification of the theater as being "all'antica." The present state of the Gonzaga Theater is uncritically reproduced in U. Polazzo, "Il Teatro de Sabbioneta," *L'architettura*, 5 (1956), pp. 709-715.
7. Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, n. 191A. The copy of the original design which Scamozzi had completed ("in due fogli reali") for Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga's approval on 10 May 1588 reveals the imprecisions of a rapid sketch but also many specific details of the final project.
8. The ducal buildings in Sabbioneta were linked by elevated corridors, much like the Florentine Palazzo Vecchio and Palazzo Pitti still are today. The poor state of repair of the connectors in Sabbioneta is reported in documents of the Austrian administration before they were pulled down in the 1790's (Mantua, Archivi di Stato, Arch.Mag.Comm. Nuovo, busta 139).
9. The postwar reconstruction of the wooden tiers forming the *cavea* and the rebuilding of the orchestra floor and of the stage were carried out without the necessary investigation of the building fabric and of archival sources.
10. The remains of illusionistic frescoes representing landscapes towers and rooftops are clearly visible on the walls of the central

recessed space (fig. 5). On the east and west walls hilltops and strips of sky are painted along the full depth of the stage.

11. Some awkward transitions and unresolved passages do not weaken the concept substantially, they merely indicate haste, limited resources and modest competence among craftsmen and painters. The ugly plaster casts now occupying the four niches of the lateral intercolumnia are nonsensical modern additions; cf. Scamozzi's sketch (fig. 4).

12. The varying distribution of spectators over the ranks and segments of the amphitheatrical tiers is well attested. There are even recorded complaints about the consequences of a system that allowed "foreigners to occupy the stepped rows, and, if any room remained, the gentlemen of Ferrara took them," as Isabella d'Este wrote to her husband in 1502 (A. D'Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano* [Turin, 1891], p. 389).

13. Sebastiano Serlio, *Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospetiva de Sebastiano Serlio Bolognese* (Venice, 1619), II, fols. 43v-44v.

14. *Ibid.*, fol. 44.

15. Editors and commentators of Vitruvius, from Johannes Sulpius da Veroli (1486) and Cesariano (1521) to Daniele Barbaro (1556), approached their reconstruction of antique theaters more as an archaeological and philological matter than as a task of designing theaters that might serve contemporary needs. Some of these reconstructions, such as Giovanni Carota's of the Roman theater at Verona (in T. Sarayna, *De Civitatis Veronae amplitudine* [Verona, 1540]), exercised considerable influence on Palladio and on the design of later Renaissance theaters. For a critical review of the problems arising from Renaissance interpretations of the Vitruvian theater see the article by Klein and Zerner cited in note 18 below.

16. A. D'Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano*, p. 394.

17. *La pratica della prospettiva di Monsignor Daniele Barbaro . . . , opera molto profittevole a pittori, scultori, et architetti* (Venice, 1569), p. 155.

18. Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, "Vitruve et le théâtre de la Renaissance italienne," *Le lieu théâtral à la Renaissance* (Paris, 1964), p. 54.

19. A. Ademollo, "Intorno al teatro drammatico italiano dal 1550 in poi," *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 2nd ser., (1881), XXVI, p. 53.

20. Leone Leoni wrote to Michelangelo on 12 April 1561: "I am busy with the largest *apparato* that has ever been made, going back as far as a hundred years. It contains mountains, islands, real rivers, combats on land and water, paradise and hell, and a number of buildings in perspective." E. Plon, *Leone Leoni et Pompeo Leone* (Paris, 1887), p. 178.

21. Leone De'Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche*, ed. by Ferruccio Marotti (Milan, 1968), p. 63. During the early 1550's De'Sommi was in Ferrara, then the major center of theatrical activity and innovation in Italy. His work as a playwright and director at the Gonzaga court in Mantua is fairly well-known (see Marotti's commentary to the edition of the *Quattro dialoghi*, with bibliography) and he also was in touch with the other branches of the Gonzaga family, notably with the Dukes of Guastalla.

22. Leone De'Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi . . .*, p. 14. De'Sommi also derived the use of artificial illumination in the theater from

public festivals: "it is and always was the custom to light lamps in the streets, on roofs and towers, as a sign of joyous celebration . . ." (p. 63).

23. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

24. Angelo Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa et del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche* (Ferrara, 1598), p. 64. Ingegneri was a highly respected authority on theater construction and production of plays. The Accademia Olimpica asked Scamozzi to alter Palladio's Teatro Olimpico so that Ingegneri's production of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* could be realized in 1585.

25. Serlio, *II*, fol. 46.

26. Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa . . .*, p. 67.

27. Leone De'Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi . . .*, p. 55.

28. University of Kansas Library, Lawrence, Kansas, Special Collections. From a mass of documents and fragments of payment books concerning the construction and decoration of Sabbioneta; fol. 190, dated 6 June 1590: "comedianti et maranghoni muradori et altri che vano alla giornata. . ."

29. Key examples include Baldassare Peruzzi's set for *La Calandria* in 1514/15 and the set of Athens for the *Bacchidi* (fig. 14) in 1531 (Fabrizio Cruciani, "Gli allestimenti scenici de Baldassare Peruzzi," *Bollettino del C.I.S.A.*, [1974], XVI, pp. 155-172); the stage set representing Pisa which Aristotile da Sangallo built for the play *Il Commodo*, given during the marriage festivities of Cosimo I de'Medici in 1539; the representation of Florence for *La Vedova* (fig. 20) in 1569 (see the catalogue of the Florentine exhibition *Il luogo teatrale a Firenze* [Milan, 1975], pp. 81f., 100f.); and, of course, the highly elaborate set with its five deeply extending 'streets' of Thebes which Scamozzi added to Palladio's Teatro Olimpico in 1584 (fig. 22). Telling comparisons can be made between these stage sets and the stage-like temporary decorations and alterations of actual squares and streets on the occasion of triumphal entries, cf. e.g. Piero Ginori Conti, *L'apparato per le nozze di Francesco de'Medici e di Giovanna d'Austria . . .* (Florence, 1936), esp. pp. 24ff.

30. Leone De'Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi . . .*, p. 13.

Figure Credits

1 Reprinted from *Oppositions*, 7, Winter 1976, p. 40.

2, 5, 6, 10, 16, 23, 24, 26, 32 Foto Calzolari, Mantua.

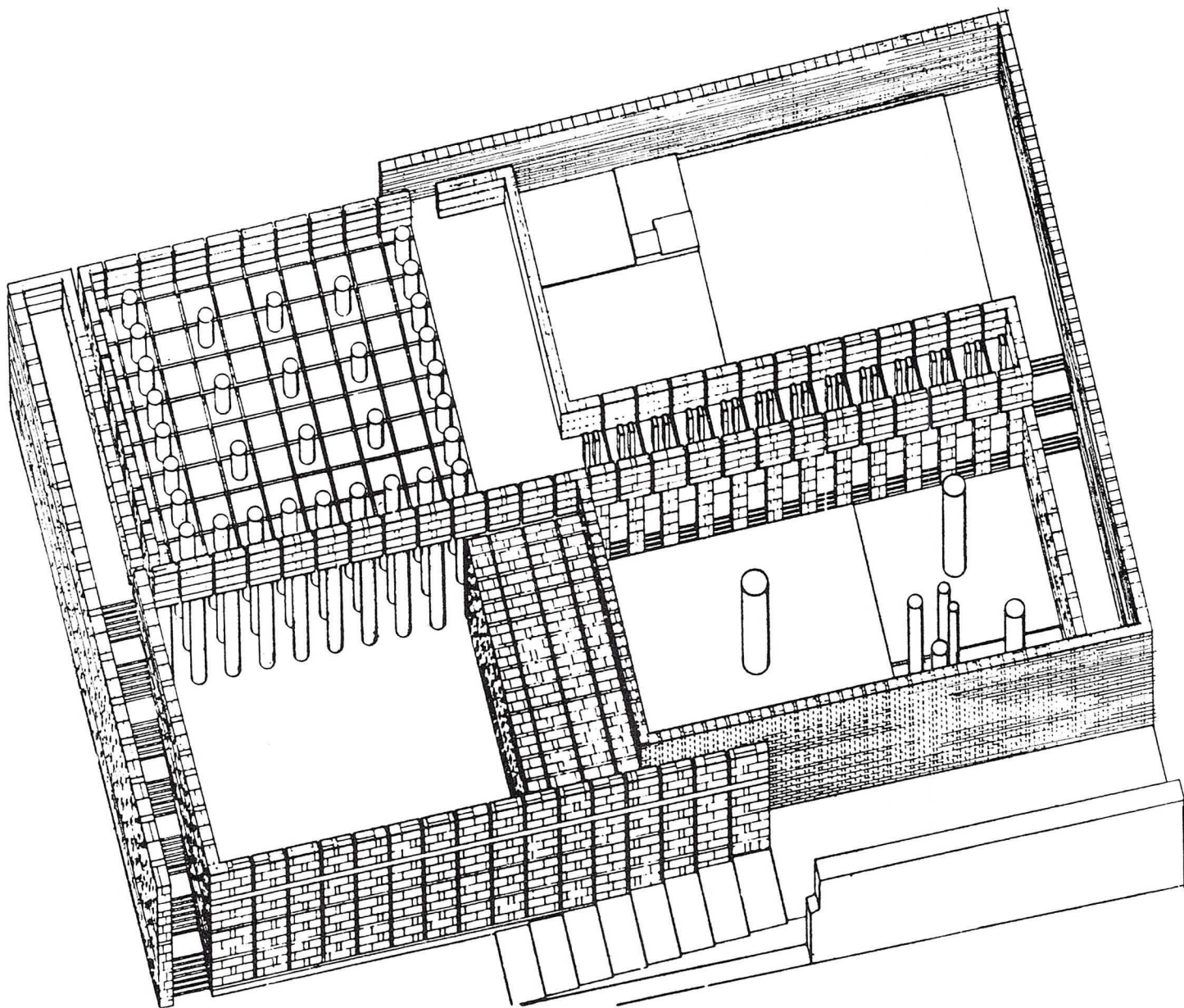
3, 4, 7, 14, 19, 20 Florence, Uffizi. Gabinetto fotografico—Sopr. Gallerie—Florence.

8, 9, 12, 13, 15, 17, 27-29, 31 Courtesy the author.

11, 21, 22 Centro internazionale di studi di architettura, A. Palladio, Vicenza.

18 Foto Ferrini, Vicenza.

25, 30 Foto Giovetti, Mantua.



From Gruppo 7 to the Danteum: A Critical Introduction to Terragni's *Relazione Sul Danteum*¹

Thomas Schumacher

90 In 1938 Rino Valdameri, director of the Brera Art Academy in Milan, privately commissioned Pietro Lingeri and Giuseppe Terragni to design a Dante Museum and Study Center for Rome.² The architects had already designed various projects for Valdameri, including the three artists' houses on the Isola Comacina, a seaside villa (by Lingeri alone), and an academic building for the Brera (in collaboration with Figini and Pollini). Associated with Valdameri was a Milanese senator, Count Poss, who was influential in getting the idea approved by the Ministry of Popular Culture and the National Fine Arts Commission and who offered £2,000,000 for the construction of the building. A site was chosen in Via dell'Impero, facing the recently restored Basilica of Maxentius.³ While the manifest function of the Danteum was to house all the available editions of Dante's works (as well as works on Dante), the major spaces of the building were designed as a setting to the cantos of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, symbolizing what Dante represented in politics: Italian unification and Imperial pretensions.⁴

The architects prepared an elaborate set of watercolor drawings on rigid panels, at a scale of 1:100. Mario Sironi, commissioned to provide bas-relief sculptures for the facades, made charcoal sketches which were photomontaged onto the final architectural drawings. The drawings and the model, a large wood and plaster construction, were brought to Rome for a presentation before Mussolini. The audience before the Duce was held on November 10, 1938, with Valdameri, Poss, Terragni, and Lingeri in attendance.⁵

Mussolini was pleased, and the project was substantially approved. The war, however, intervened. Valdameri, the project's chief exponent, died during the war, and the idea of the glorification of the New Roman Empire was not part of Italian reconstruction. The *Relazione Sul Danteum*, translated here from Terragni's draft, was apparently not completed in time for the presentation to Mussolini.⁶

The intellectual context for the *Relazione Sul Danteum* begins with the Gruppo 7 articles, recently translated in *Oppositions 6*. A shift in ideology, from internationalism to nationalism, is the most remarkable distinction between

these works. This return to nationalism cannot be attributed to the Machiavellian political climate of Fascist Italy alone, as some recent writers have suggested.⁷ Many factors converged in the early thirties, causing the Rationalists to alter their own polemic, and among the most important of these were the arguments of Marcello Piacentini.⁸ Piacentini's criticism of modern architecture had begun long before Gruppo 7 existed, and his reactionary architectural style outlasted Mussolini's regime by some years. Alongside the 'hotheads' of the MIAR, Piacentini's cultured style must have seemed staid.

Piacentini's most important function was to show that the Rationalists, and their European colleagues, possessed a symbolic basis, not a technical one.⁹ Accepting this for the Rationalists, he then proceeded to repositulate the notion that all building need not be *architecture*.¹⁰ He proposed to divide the built environment into two types; one in 'underwear' and one in 'evening dress'.¹¹

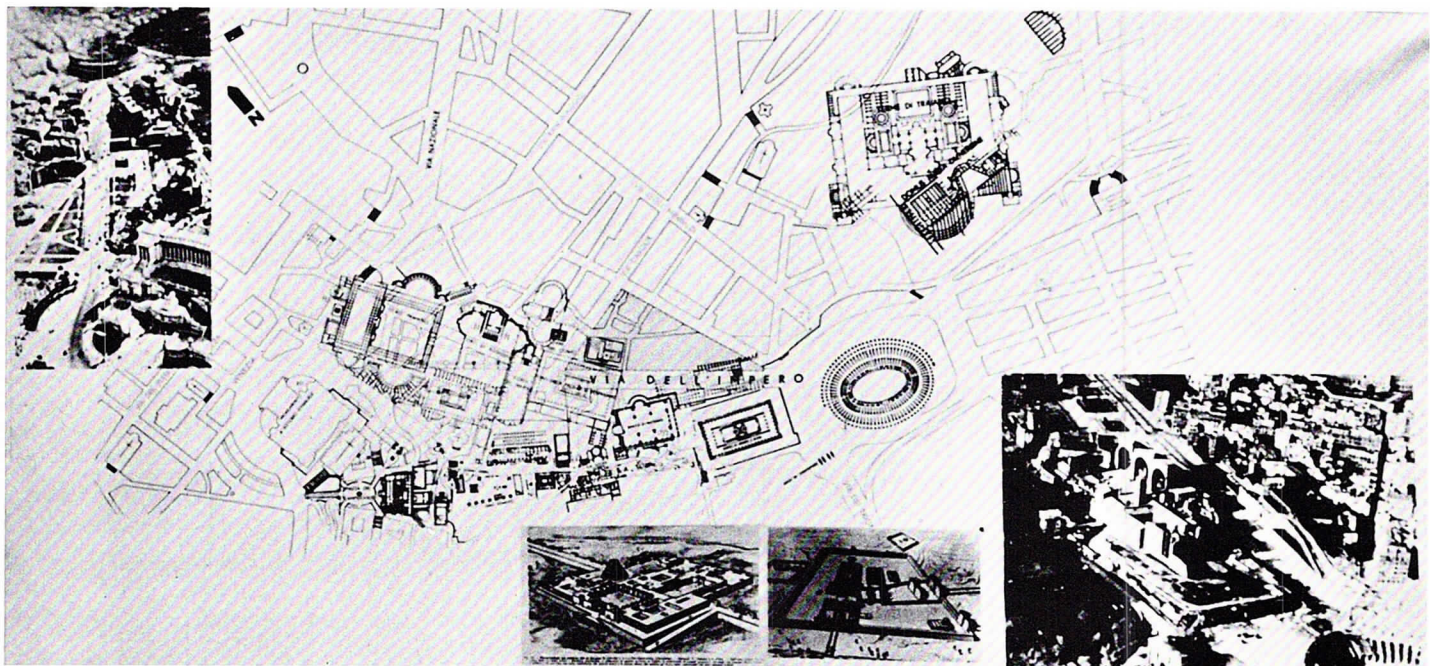
Unable to mount Functionalist arguments to counter Piacentini's rhetoric, the Rationalists turned to the State and its symbols, and directed their polemic toward a single aim: the conversion of Mussolini to the use of Modern Movement architecture as the symbol of the Fascist 'revolution'. Thus, the characteristic arches and columns of the Piacentiniani were matched by an equally rhetorical use of the Rationalists' concrete frame. The frame appears so often as to elicit speculation that it was intended as the modern equivalent of the classical orders.

The Rationalists' problem was to maintain as much of a modern grammar of architectural forms as possible, while not adopting a machine aesthetic, which would have appeared to devour national characteristics. The resulting aestheticism, often abstract, is seen in Terragni's Casa del Fascio in Como (fig. 3), the ensign building of Rationalism. Pagano's statement of 1933 perhaps best summarized the written 'retreat' from internationalist precepts: "We cannot any more consider the aspiration of Le Corbusier to an absolute technology as the 'style of our epoch daily fixed' (by that technology) . . . the position that we must assume today is a rigorous aesthetic one."¹²

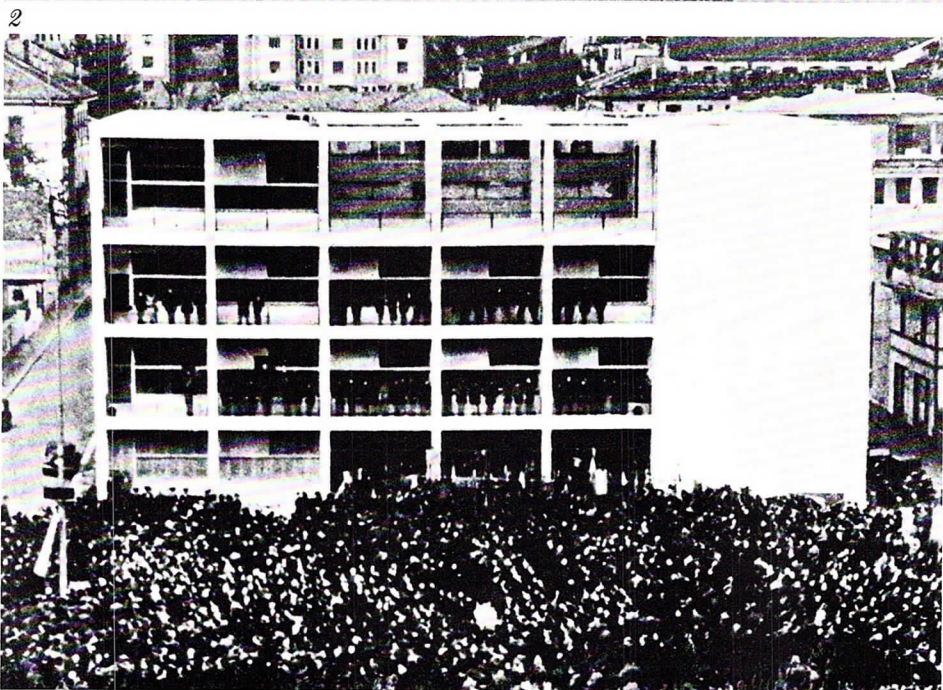
1 (frontispiece) *Danteum* project,
Rome. Giuseppe Terragni and Pietro
Lingeri, architects, 1938.
Axonometric.

2 *Danteum*. Site plan.

3 *Casa del Fascio*, Como. Giuseppe
Terragni, architect, 1932–1936.



91



3

92 An abstraction which avoided either extreme—International Style or ‘Monumentalism’—was not without symbolic intention. On the contrary, Terragni explained the design of his Casa del Fascio in Como according to its place in the symbolism of the regime, stating, “Here is the Mussolinian concept that Fascism is a glass house into which everyone can peer, giving rise to the architectural interpretation that is the complement of that metaphor: no encumbrance, no barrier, no obstacle between the political hierarchy and the people.”¹³ He followed Piacentini’s directive for a building in ‘evening dress’, but substituted a sheer *crêpe de chine* for the requisite brocade.

If Terragni’s published writings can be interpreted as pandering to the regime, a smokescreen to his intended abstraction, then he spent a great deal of energy in that pursuit, as the *Relazione Sul Danteum* demonstrates. The building itself is clearly modern, without relying on plain white surfaces or modern structural techniques. It was enthusiastically received by Mussolini and might well have been built if the war had not arrived in 1940.¹⁴

The *Relazione* presents us with an elaborate explanation of sources, references, formal devices, and design development concepts—in short, Terragni’s *method*. It is uniquely complete and honest, while omitting enough to provoke some speculation concerning further intentions. Among these is Terragni’s probable intention that the report be a contemporary version of Dante’s *Epistle to Can Grande della Scala*, his patron, which enumerated the different senses of the form and the content of the *Divine Comedy* lest the complexities of meanings be lost in a difficult text filled with an expansive collection of images and levels of allegory.¹⁵ The *Relazione* not only resembles the *Epistle* in format but it enumerates many levels of meaning that are not apparent in an initial reading of the building through the drawings alone.

While Argan has described the Danteum as, “an abstract component in an urban space” (fig. 2),¹⁶ Terragni’s intention was clearly a symbolic building (he called it a Temple) that would transcend the politics of Fascism and respond to a more general and more universal standard of Christian

philosophy grounded in his almost fanatical Catholicism.¹⁷

An appropriate introductory note comes from Dante himself: “The meaning of this work is not of one kind only; rather the work may be described as having several meanings; for the first meaning is that which is conveyed by the letter, and the next by which the letter signifies; the former is called the literal, while the latter is called allegorical, or mystical.”¹⁸

The document itself is primarily an exhaustive account of those formal manipulations in the building that correspond to what Terragni calls “Dantesque compositional criteria.” He reaches beyond the formal/structural similarities, however, into the meaning of the monument in historical terms, and often slips into a stilted rhetoricism (probably aimed at Mussolini) which labors his point. The significance of the *Relazione*, however, lies not in the tracing of line-for-line correspondences, but in the exposition of the varieties of modes of being for the various elements of the composition. These modes of being are multiple. A courtyard, for example, is a symbol of Dante’s life before his trip through the *Comedy*; it is also the modern equivalent of the ancient form, the *ortus conclusus* or *atrium* of the ancient house. The longitudinal space that represents Dante’s (and Mussolini’s) concept of the Empire is also a nave to a church; it is further the complement to the frontal wall that ‘hides’ the building. That wall, in its turn, is called a ‘blackboard’. Objects represent people, other objects, parts of the *Comedy*, other times, other places, or historical precedents.

In its somewhat haphazard organization, the *Relazione Sul Danteum* explains Terragni’s involvement with a constellation of ideas relating architecture to literature, history, experiential conditioning, and politics. It is perhaps the most comprehensive theoretical text he ever wrote. For the Anglo-American audience in particular, this tract reveals the ‘other’ Terragni, better known to Italians. In reading the text, then, one should keep in mind Zuccoli’s (Terragni’s assistant) paraphrase of Terragni’s concept of design, “Architecture is never merely a composition of elements in certain relationships.”¹⁹

1. The literal translation of the word *relazione* is "report," but the shades of meaning that accrue to the word in Italian make it necessary *not* to translate. These implications include "relationship," "connection," "acquaintance," even "love affair."
2. Much of the historic information concerning the Danteum comes from the memories of Lingeri's and Terragni's contemporaries and families, in particular Sgra. Editta Lingeri, Ing. Piercarlo Lingeri, Arch. Emilio Terragni and Arch. Luigi Zucconi. The drawings and model are in the possession of the Lingeri family in Tremezzo. Many of the original documents were destroyed in the bombing of Lingeri's studio in Milan in 1944. The project was one of Lingeri's favorites, but his influence on the design was apparently secondary. This particular example of Terragni/Lingeri collaboration seems to have been dominated by Terragni (recollections of Piercarlo Lingeri). Terragni apparently conceived the basic scheme and worked on it in the Lingeri studio in Milan, where he virtually lived with the Lingeri family. Further evidence for Terragni's authorship is found in the initial conceptual sketches, some mechanically-drawn preliminaries, and the *Relazione Sul Danteum* draft, all from his studio in Como. Previous publication of the Danteum drawings are: *Architettura e Cantiere*, Sept. 1957, and *L'Architettura* (Omaggio a Terragni), #153, July 1968.
3. The Via dell'Impero was completed in 1932, for the tenth anniversary of the Fascist 'revolution'. At that time, the Basilica of Maxentius was completely unearthed for the first time since antiquity.
4. For Dante and the Roman Empire, see N. Lenkeith, *Dante and the Legend of Rome* (London: Warburg Inst., 1953), and C. T. Davis, *Dante and the Idea of Rome* (Oxford University Press, 1957).
5. From the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, PNF section, Busta 509, 374 (Segretaria Particolare del Duce).
6. The manuscript is a proof, apparently composed to have illustrations inserted into the text. The first, and an undetermined number of end pages are lost, and judging from the fact that Terragni scrawled the word "Danteum" over page two, the remaining pages were apparently lost before the war.
7. Recent scholarship has established the inadequacy of the position that the Traditionalists were simply reactionary Fascists and the Rationalists were progressive, a position still vehemently proposed by Bruno Zevi. His recent review of the Biennale Exhibit of inter-war architecture is a case in point (*L'Espresso*, Aug. 12, 1976). Here he stated the impossibility of including Pagano, martyr of Mathausen, with Piacentini, reactionary Fascist. It seems to me that the war period has colored much of the writings concerning Rationalism, and that critics and historians have labored to remove the smell of Fascism from the heroes of the Italian Modern Movement. I find this not only unnecessary, but as dangerous as the attitude that attributes virtually all Italian phenomena of the period to a political determinism.
8. Piacentini was the 'evil one' of Italian modern architecture. Relatively speaking, he was the most powerful architect of the period (after Speer perhaps). As director of *Architettura* he controlled much of what Italians read concerning their own architecture and foreign work. He either designed, or judged in competition almost all the major buildings erected for the régime, including the Florence Railway Station, the University City in Rome, the Via della Conciliazione (in front of St. Peters in Rome), the Town Center of Brescia, and the Plan of E'42 (now the EUR district of Rome). Upon his death in 1960, Zevi's editorial obituary was entitled, "Piacentini Died in 1925."
9. See Piacentini, *L'Architettura d'Oggi* (Rome: Paolo Cremonese, 1930); also Piacentini, various articles republished in L. Patetta, *L'Architettura in Italia, 1919-1943, Le Polemiche* (Milan: CLUP, 1972).
10. I find interesting parallels between this position of almost fifty years ago and Kenneth Frampton's ideas, based on Arendt, in *Oppositions* 4, "On Re-reading Heidegger."
11. The actual wording was, "I don't say that there ought to be two architectures . . . one in underwear and one in evening dress." From Patetta, *L'Architettura* . . . (author's translation), p. 161. There has never been any doubt that he meant that there *ought* to be such a symbolic division.
12. Quoted in Maltese, C., *Arte Moderna in Italia, 1785-1943* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962), p. 423.
13. Reprinted in Mantero, E., *Giuseppe Terragni e la Città del Razionalismo in Italia* (Rome: Dedalo, 1969), p. 130. Terragni also defended international modern architecture against charges of Bolshevism and 'Jewishness', but did so in terms of style, not in terms of the liberal social leanings of the movement.
14. As I argue elsewhere, I do not believe that Terragni's reduction of architecture to a code of formal relationships of seemingly weightless white planes means that his architecture is without connotative significance. See my article, "Levels of Meaning in Terragni: The Danteum Project," *Parametro* 46, May 1976. Besides the Danteum project, there is ample evidence in Terragni's essays, and in his unbuilt work, to support the contention that he was self-consciously and seriously involved with a symbolic reading of his work.
15. Dante's patron, Can Grande, was the recipient of the Paradise as an offering for the hospitality he had shown Dante in exile. The entire *Comedy*, however, was explained in this letter. See Paget Toynbee, ed., *Dantis Alagherii Epistolae: The Letters of Dante* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920).
16. C. G. Argan, in the theme speech at the Terragni Congress, Sept. 1968, in *L'Architettura*, May 1969, p. 7.
17. According to Luigi Zucconi, Terragni's assistant from the Novocumum to the end, Terragni was a devoutly religious Catholic, and a bit of a mystic. Sundays, he would travel to the periphery of Como to hear Mass in an unfrequented medieval church, so as to be alone and quiet. His identification with Dante must be seen in this light.
18. *Dantis Alagherii Epistolae*. . . .
19. Luigi Zucconi, *L'Architettura*, May, 1969, p. 16. "L'Architettura non puo essere mai soltanto una composizione di elementi in certo rapporto, è una casa, una scuola, un aeroporto, ecc."

Figure Credits

- 1, 2 Reprinted from "Omaggio a Terragni," *L'Architettura*, 153, July 1968.
- 3 Courtesy Thomas Schumacher.

Relazione Sul Danteum (1938)

Giuseppe Terragni

Translated by Thomas Schumacher

94 *The text begins on page two of the extant manuscript, in the middle of a sentence. Paragraph numberings are used for all citations in footnotes and other works. The tract lacks a description of the Paradise, the Impero, and the descent to the street. In view of this deficiency I have added, as a postscript, a brief description of these spaces with an explanation of Terragni's design intentions. T.S.*

1 . . . the series of the Imperial Fora of Trajan, Augustus, Nerva, and Vespasian, with a northwest, southeast direction. The Via dell'Impero is inserted in the space determined by the two groupings of buildings which lie mainly on the second (southwest) side of the street. The ruins that flank the Via dell'Impero are disposed at a slight angle to the street, slightly inclined to face the Colosseum itself.

2 The area established by the technical office of the government for the construction of the Danteum is of a non-geometric shape, the edge of which describes an irregular polygon (fig. 1).¹ Our first task was to study the possibility of inserting a geometrically *regular* plan form into such an accidental shape.

3 The round form was discarded because the area it encloses is too modest for what was needed, but also because of the immediacy of potential conflict with the perfect and imposing ellipse of the Colosseum.² It was necessary to turn our attention to a rectangle in order to arrive at the particular one that would imprint, through the happy relation of its two dimensions, that value of 'absolute' geometric beauty onto the entire structure of the monument, this being the tendency of the exemplary architectures of the great historical epochs.³

4 Meanwhile, it was impossible to escape our preoccupation as designers with the problems of grafting onto geometric schemes for the monument—from the very beginning—meanings, myths, and commonly held symbols, as a spiritual synthesis.⁴ And in the case of Dante's works these are evidently *numerical* meanings.

5 The connection between the plastic-architectonic expression and the abstraction and symbolism of the theme of the

building (a connection that could cast doubt on the relevance and spontaneity of the results) was only possible at the *origin* of those two discrete spiritual facts⁵—building and poem. Architectural monument and literary work can adhere to a *singular* scheme without losing, in this union, any of each work's essential qualities only if both possess a structure and harmonic rule that can allow them to confront each other, so that they may then be read in a geometric or mathematical relation of parallelism or subordination. In our case the architecture could adhere to the literary work only through an examination of the admirable structure of the Divine Poem, itself faithful to a criterion of division and interpretation through certain symbolic numbers—1, 3, 7, 10 and their combinations—which happily can be synthesized into *one* and *three* (unity and trinity).⁶

6 Now, there is only one rectangle that clearly expresses the harmonic law of unity in trinity, and this is the rectangle known historically as the 'golden'; the rectangle, that is, whose sides are in the golden ratio (the short side is to the long side as the long side is to the sum of the two sides). *One* is the rectangle, *three* are the segments that determine the golden ratio. And furthermore, such a rectangle is capable of being decomposed into a square of a side equal to the short side and another golden rectangle of sides equal, respectively, to the short side and the difference between the two sides of the original rectangle. In its turn, such a smaller golden rectangle may be decomposed into a square and a golden rectangle, and thus it goes—through these possible decompositions is manifested the concept of the infinite—because such decompositions are in fact infinite.

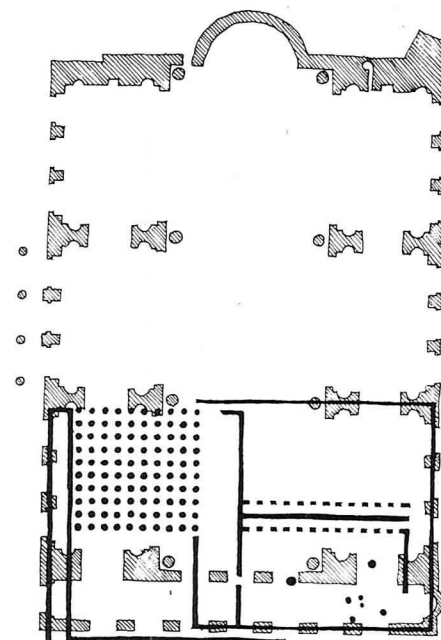
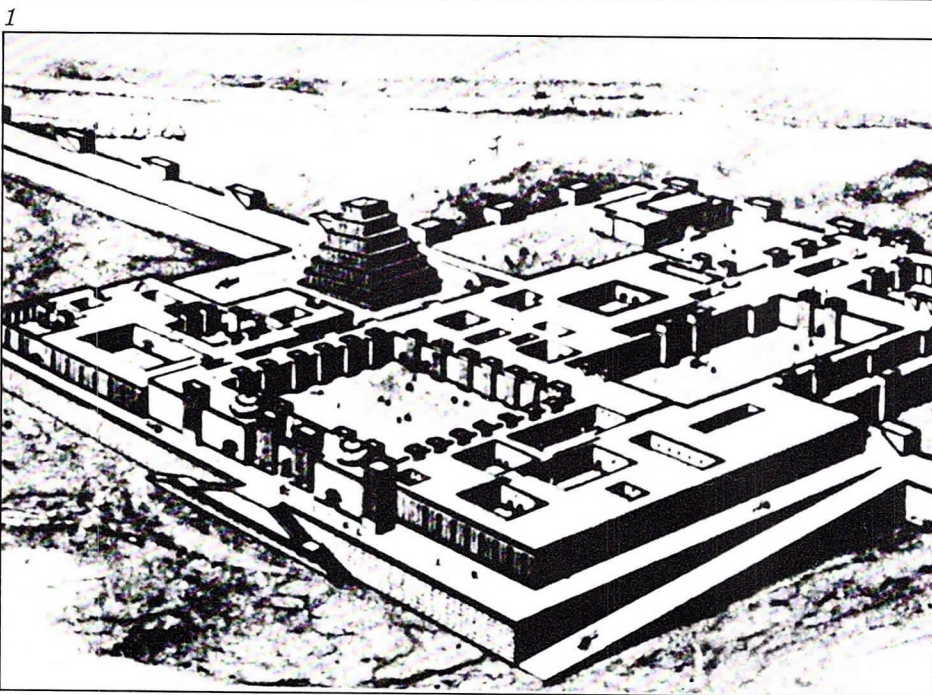
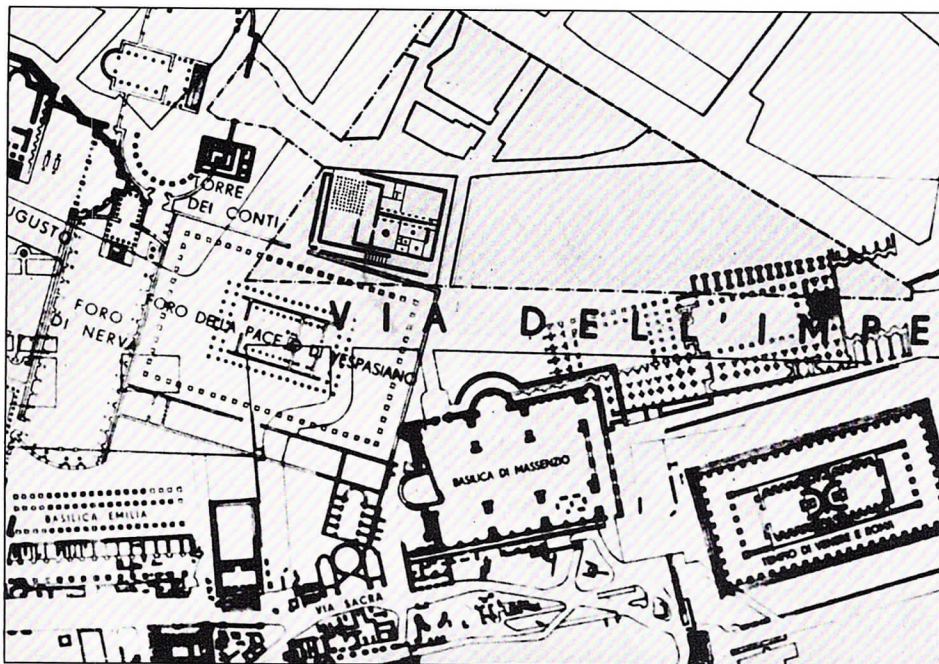
7 The golden section rectangle is one of the plan forms frequently adopted by the ancient Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. These peoples have left behind typical examples of rectangular-plan temples in which the golden rectangle is used; and most often composed with numerical relationships as well. The most evident example lies in the Via dell'Impero in the form of the Basilica of Maxentius,⁷ whose plan is a golden rectangle (fig. 2).

8 The plan adopted for the Danteum, then, is the rectangle

1 Danteum project, Rome. Giuseppe Terragni and Pietro Lingeri, architects, 1938. Detailed site plan.

2 Danteum. The Sargon's Palace, included in the site plan.

3 Danteum. Plan at 1,60m, over the plan of the Basilica of Maxentius.



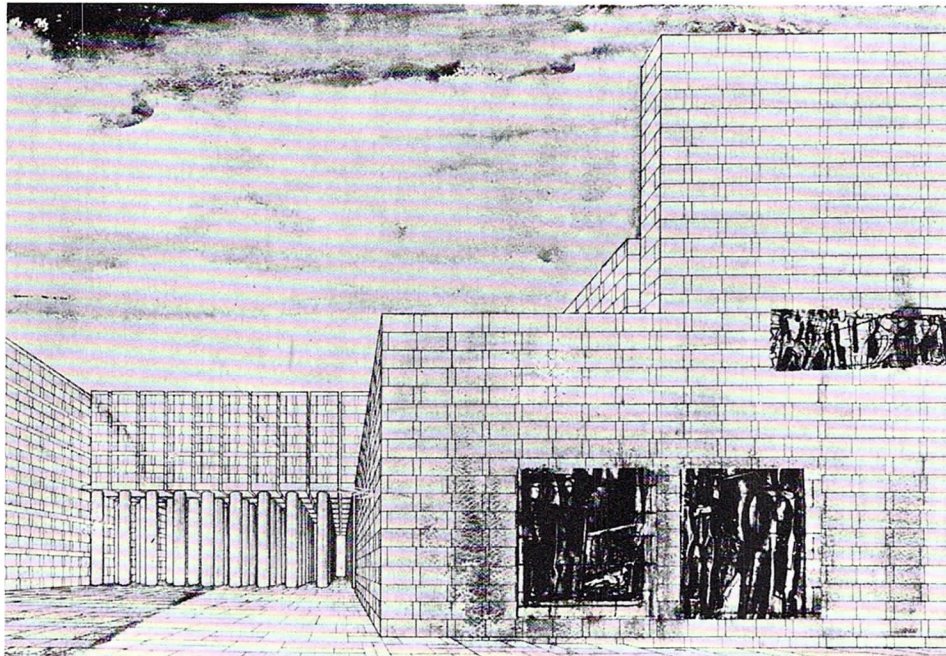
96 similar to that of the Basilica of Maxentius (fig. 3), and dimensionally directly derived from that illustrious Roman construct. The long side of the Danteum is equal to the short side of the Basilica, while the short side is consequently equal to the difference between the two sides of the Basilica. Once the form, dimension, and orientation of the building are determined in this way, it is then necessary to proceed in such a way that would respect the harmonic law imposed by the golden rectangle. Of particular importance in the composition of the fundamental elements of the work is also the rule and the relationship established by the numbers 1 and 3; 1, 3, and 7; 1, 3, 7, and 10—the numerical law that is found in the *Divine Comedy*. To superimpose two rules, one geometric, the other numerical, is to achieve equilibrium and logic in the selection of dimensions, spaces, heights, and thicknesses for the purpose of establishing a plastic fact of absolute values,⁸ spiritually chained to Dantesque compositional criteria. This also serves to obtain a higher value, at the same time avoiding the imminent danger of falling into rhetoricism, into symbolism, or into convention.⁹ If the Dantesque *Inferno*, for instance, were to be plastically delineated by a series of diminishing rings in the form of a funnel, ending in the vertex of the Devil, with the intervals, jumps, bridges, rivers, etc., so admirably described by the *Divine Poet*, this would almost certainly *not* create an exciting effect, because the presentation would be too literal a version of Dante's description.

9 It is necessary, therefore, that the plastic means be itself an expression of absolute geometric beauty. The spiritual reference and direct dependence upon the first canto of the *Poem* must be expressed in unmistakable signs by an atmosphere that influences the visitor and appears physically to weigh upon his mortal person so that he is moved to experience the 'trip' as Dante did.¹⁰ He must be touched by the contemplation of this adventure and of the pains of the sinners whom Dante met throughout his sad pilgrimage. Such a state of mind is difficult enough to relate with the aid of words and poetic imagination, or with the plastic means of proportions and volumes of architecture. But the difficulty is then enlarged by the danger of obtaining results which are too remote from what is needed. Thus, we have

reexamined the problem with our minds liberated from the preoccupation of literally following the text of the *Magnificent Account*. Instead, we place our attention on a problem that is closer to our sensibilities and our preparation as architects: that is, to imagine and translate into *stone* an architectural organism that, through the balanced proportion of its walls, ramps, stairs, ceilings, the play of its ever changing light from the sun above, can give to him who traverses its internal spaces the sensation of contemplative isolation, of removal from the external world, which is so often permeated by the noises of life and feverish anxiety of movement and traffic.¹¹

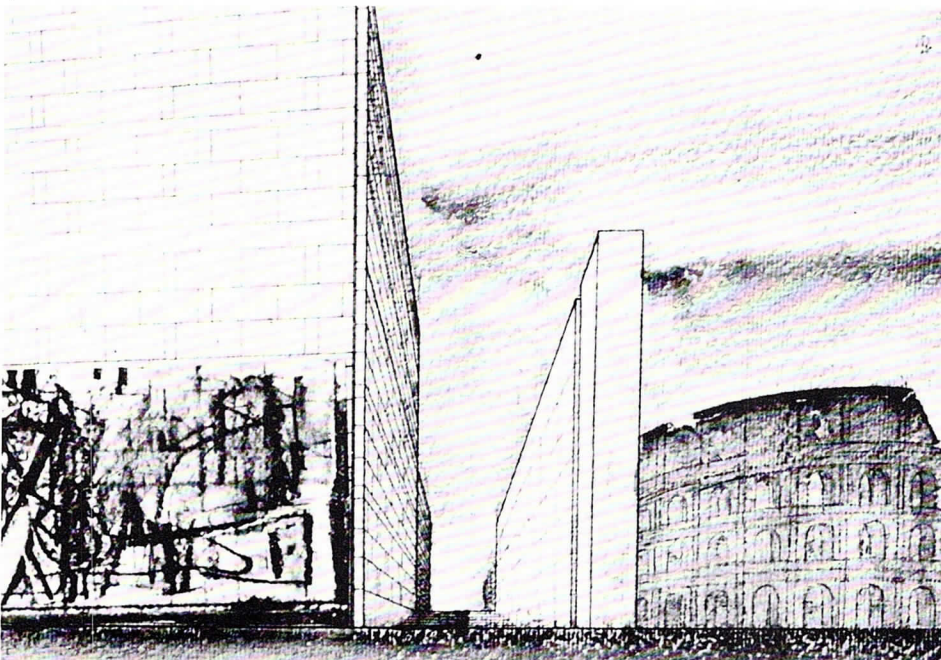
10 Three rectangular spaces declare, in a clear manner, the theme of the rectangle already taken in relation to, and derived from, the golden rectangle of the Basilica of Maxentius (see frontispiece). There remains a fourth space defined by the binding walls of the building and, since it is excluded from the scheme of the *three* fundamental spaces of the philosophical structure of the *Poem*, it is also excluded from the architectural organism, thereby determining a *closed court*, comparable to the *ortus concluso* ("closed garden") of the typical Latin house or the *atrium*, open to the sky, of the Etruscan house (fig. 4). This symbolism can add meaning to this space 'intentionally wasted' from the point of view of building economy, and we can thus speak of a reference to the life of Dante up to his thirty-fifth year of age, a life of transgression into error and sin, and therefore 'lost' in the moral and philosophical balance, when the life of the poet is taken as an example of the reformation and salvation of a corrupt and sinful mankind.¹² The important thing to note here is that the meaning, or reading, of the symbol is not so important as to obscure the effective plastic necessity and harmony of the composition. Avoidance of this necessity would create a *hole* in the architectonic structure. Thus we can say the same of all the connections found in the building which have the value of analogue or reference to conditions beyond having solved the problems of equilibrium and architectonic harmony.¹³ Here, in fact, is the 'forest' of a hundred marble columns in a square of twenty meters on a side, each of which supports an element of the floor above, situated eight meters above the plane of the court. This

4 *Danteum* project, Rome. Giuseppe Terragni and Pietro Lingeri, architects, 1938. Perspective view to the courtyard.

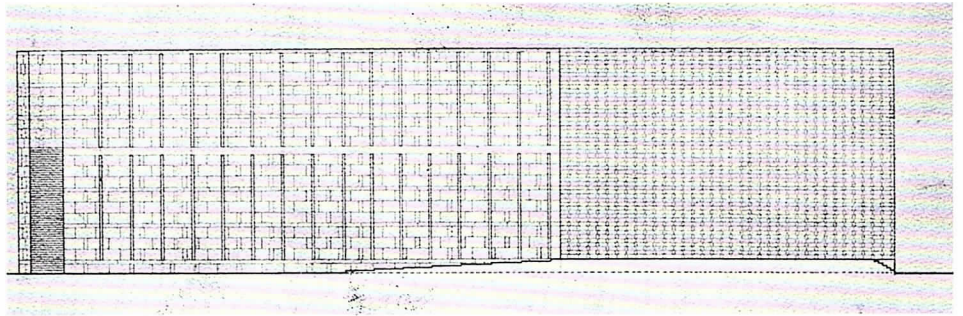


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5 *Danteum*. Exterior view toward the Colosseum, detail.



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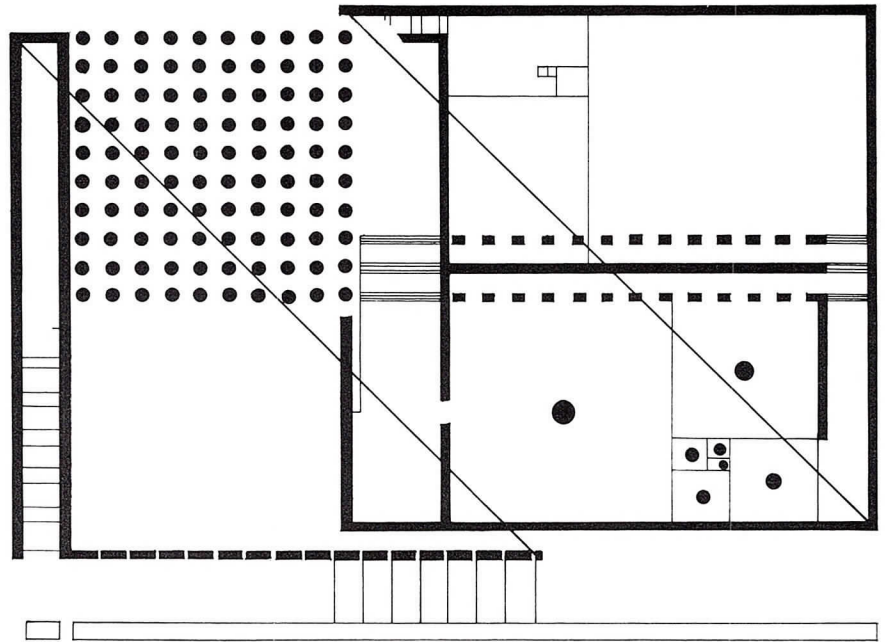
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98 6 *Danteum* project, Rome. Giuseppe Terragni and Pietro Lingeri, architects, 1938. 'Inside' front facade, behind the free-standing wall.

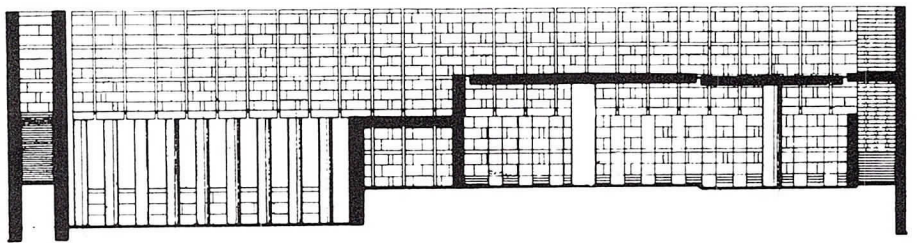
7 *Danteum*. Plan overlaid with the generating squares.

8 *Danteum*. Longitudinal section through court and *Inferno*.

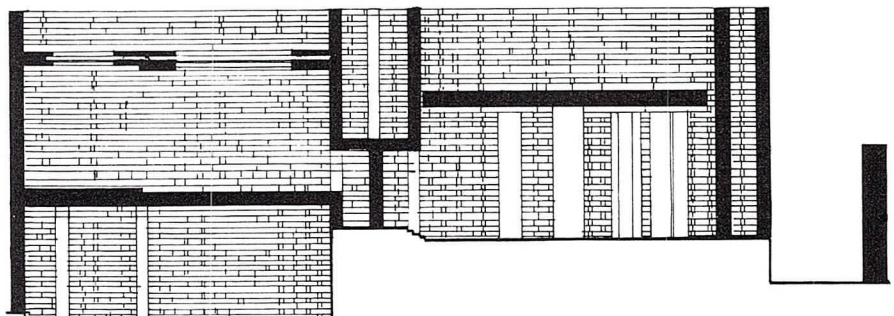
9 *Danteum*. Transverse section.



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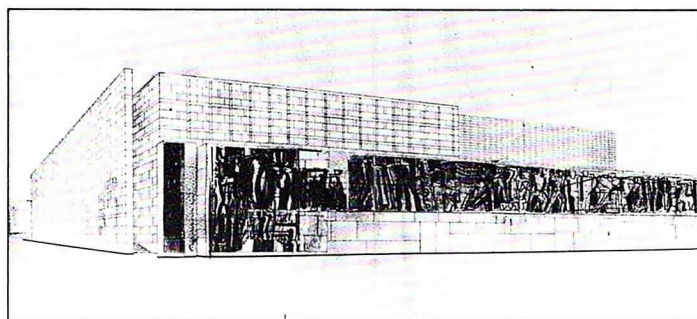
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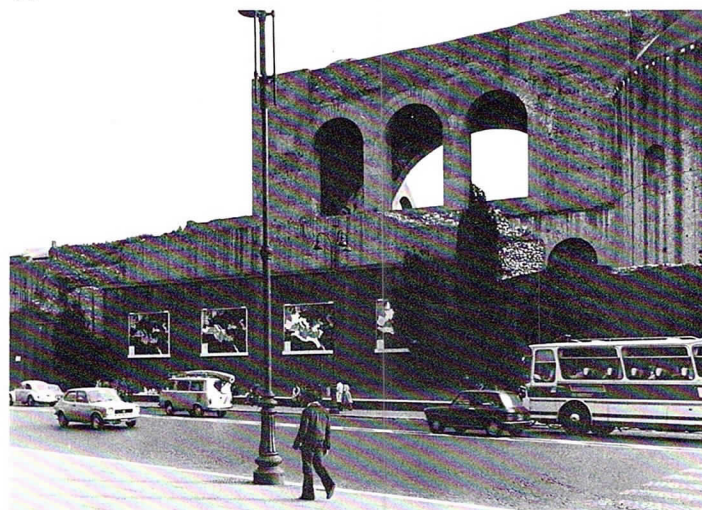
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architectonic motif, of great plastic effect, is, first of all, the entry portico to the rooms of the Danteum. The image of the Dantesque forest can be suggested by contiguity with the continuous open space of the court (the life of Dante before his subterranean trip) and the necessity for the visitor to traverse such a space as a prelude to the rooms dedicated to the three *cantiche* of the Comedy. The entrance to the building, then, situated parallel to and behind the facade, and between two high walls of marble (fig. 5), further restated by another long wall parallel to the front, can also correspond to another Dantesque 'justification': "non so ben come v'entrai" ("I do not know how I entered").¹⁴ This securely establishes the character of pilgrimage that visitors must make, lining processionally in single file, and guided only by the intense sunlight that will be reflected on the square space of the court.

11 From the golden rectangle that coincides with the generating plan of the building are developed the fundamental lines, such as the square constructed from the minor side, the most easily perceived characteristic of the work. The square is revealed in the plan at level 1,60m, and in the approach to the study rooms of the ground floor (fig. 7). The same scheme is created on the opposite side where the frontal wall is displaced in front of, and parallel to, the major side of the golden rectangle, thereby creating another pure square. This displacement of walls also creates the entry passage. Hence, the long flight of stairs of seven landings is the result of the difference between the golden rectangle of the generating plan and the square of the body of the building proper at the ground plane. It then follows that the mathematical and geometric correspondences can be traced in turn for the most important divisions of the rooms of the building—deriving the workings of the plan from the decomposition of the golden rectangle. Onto the functional plan scheme of a cruciform shape that determines the partitioning into *one* (open court) and *three* (the large, temple-like rooms dedicated to the three *cantiche*—Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso) is overlaid a scheme of vertical measure (the three rooms are situated at three levels respectively at 2,70m, 5,40m, and 8,10m, dimensions which are all multiples of three).



10



11

10 Danteum. Detail of frontal wall.

11 Basilica of Maxentius. View from the Via dei Fori Imperiali, showing relief maps of the Empire.

10 12 These two fundamental schemes are intersected by a third scheme formed by the 'longitudinal spine' that is constituted of three walls (alternately solid and perforated) defining, at the top of the building, the room dedicated to the Imperial Concept of Dante (fig. 9). This room of fundamental spiritual importance comes to represent the core of the architectural whole, as the conclusion of the experience of the spaces traversed, from the Inferno to the Purgatory to the Paradise. It can therefore be interpreted as the central nave of a temple, dominating and giving light to the minor spaces. The reference to the theme is clear:

13 the Universal Roman Empire which was envisaged and forecast by Dante as the ultimate purpose, and the only remedy for saving humanity and the Church from disorder and corruption. The allusions, references, and citations can be seen most often in the Divine Comedy in the transitions between Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise. The parts dedicated to this vision and prophecy of the Empire progress throughout the Poem and therefore will progress throughout the spaces that seek to exalt the Poem. It is necessary here to remember that element in the architectonic structure of the Danteum that is a strict analogy to the room dedicated to the Empire: It is the monumental wall which is disposed parallel to the front and displays a long frieze of relief sculptures to the Via dell'Impero (fig. 10).¹⁶ It is thus similar to the Pelasgic walls which are so well preserved on the Greek peninsula and on the Aegean Islands.¹⁷ This wall, which hides the building, creates an internal street of slight incline that leads to the entry and leaves the view to the Colosseum visually free for the visitor who approaches from Piazza Venezia. But above all, this wall recalls the character of the facing Basilica of Maxentius (fig. 11), thus expressing and explaining that lesson of the universality of the Roman Empire that Dante polemically expounded in *De Monarchia* and the *Convivio* and later exalted in the marvelous tercets of the Poem. In this way the wall becomes an immense blackboard, a monumental tablet¹⁸ filled with a hundred marble blocks (equivalent to the cantos of the Comedy), each in a size proportional to its place in the scheme of its canto. They therefore vary in size, and this explains the free composition, the model for which is found in Homeric Greece. The tercets or the

verses containing the allusions, the references, and the allegory of the Empire will be incised on the facade within the blocks corresponding to the canto from which each is derived. The monolithic block at the head of the sequence, on the Piazza Venezia side, is the *greyhound*.¹⁹

14 In this way it will be documented that the providential coincidence of choosing the zone of the Via dell'Impero for a monument to Dante could not but create a great spiritual response and a very *certain* prediction.

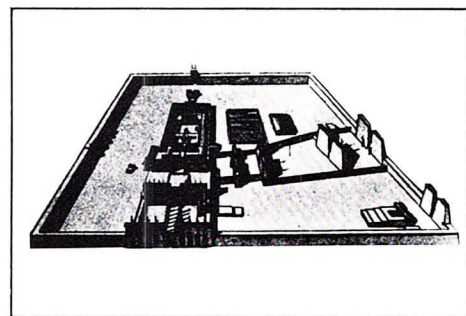
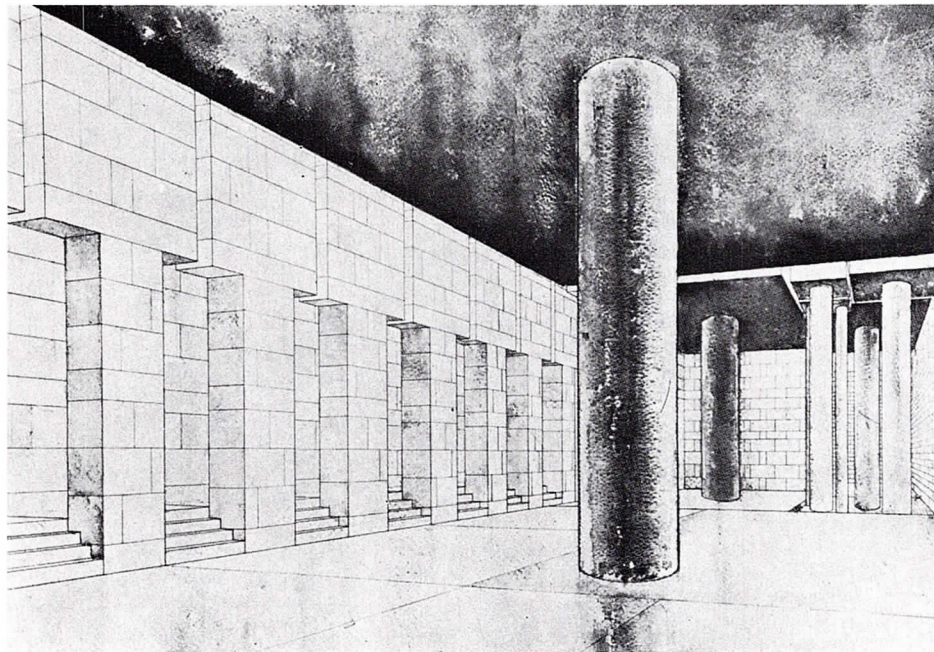
15 The moral system of the Inferno is traced with fundamental lines in the lesson given to Dante by Virgil in Canto XI (the structure of Hell). This, however, is the Aristotelian concept, which for Dante is a pagan concept of reason; this moral topography is valid up to the point where it must then be sustained by the cardinal and theological virtues. It then follows that the worst sins or capital vices and hence bad dispositions, which contrast to the three theological and the four cardinal virtues, are considered here as the real major decompositions of the moral structure of the Inferno and Purgatory—thus they may be glimpsed in the 'architecture' of the Poem.²⁰ And the second of Virgil's lessons on the organization of Purgatory (Canto XVII) is the more exact classification of faults already described in Canto XI of the Inferno. The two cantos together form the correct response between the *seven* frames of Purgatory and the *nine* rings of the Inferno. This is not a paradoxical affirmation because in the Inferno one is being punished for faults provoked by the seven sins and in Purgatory only for a moral blot; it is logical that, at first, Dante would have followed a more analytical classification, later extending it to consider some finer-grained subdivisions (nine versus seven). These premises are necessary to give an exhaustive explanation to the composition of the two rooms of the Inferno and Purgatory as they are represented in the drawings of the Danteum.²¹ We have already seen how the plan of each room coincides with a golden section rectangle that is one quarter of the total area of the larger golden rectangle that determines the entire composition (see fig. 7).

16 The rule of unity and trinity is therefore contained in

12 *Danteum* project, Rome. Giuseppe Terragni and Pietro Lingeri, architects, 1938. View of the Inferno.

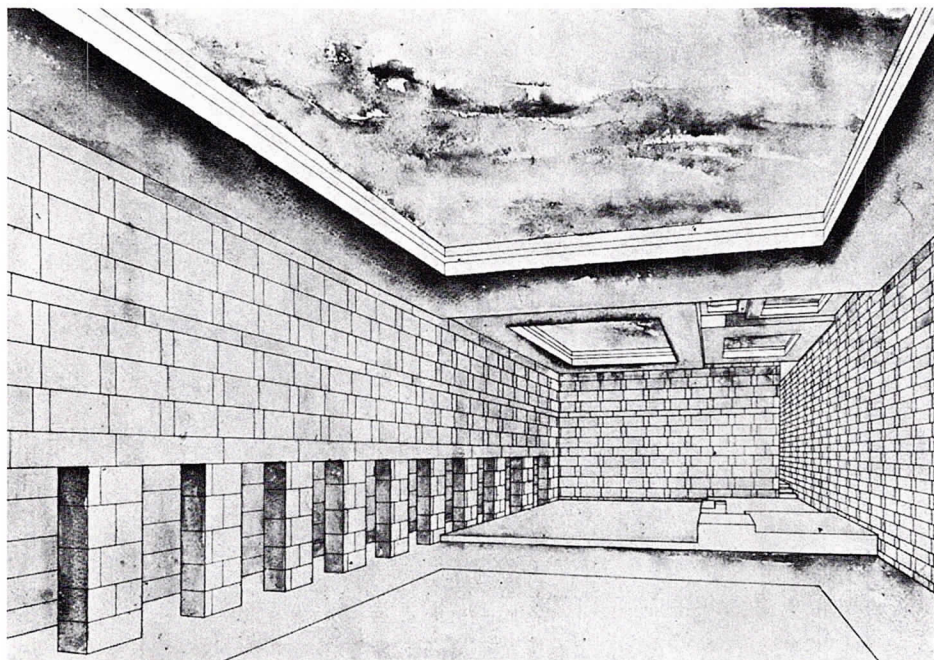
14 *Danteum*. Egyptian temple included in the site plan.

13 *Danteum*. View of Purgatory.



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02 the rectangle itself as it is rigorously respected in the 'symmetrical' division of the Poem: three *cantiche* of thirty-three cantos each plus a *cantica* of introduction. The one hundred cantos that result are equal to the *square of ten*, symbol of perfection ($3 \times 3 + 1$). The same rhythm that is the basis for the tercet is retaken as an analogy in the subdivision of the marble coursing of the building: three courses of equal height, one string course assigned to correspond to a level of each of the three rooms for which floor and ceiling of four rooms (the terrestrial life of Dante, the Inferno, Purgatory, Paradise) are plotted on the facade by seven bands that interrupt the stone ashlar which is disposed at intervals of three (fig. 6).

17 Seven are the mortal sins, seven the theological and cardinal virtues ($3 + 4$), seven the days taken by Dante in the allegorical trip begun on the seventh of April in 1300 (Holy Thursday in the Jubilee year).

18 The adherence of the architectural and the compositional artifact to the numerical rule of symmetry as well as the retracing of the subdivisions of the walls and the fundamental dimensions of the rooms, e.g., the floor-to-ceiling height of 8,10 meters (eighty-one decimeters, $3 \times 3 \times 3$ decimeters) is not sufficient to explain the structure of the rooms themselves. It is necessary to refer also to a more general problem, taking into account two limits: 1) Research into *essentials*, in an interpretation of the Poem, involving three modes of discourse: the *literal*, the *allegorical*, and the *anagogical*; 2) the character of an architecture and the definition of a type for a monumental building that must avail itself of two, or more, already historically fixed types in the form of Temple, Museum, Tomb, Palace, and Theater.

19 The *literal* sense is the description of the extraterrestrial trip that forms part of the cycle of medieval poetry on the destiny of man (the voyage of St. Paul, the purgatory of St. Patrick, etc.) and joins perfection, in the artistic sense, with higher Christian goals. The *allegorical* is the amelioration of Dante (sinful humanity) through consideration of fault (Inferno) and the expiation of penitence (Purgatory) into Grace (Paradise). The *anagogical* sense is the

vision of eternal happiness for humanity (recaptured in the person of Dante) obtained with the reconstruction of the Roman Empire, with its center in Rome, for worldly prosperity, and with the restoration of the Church—now liberated from the temporal power that pollutes it—for spiritual happiness, with its center also in Rome.

20 The research into *essentials* in these three areas brings us to consider the last eminent didactic quality of the building; and this would be valued as the 'pretext' of the work if this marvelous epoch in which we live were not such a limpid confirmation of Dante's 'dowry' of prophecy.²²

21 To exalt the Divine Comedy with an architectural monument is thus a living work and not a labor of erudition, or the fantasy of a theatrical producer.

22 Therefore, it is not a museum, not a palace, not a theater, but a *Temple* that we wish to construct.²³

23 A tripartite Temple of rooms disposed at different levels establishes an ascending route. Constructed in different ways, these rooms are integrated to gradually prepare the visitor for a sublimation of matter and light. The room of the Inferno (fig. 12), heavy and discreetly lighted by slits in the ceiling, seeks to establish by first contact with the visitor the spiritual atmosphere of astonishment through its peculiar and suggestive arrangement of seven monolithic columns that each carry part of a roof made of stone cut up into seven blocks. The decomposition is obtained by a rigorous application of the harmonic rule contained in the golden section rectangle; this results in a series of squares which are disposed in a descending spiral and which are theoretically infinite in number. In order to stop this decomposition at a practical number of squares we set a limit at seven. Entering the room one passes from the first square of seventeen meters on a side to the seventh of seventy centimeters on a side. The continuous line that passes through the center of these squares is a spiral, the spiral that results from the topography of the Divine Comedy, Dante's trip across the abyss of the Inferno and up the mountain of Purgatory. We have thus designed a room of columns that recalls the compositional motifs of antiquity;

the Orient, Greece, Italy; Egyptian rooms, Hellenic Temples, Etruscan Tombs (fig. 14). This represents an adherence, then, to the thoughts of Dante, which describe the moral structure of the Inferno through the Virgilian lesson of Canto XI, as if it were a reprise from a page of Aristotelian philosophy. The sensation of the *impending*, of the void formed under the crust of the earth and through a fearsome seismic disorder caused by the fall of Lucifer can be plastically created by the overall covering of the room. The fractured ceiling and the floor which is decomposed into diminishing squares, the scanty light that filters through the cracks in the blocks in the ceiling, all will give the catastrophic sensation of pain and useless aspiration to gain the sun and light—sensations that we find so often in the sorrowful speeches of the sinners interviewed by Dante. The seven columns, then, have thicknesses proportional to the weight they support, varying in diameter from 2,78m to ,48m, resulting in an arrangement that appears disorganized in the room. The imaginary line that collects the group of columns in a spiral assures that such an arrangement, which is not arbitrary, will produce a sure plastic effect.

24 In the room of Purgatory (fig. 13), the rule of counter-balance, which Dante clearly evidences in the two systems (punitive and expiatory in the two realms of Inferno and Purgatory respectively), is represented plastically by the perfect response between the floor and ceiling of each room. For the first room is provided a paving pattern that repeats the roof subdivision of seven squares, making seven steps to coincide with the seven blocks of the ceiling.²⁴

25 But it is also opportune to speak of another response which gives an exact explanation of the plastic conformity of the second room. Dante imagines Purgatory in the form of a truncated conical mountain of seven terraces or 'cornices' immersed in the Australian hemisphere and created by the impact of Lucifer's fall, which also created the Inferno at the opposite end of the earth in the northern hemisphere. Purgatory is an island in a sea of water, and above the Inferno, at the opposite side (and covered by land), is the heavenly Jerusalem. We have already brought out the parallelism between the moral topography of the

Inferno and of Purgatory, summarized in the numerical 10: rule of seven. It is now necessary to add the physical, material, plastic response between the *void* of the infernal chasm and the *solid* of the mystical mountain of Purgatory.²⁵

26 In designing the rooms of the Danteum we have believed it opportune to respect, with the fidelity of a performer, these fundamental concepts, reserving for ourselves a freedom of choice and synthesis in the plastic composition of the rooms. The room dedicated to the second *cantica*, therefore, presents analogies with the preceding room. The subdivision of the golden rectangle into seven squares is identical, but reversed in direction (to follow the itinerary that the visitor must follow). Such a concentric pattern of squares is made by a slight depression, like a valley, in the ceiling. The outline of the fascias is clearly shown—equivalent to two steps of Dante's 'terraces'—which is nothing more than the proposition of the 'frame' of the hypothetical structure, in terraces, of the mountain of Purgatory.

27 The moral 'construction' of Purgatory is incomparably simpler than that of the Inferno, and the room dedicated to Purgatory is very much more *unencumbered* and open than the preceding room. In the second *cantica* the expiation of sin through penitence gives the Poet the opportunity to present the sinners, and the allegorical scenes, with humanity, and more often with sweetness. He himself participates in the lives of the sinners, receiving on his forehead, from the spade of the Angel of the first terrace, the sign of the seven sins which, from time to time, are canceled by other angels, the custodians of the mountain.

28 The scene that we intend to prepare to present this second *cantica* properly does not omit of such a poetic sensation. And by making use of the abundant light from the wide rays of sun that burst through the ample openings in the ceiling, we will succeed in creating an ambience in which the visitor feels a salutary sensation of comfort, calling his attention to the sky again, but framed by geometry . . .

(end of extant text).

1. This statement implies that the government had already substantially accepted the idea of the Danteum building, and further indicates that the choice of site was not in the hands of either the architects or the clients.

2. The sequence of these last statements is significant. The 'first task' is the a priori selection of the proper and natural form for a monument. The second task is the adaptation of the perfect 'set piece' to circumstances that are both formal/historical and related to the social hierarchy of the building.

3. Terragni's insistence on geometric harmony and absolute beauty derived through the use of the golden section recalls Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*, but Terragni's insistence on *historical*, rather than *psychological*, justification is an important distinction. For Le Corbusier, "Primary forms are beautiful forms because they can be clearly appreciated" (p. 8). For Terragni pure geometry is beautiful because it is perfect, and because it represents the Divine. See my article, "Levels of Meaning in Terragni," *Parametro* 46, May 1976.

4. This contrasts with the more 'orthodox' Modern Movement view of Lewis Mumford, "The true symbol of the modern age in architecture is the absence of visible symbols," *The Culture of Cities*, written in 1938, the same year as the *Relazione*.

5. *Spiritual* is taken here to mean both *intellectual* and *mystical*, meanings that Terragni specifies further on.

6. Although every Italian school child is familiar with the numerical structure of the *Divine Comedy* (as in Terragni's day) for the American reader these are the major divisions.

Three *cantiche* of thirty-three cantos each, plus one extra in the first *cantica*, making a total of one hundred.

The Poem is composed of three-line tercets; the first and the third lines rhyme, the second line rhymes with the beginning of the next stanza, making a kind of overlap, reflected in the Danteum design.

The Inferno is of nine levels, the vestibule makes the tenth.

The Purgatory is of nine terraces, the terrestrial Paradise makes the tenth.

Paradise is of nine heavens, Empyrean makes the tenth.

Sinners in the Inferno are organized by their vices. There are three: Incontinence, Violence, and Fraud.

Penitence is ordered on the basis of three types of natural love in Purgatory.

Paradise is ordered on the basis of three types of Divine Love. (From the *Divine Comedy*, C. H. Grandgent, Random House, 1932)

7. Terragni seems to misconceive the Basilica as a Temple. He most likely made no distinction between the two types in terms of source material for design, but later he makes an important building-type distinction; see para. 22.

8. The statement derives from *Towards a New Architecture*, while appearing to foreshadow Le Corbusier's own claims for the effectiveness of his Modulor.

9. While Terragni could claim an avoidance of the rhetoricism of the *Piacentiniani* in eschewing columns and arches, he embraced other forms of imitative building in some of his tombs and monuments, most particularly the Sarfatti Monument of 1934 and the Palazzo Littorio Projects. The distinction between the adaptation of the Florentine palace plan for the Casa del Fascio in Como

and the expropriation of detail motifs is central to his argument. It is just such a distinction that separated the Rationalists from the Monumentalists.

10. Dante began his journey in a dark forest. An atmosphere of impending doom and uncertainty pervades this introductory canto. The journey itself is both a ritual of initiation and an architectural promenade. The process by which mankind is transformed is thus the direct result of an architectural form, both in the *Comedy* and in the *Danteum*.

11. The creation of ambience is the second Dantesque correspondence after numerology.

12. This form of substitution is as important to Terragni in the building of his architectural 'allegory' as it was to Dante. The potentials for speculation on just what the allegorical sense is for Terragni are many. For a brief discussion of the problem see my "Levels of Meaning in Terragni," *Parametro* 46, May 1976.

13. This is the reverse of the Corbusian idea that "starting from conditions more or less utilitarian, you have established relationships that have aroused my emotions" *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 165. Terragni, by contrast, seeks to solve the compositional problems first, and then attacks use and meaning. While this distinction is stronger in print than in result—Le Corbusier did, after all, create a priori schemes for buildings—the difference requires underscoring since the very existence of a referential realm beyond the solving of some set of initial problems is a necessary component of Terragni's world view if we are to accept him as more than a pattern-maker.

14. "How I got there I cannot say,
Because I was so heavy and full of sleep

When I first stumbled from the narrow way . . ."

Thus Dante describes his initial experience in the *Comedy*, *Inferno* I.

15. The multiplicity of readings of the organizing geometry of the building is matched by a similar multiplicity in the symbolic readings of the forms as the conveyers of many levels of association, from direct Dantesque structural reference to the history of architecture.

16. The retaining wall unearthed with the Basilica was also imitated by Terragni in the scheme for the Palazzo Littorio of 1934.

17. The Pelasgi were pre-Hellenic Greeks. The Lion Gate in Mycenae is an example of a 'Pelasgic Wall'.

18. This wall, and the interior wall of the entrance passage, both contained reliefs imitating the long retaining wall across the street where Mussolini had placed relief maps of the various stages of the Roman Empire (fig. 11). The 'symmetry', initiated in Terragni's mind with the Palazzo Littorio project (the question mark shaped wall in the Sacratio) is restated by the orientation of the *Danteum* block and reinforced by these decorations.

19. Dante's numerical structuring goes back to Homer. Thus Terragni further ties himself to Dante by using similar source material, i.e., ancient systems. The 'greyhound' is Dante's image for the one who was to revive Italy from her ruinous state, Henry VII of Luxembourg. For Terragni the 'greyhound' is obviously Mussolini, who also doubles as Can Grande della Scala, since he is both patron and leader.

20. This metaphor recalls Massimo Bontempelli, who was the leading Italian intellectual involved in interdisciplinary 'cross fer-

tilization'. Bontempelli's ideas concerning the relation of architecture to literature are part of the conditions for Terragni's conception of the *Danteum* in this manner. See *L'Architettura*, May 1969.

21. The Aristotelian justification of numerical and 'rational' precepts that are to be found in Dante goes for Terragni as well.

"Philosophy, to him who hears it, points out . . . how nature takes her course from the Divine Intellect, and from its art; and if thou note well thy physics, thou wilt find . . . that your art, as far as it can, follows her as the scholar does his master; so that your art is, as it were, the grandchild of the Deity." Canto XI, *Inferno*. "Physics" refers to the physics of Aristotle. The sense of correctness that Terragni sought for his building and his method, against the probability of error, is dramatized in Canto XVII of *Purgatory*, where Dante describes 'love' as the fountainhead of all action: "nor creator, nor creature, my son, was ever without love, either natural or rational, . . . the natural is always without error; but the other may err through an evil object, or through too little or too much vigor."

The *Danteum* project itself becomes a *good* object in Terragni's system, since it glorifies Dante, Mussolini, Italy. And Terragni's method of design gives the building just enough, but not too much, vigor, through its rational evolution.

22. Six years before the creation of the new Roman Empire, Mussolini had concluded a reconciliation with the Church of Rome which officially recognized the loss of temporal powers resulting from the unification of Italy under Victor Emmanuel II. This was another confirmation of Dante's 'dowry of prophecy' as a White Guelph is the politics of medieval Florence.

23. The statement is the direct opposite of that of Theo van Doesburg, "elimination of all *concept of form* in the sense of a fixed type is essential . . . the new architecture is not subject to any fixed aesthetic formal type . . . the new architectural methods will know no closed type, no *basic type* . . . the functional space will be strictly divided into rectangular surfaces . . ." (from Van Doesburg, "Towards a Plastic Architecture," 1924). Terragni's concept of the *Danteum* as an a priori form/use type, the Temple, would be totally irrelevant to Van Doesburg.

24. Terragni's need for unity in trinity is clearly expressed in the structural similarity, but atmospheric differences, among the three spaces of his own 'allegory'. This tension between generalized form and the function of the form is a parallel to the Renaissance retrieval of antique forms for both ecclesiastical and secular uses without distinction.

25. The correspondence is rendered in the small spiral 'mountain' in the center of the space of *Purgatory*, contrasting to the slight depression, also a spiral, in the *Inferno*.

Figure Credits

1-3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14 Courtesy Thomas Schumacher.

4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15-17 Reprinted from "Omaggio a Terragni," *L'Architettura*, 153, July 1968.

Postscript

Thomas Schumacher

06 To ascend to the space that represents the Paradise the visitor must exit Purgatory at the corner and climb a stairway of three groups of three steps, placed in the zone of overlap of the two squares of the original generating scheme (fig. 16). The stairway is also narrower than previous transitions (except for the entrance to the building itself) implying that few souls ever get to Paradise (fig. 15). This space has undergone the greatest decomposition of all, since materiality is least important in Paradise. But Terragni has created this effect through *destruction* of material and architectural form rather than *absence* of such form. The visitor enters into an ante-space, like the ante-Paradise of Dante's Comedy. He may then go on to the space of Paradise proper or to the space of the Impero (fig. 17). From the ante-space the structure of the Paradise is made evident—thirty-three columns of glass support a transparent frame open to the sky, surrounded by walls which are further decomposed by the vertical slits which correspond to the grid of the forest of columns below. The pavement, too, is decomposed along the same grid, with glazing between the blocks which are supported by the columns below. It is as if the entire space is floating.

An adherence to the golden rectangle scheme is maintained along with the superimposition of the scheme of the square (the motifs that are contained in the original composition). In the Paradise the golden section rectangle includes the ante-space and the adjacent space of the top of the stair that leads back down to the street. The square removed from the golden rectangle describes the Paradise proper, the limits of the column grid and the frame of the transparent beams connecting this architectural event to the real heavens. The progression from *dense* to *framed* to *open*—Inferno, Purgatory, Paradise—following a scheme of ascent toward the most holy and sacred leads the visitor finally to the room dedicated to the new Roman Empire. This space is a long corridor which displaces space from both the Inferno and the Purgatory, and lies parallel to the axis of the Via dell'Impero, restating the connection of the Piazza Venezia and the Colosseum, and thus making the Danteum a microcosm of Terragni's concept of the Empire. The interdependency of the two spaces of Paradise and Impero (along with their literal separation) symbolizes

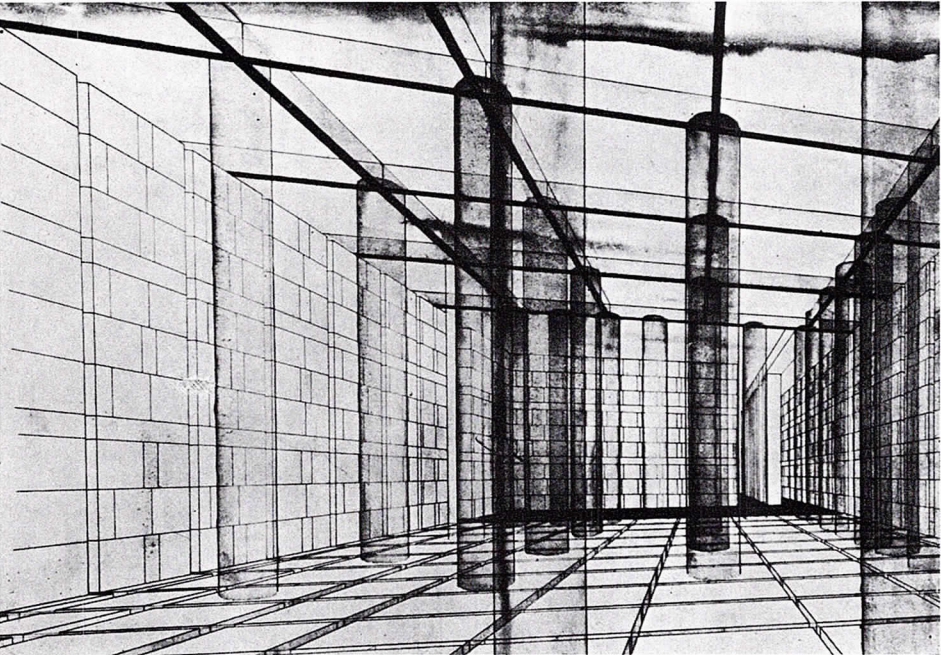
the spiritual interdependency of the Church and the Empire, each of which was believed by Dante to derive its powers directly from God.

The final descent is made by slipping through two walls at the far corner of Paradise and descending the stair to the street, completing a circuit begun at the entrance of the Inferno. Between these two portals all transitions are made by ascent and around corners, not through actual doors. In this way the final exit, which also marks the end of Dante's text (which lacks any description of the return to the *real* world), recalls the inscription on the gates of the Inferno, "lasciate ogni speranza, voi che v'entrate" ("abandon all hope, ye that enter").

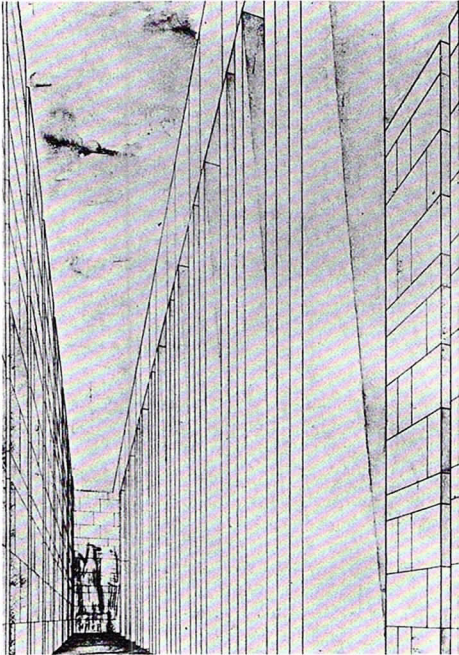
Upon his exit, the visitor is confronted with the marble block at the head of the sequence of reliefs: the Greyhound.

15 Danteum project, Rome. Giuseppe Terragni and Pietro Lingeri, architects, 1938. View of Paradise.

16 Danteum. Plan at 10,00m.

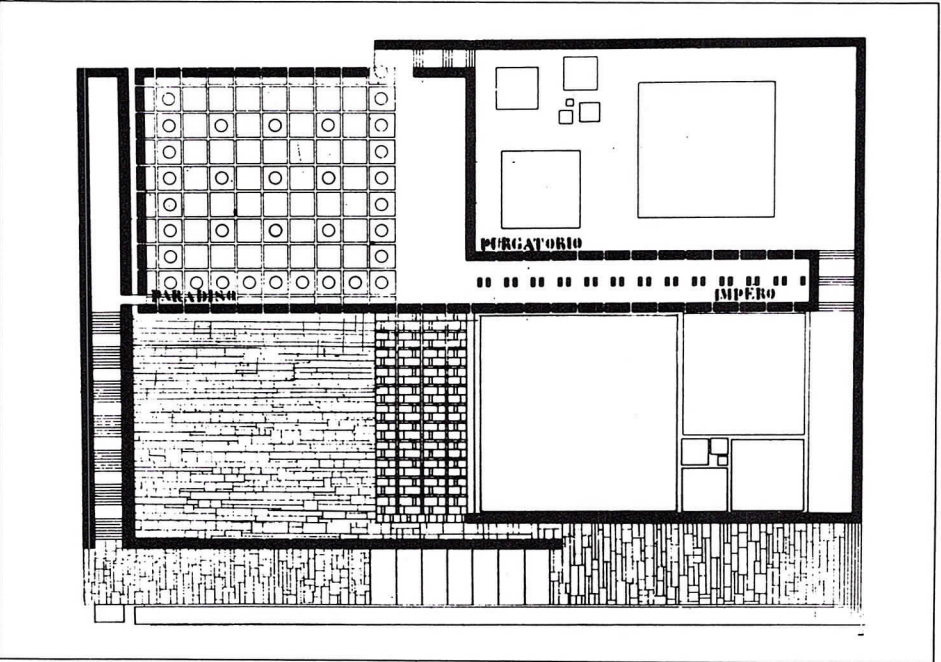


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Reviews, Letters, and Forum

**On Nikolai Miliutin's Sotsgorod:
The Problem of Building Socialist Cities**

N. A. Miliutin. *Sotsgorod: The Problem of Building Socialist Cities*. Edited by William Alex, George Collins, and Tanya Page. Translated by Arthur Sprague. 1975, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press. 143 pp., \$25.00.

Kenneth Frampton



1 Nikolai Aleksandrovich Miliutin, 1932.

This publication of N. A. Miliutin's *Sotsgorod* ("Socialist Towns") constitutes an unexpected but welcome point of reference amid a flood of recent publications which, in one way or another, have been dedicated to the heroic period of modern architecture in the USSR. The late Arthur Sprague's translation of 1968 now assumes a special significance, partly because of its presentation of material which was hitherto unavailable in English, and partly because of the way in which it has been edited by William Alex, George Collins, and Tanya Page. Save for a certain number of small and idiosyncratic errors, the Collins-Sprague introduction provides an excellent context for a work which would otherwise remain decidedly cryptic; for without the annotation, the introduction, and the glossary, the double-sided nature of Miliutin's text—in part ideological, in part instrumental—would remain largely concealed. As it is, the biographic account of Miliutin's life still borders on the schematic; the editors apparently feeling no obligation to record the known facts of Miliutin's career as a political militant. For inexplicable reasons Collins' introduction tells us nothing of Miliutin's peasant origins, of his membership of the Party at the age of nineteen, of his conscription and subsequent formation of militant cells within the Imperial army, of his arrest, escape, re-arrest and narrow escape from a court martial sentencing him to death, and of his subsequent taking command of a Red Guard detachment in the Kornilov affair and, finally, of his creditable record as a Red Guard commandant in the defence of Petrograd.

Nikolai Aleksandrovich Miliutin was not himself an architect by training and this alone is sufficient to cast his post-Revolutionary career as an urbanist in a problematic light. At the same time, the lacunae that remained in the account of his early years are such as to provoke further question about the nature of his basic education. Born in 1889 (and hence of the same generation as Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe), Miliutin's only formal education

seems to have been in the field of fine art which he studied between 1905 and 1912. After this, little is known of his personal development until 1917 when he became chairman of the Citywide Petrograd Hospital accounting office and entered a successful administrative career in which there was little call to become involved in the problems of physical planning. In 1925, however, he was made chairman of the New Towns committee of that Soviet 'think-tank', the Communist Academy, and from then on he was increasingly involved in the formation of socialist planning theory. At the same time—as unlikely as it may seem—he was appointed People's Commissar to the RSFSR, that is, he was made finance minister to the largest republic of the Soviet Union; a post which he continued to hold until 1929. Apart from establishing his status amid the Party élite, this position was to provide the necessary administrative and statistical experience for the writing of *Sotsgorod*. The 1930 publication of this book and the founding in the following year of his magazine *Sovetskaya Arkhitektura* inaugurated Miliutin's career as an urban theorist. It was at the same time the crowning achievement of an autodidact and distinguished public servant whose activity was suddenly curtailed for political reasons at the end of 1934.

All of the evidence would indicate that Miliutin was something of a polymath—part architect, part bureaucrat, part philosopher, part economist, part aesthete, part statistician. Yet for all of this, the most surprising thing about him was his unwavering support until 1935 for the Soviet functionalist architects; that is to say, of Moisei Ginzburg's OSA group, which Miliutin loyally defended against the attacks from both the prewar academicians and the cultural reactionaries within the Party.

The contestatory nature of *Sotsgorod*—sometimes misunderstood by the editors as "inconsistency"—explicitly reflects the ideological conflicts of these early years. Indeed Miliutin's basic thesis seems often to

be formulated in terms of an impossible choice between meeting the urgent demands of an immediate reality and building an appropriate infrastructure for some still remote Socialist future. Nowhere is this more evident than in Miliutin's opposition to the "super-collectivist" policies of the urban theorist Moissevich Sabsovich, who advocated the building of large *dom-kommunas* that would effectively be comprised of little else save public facilities and individual sleeping cabins.¹ While Miliutin categorically repudiated this reduction of the dwelling to the status of a "toilet," he was equally repelled by the importance then already being given to the nuclear family by petty bourgeois elements of the Party. He wrote: "One cannot but regret that in certain circles of our party, the bourgeois ideology is so strong that, with a diligence worthy of a less petty purpose, they think up ever new arguments for retaining the double bed as a permanent and compulsory item in the worker's home!"

In Miliutin's view, however, there was no way of transforming the traditional structure of the nuclear family except on piecemeal and gradual basis. He maintained that the final form of the future collective was as tactically undesirable to impose as it was strategically impossible to foresee. Of the redundant "utopianism" of visionary future, he quoted Goethe (after Engels) as saying that: "it is as much a secret for fools as for sages." As far as Miliutin was concerned, the only societal components that had to be immediately changed in order to ensure the progressive transformation of society were the kitchen and the nursery school, since the *liberation of women* was obviously contingent on the nature of these items. And while the priority that Miliutin attached to female liberation should unquestionably make *Sotsgorod* a seminal text in the annals of architectural feminism (a source incidentally which has so far been ignored by the doyennes of the movement), the anticipated consequences of this liberty were surely already enough to provoke social disquiet not to say disaffection. For

although Miliutin championed female liberation on socio-cultural grounds, he saw the consequent release of energy as an important source of economic wealth. For him it was first and foremost a strategy by which the output of the society could be increased without augmenting the investment in residential stock. And although the anticipated cultural advance to be derived from such a 'surplus' remains as problematic today as when Miliutin's thesis was first advanced, the logic of the argument itself can hardly be disputed. In his chapter dedicated to "The New Organization of Life," Miliutin wrote: "Finally, the problem of raising the standard of living of the population also finds its solution in the collectivization of the life services, even with our contemporary productive capacity of the labor force. Freeing woman from the household and making her into a worker will increase the family's earnings; only forty to fifty percent of these additional earnings need go toward the expenses of the family while fifty to sixty percent will be used to raise the standard of living. Therefore, collectivization of the life services of the population provides:

- 1) the freedom of woman from domestic slavery;
- 2) a reduction, and in places elimination, of the demands for a flow of new workers into the city;
- 3) a reduction of demand for new residential construction;
- 4) an increase in the productive capacity of the labor force;
- 5) an increase in the standard of living of the working population; and
- 6) an advance to a higher cultural level for mankind."

An essential element in this gradualist policy was the subsidiary kitchen to be shared in the case of Miliutin's *dom-kommunas* by two couples and eight bachelors, stacked on three floors above a kitchen set at grade. In such an arrangement, it was intended that the main meals would be taken in the communal dining hall, with the provision that the subsidiary kitchens would

eventually be phased out. The nursery school in this model had an even greater transitional role to perform, a "transition" that would be both physical and temporal. As each successive wave of children passed from a kibbutz-like nursery school, to a kindergarten, and finally to a dormitory-school, a whole generation would be literally transported in space, further and further away, from the family structure of the residential sector and closer to the collective organization of the production center itself. For Miliutin these schools were even seen as centers of production in as much as they were to yield the human material of the future society.

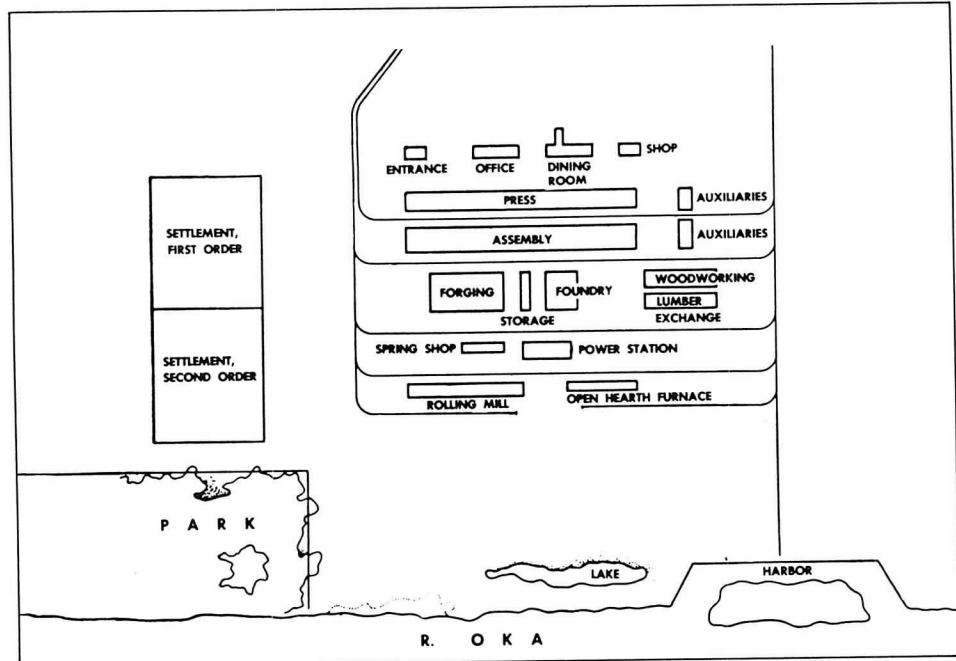
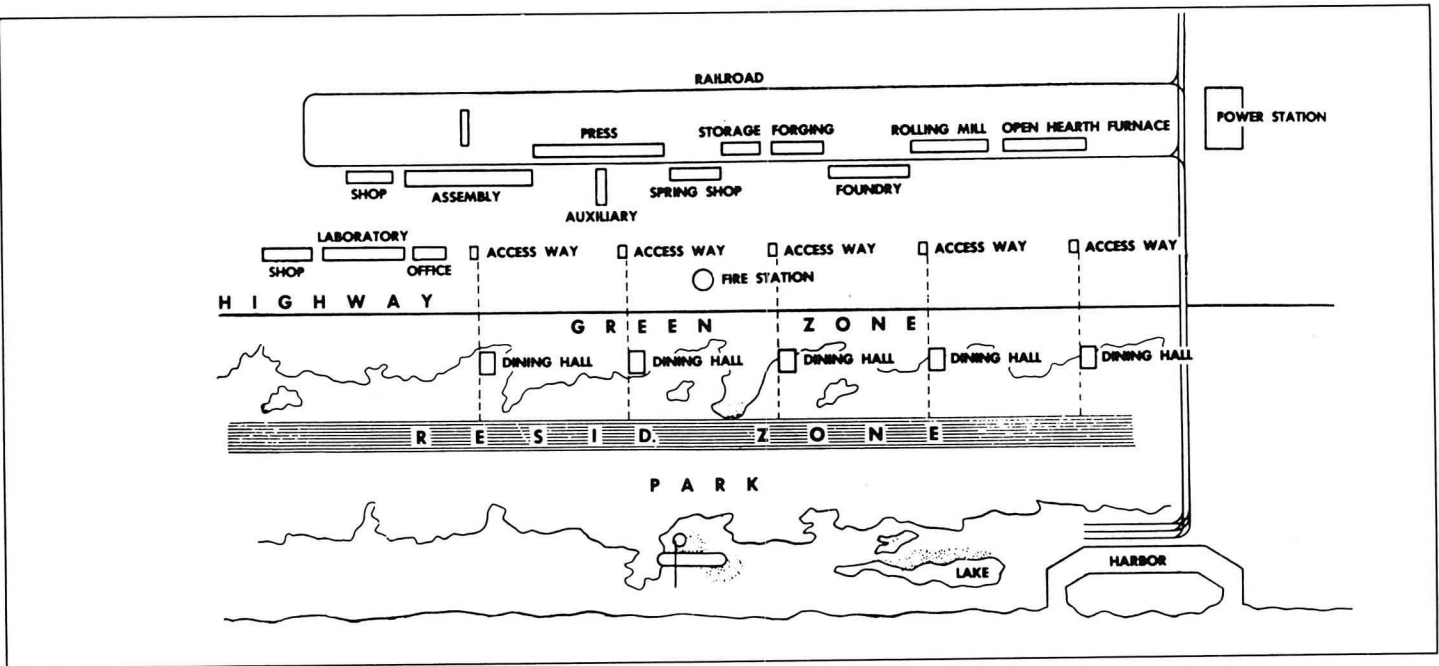
Such an economic emphasis permeates the entire body of *Sotsgorod* from the desire to bring about an immediate improvement in the standard of living of the workers, to the determination to evolve, after Ford's industrial methods, the 'one best way' for the organization of the urban environment. In that famous Soviet planning dispute of the late twenties between the 'urbanists' and the 'de-urbanists', Miliutin came down decidedly on the side of the latter, but not to the extent of recommending the disestablishment of all existing cities. He took his most radical stand in advocating the decentralization of all new industry, providing that this industry should remain in a form that was sufficiently concentrated as to be able to exploit the principles of Taylorization. He leaves the readers in no doubt as to his contempt for the Kropotkinian policy of inundating the countryside with small workshops. Despite this, his 'six-banded' linear city was to remain dedicated, after the principles of the Communist Manifesto, to the reunification of town and country. To this end it was arranged as an 'agro-industrial' unit in which both agricultural and industrial workers were to live in the same residential sector.

As the basic organization of Miliutin's city model is by now well-known, one need only enumerate here the six zones and state the nature of their interaction. They were

2 Miliutin's rearrangement of the Nizhninogorod factory in the form of a banded, linear industrial city. Miliutin was as critical of Taylorization as he was influenced by it.

4 Miliutin's basic six-banded linear scheme as projected for the town of Stalingrad. As usual the water resource is incorporated into the park zone.

3 The accepted layout for the Nizhninogorod automobile factory.



respectively the rail zone, the industrial zone, the green buffer zone with arterial road, the residential zone, the park zone, and the agricultural zone. The metabolic nature of this model is evident from the activity that would have ranged back and forth across the layering of these zones. Thus workers would have traversed the green zones on either side of the residential band to gain access to the zones of production; while industrial and agricultural produce would have penetrated the residential and industrial matrix, to be stored in warehouses or at points of transshipment for their eventual redistribution by rail or road to the community at large. Meanwhile 'night-soil' would flow out from the residential zone to the fields, only to return to its point of origin in the form of food.

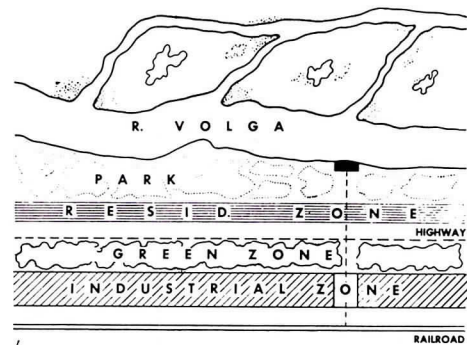
And while Miliutin was adamant about maintaining the strict sequential arrangement of the zones, he was cognizant of the need to tailor the width and orientation of the city axis in such a way as to accommodate the configuration of the topography and to take advantage of available water resources and the direction of the prevailing wind. It is significant that unlike Le Corbusier's later adaptation of the Miliutin model—first in his plan for Zlin in Czechoslovakia of 1935 and then in his book *The Four Routes* of 1942—Miliutin seems to have ignored water as a viable means of transport or that he realized that the Russian canal infrastructure was already too focused on existing cities to be of significant use for future urban development. In any event, water for Miliutin was of consequence only as a recreational resource and as such it was always shown as part of the park zone.

For Miliutin the idea of functionalism in architecture was inseparable from the notion of production itself and this conviction led him to specify a full range of design criteria with uncommon precision. From

the organization of the city itself to the equipment of the living cell, or from the performance requirements of 'social-condensers'—be they schools, clubs, or communes—to the technical components of the built fabric, the design criteria set out in *Sotsgorod* are as coherent as they are realistic. When it comes to the means of construction, one cannot refrain from remarking on the non-utopian and often extremely expedient nature of Miliutin's whole approach. In all his technical specifications high priority is consistently given to ease of erection and to the lightness, strength, and cheapness of the basic components. Light, synthetic materials such as rubberoid, tar paper, silicate blocks, and compressed wood were recommended for use whenever possible and rational production was advocated whenever the scale of the undertaking would justify a Taylorized approach.

Typical of the pragmatic expediency of Miliutin's approach were his recommendations for the layout, design, and construction of new industrial development. He wrote: "We have a long standing attitude about the expediency of multi-story and wide buildings. Our opinion grows out of the fact that the layout of land plots in the West is connected with planning on the line system but that the expense of the land necessitates the upward growth of the complex. In taking over mechanically this experience from the West, we do not make the necessary modifications for our own circumstances. We have said enough concerning the advantage of the linear plan; with us, where the price of land is practically nil, it is a complete waste to spend money on vertical, substantial buildings which will long outlast the machines they house. If we would accept narrow, one-story industrial buildings, we could save considerably on their expense."

The planned obsolescence of this attitude—a thesis which has recently enjoyed a certain revival—was paralleled by Miliutin's all but irresponsible approach to the solid-

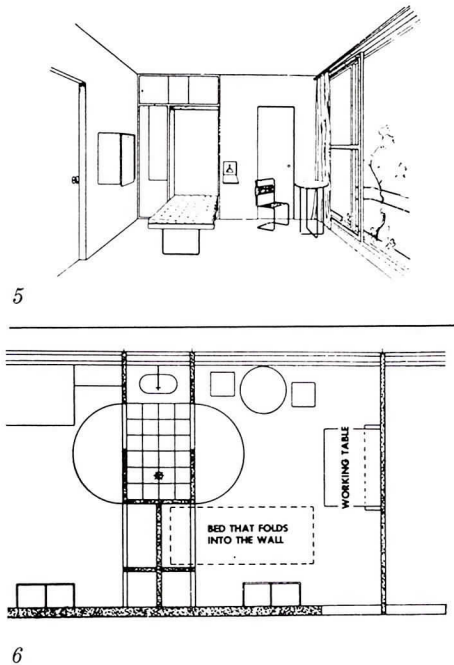


4

RAILROAD

5, 6 Miliutin's typical minimum living-cell. Aside from providing the basic equipment for minimum needs, this is a normative bachelor cell which is shown grouped in pairs about a service core so that the individuals on either side may combine and separate at will.

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ity of the construction. He wrote: "The walls could be made of glass in wood or metal frames resting on a light foundation (for example, one cinderblock thick on the north, one-half on the south. . . . It is evident that this kind of construction would last from twenty to thirty years, i.e., about the same length of time as the machines, and would cost about three to four times less than brick buildings." The likelihood that such a low level of insulation and construction would prove inadequate when faced with the rigors of the typical Russian winter seems not to have been acknowledged by Miliutin, and it is just the irresponsibility of this 'materialist' attitude that was the substance of Berthold Lubetkin's critical post-mortem on Russian Constructivism written in 1956.²

It is difficult to reconcile the absolutely economic nature of Miliutin's approach with his persistent defence of the architectural avant-garde, which on occasion even went beyond his 'functionalist' colleagues in the OSA group. Nothing surely could have been further removed from the rigors of productive economy than Miliutin's ardent defence of Jacob Chernikov's *Architectural Fantasies*, published in 1933, or the support that both he and Ginzburg gave to the highly imaginative but obviously 'afunctional' projects of the young OSA protégé Ivan Leonidov. Equally strange, from the point of view of the dissidence of a party militant, was his never ending derision of Anatole Lunarchasky's conservative cultural policies, which first came to the fore with Miliutin's public attack on the prize-winning design for the Lenin Library of 1928. Miliutin was equally critical of Lunarchasky even in 1933 when it was no longer safe to indulge in such cultural controversies—Miliutin was then defending Le Corbusier's Centroyus against Lunarchasky's censure. This was already some time after Miliutin had first come under attack, not initially for his architectural taste, but for his theoretical planning proposals. That it was Miliutin and not the more radical OSA group that

first drew Lazar Kaganovich's fire in his Bolshevik Party address of June 1931, given under the title "The Socialist Reconstruction of Moscow and other Cities in the USSR," is understandably remarked on at length by the editors. Of Kaganovich's denunciation of Miliutin, Collins writes: "It is interesting that Miliutin rather than OSA or Ginzburg, the more radical, should be singled out. . . . What is apparent is that there was to be no middle ground (where Miliutin stood) and no compromise with either the modernists or (as would prove to be the case) with those with a sympathy for Western advances in architecture, such as Miliutin had demonstrated. And, ominously, Miliutin was being attacked for things that he does not really appear to have said. Perhaps it was his substantial position in the Academy and in the Party, and the considerable publicity that the magazine *VOKS* had given his book, that required that he be admonished rather than Ginzburg, who was allowed to continue to talk Constructivism, for several years, provided that he did not expect to fill commissions in that style."

Kaganovich, acting on Stalin's behalf, was apparently determined to discredit the de-urbanist interpretation of the Communist Manifesto—to the effect that one should 'de-urbanize' the town and urbanize the country—in order to maintain the prevailing density of the Moscow conurbation. Kaganovich even quoted Stalin in support of his basic attack; that the old peasantry who had been traditionally suspicious of the city were now being replaced by a new peasantry who would look toward the city for productive sustenance and aid.

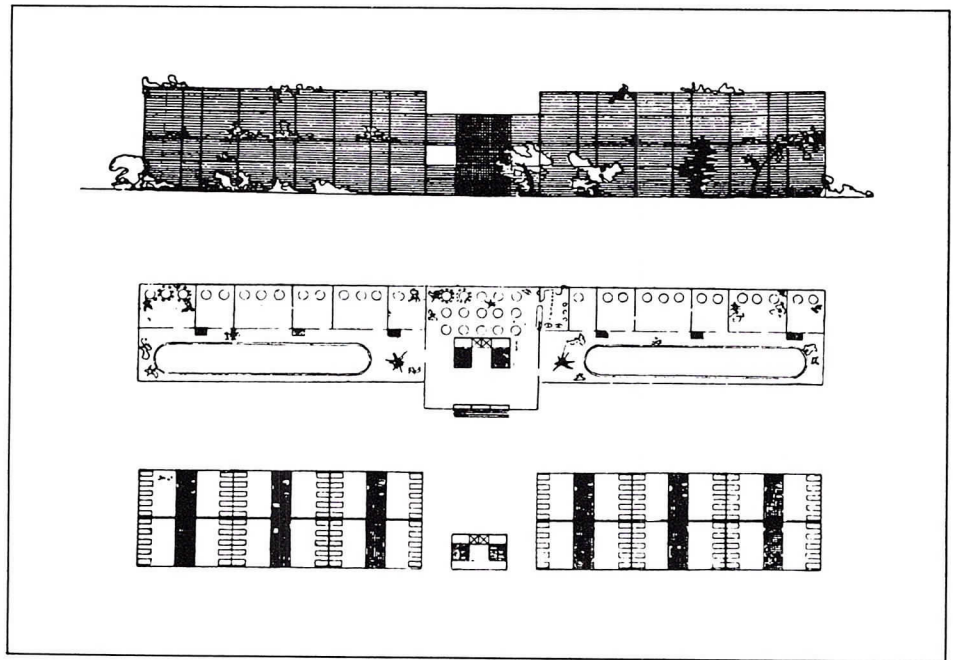
Miliutin's own recantation was to appear in *Sovetskaiia Arkhitektura* in the following year; in an essay that appeared in the Spring issue of 1932 under the title "Major Problems of the Present Period of Soviet Architecture." Here Miliutin directly disavowed his de-urbanist past and accused his former 'de-urbanist' colleague of the OSA group, Okhitovich, of being a Trotz-

7 A school dormitory for Magnitogorsk, plans and elevation. It is interesting that Miliutin should illustrate Sotsgorod with this little known scheme by Ivan Leonidov, for this project was clearly an 'advanced' work even by the standards of

its day. The suggestion of a 'green facade' and a communal 'winter garden' jointly reveal a single-minded hedonism that was atypical within the avant-garde work of the period.

kyite. And while Miliutin now lashed out to the left and the right against anyone who deviated from the Stalinist metropolitan Party line in planning, he still persisted in attacking Lunarchasky and in supporting—albeit more ambiguously—the Constructivist wing of the Soviet avant-garde. In his last essay of 1933, entitled "Basic Questions on a Theory of Soviet Architecture" he would both deny "Constructivism" as bourgeois and attack Bekker, the leader of the VOPRA group—for his assertion that Western ideas in architecture should be completely eschewed. In sum, Miliutin could never bring himself to accept Lunarchasky's Social Realist, pseudo-classical line. He wrote: "There can be no question of a synthesis of antique architecture (i.e., of the era of slavery) with contemporary forms . . . we want no unprincipled eclecticism such as they have in Washington . . . would we equip the Red Army as Greek hoplites?"

Disregarding for a moment the perennial controversies over the ideology of style, how are we to receive *Sotsgorod* today, almost half a century after its initial publication? Is there the slightest chance, for example, that its proposals for the layered integration of productive centers with both housing and nature might still have some general validity for the development of the future? After all, there is now no contradiction between the present phenomena of the megalopolis and the general 'de-urbanizing' proposals of the late twenties. There is in fact no concrete reason why Miliutin's 'six-band' model should not work even better today than fifty years ago. And there has indeed been a continuous stream of planners who, in one way or another, have advocated approaches similar to those first elaborated by Miliutin. Amongst these, mention must be made in passing of the views expressed by J. R. James in his essay "Planning Strategies for the 1970's" (*RIBA Journal*, October 1967) wherein he was to cite two linear-gridded prototypes—the 'triple stand' concept of Jamieson and Mackay and the South Hampstead



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116 Study of Colin Buchanan—both of which were, in his view, worthy of consideration as viable models for future development. In retrospect, nothing has proven to be further from either *Sotsgorod* or these prototypes than the latest British new town of Milton Keynes which, other than being a generalized grid of rather arbitrary dimension and configuration, offers little by the way of being a model for the coherent integration of residential settlements with the necessary infrastructures for transportation, culture, education, and production. The inevitable disjunctive effect of a single isolated town center, so assiduously avoided in the models proposed by both Miliutin and Buchanan, returns with all its concomittant distortion and lack of intelligibility in the realized plan for Milton Keynes. And one can hardly fail to comment on how much more appropriate it would have been to have linked the three existing agricultural villages, over which Milton Keynes has been imposed, by a tripartite, linear banded system of development, built to a much higher density.

As a corollary it is instructive to observe how the reductive procedures of “mathematized” urban design have so far been unable to generate a sufficiently comprehensive model for future development. And while on the face of it, little could be more schematic than Miliutin’s ‘six-band’ schema, the relationship that he specifies as obtaining between the ‘bands’ still seems to suggest a more concrete and comprehensive environment than most of the new town models that we have entertained over the last decade.

Notes

1. Miliutin refers directly to the theoretician Sabsovich, but he might just as well have referred to the work of the architect T. Kuzmin who advocated a house so communal that it would no longer be recognizable as a house at all. In proposing a strictly time-tabled regimen to every adult *communard*, Kuzmin’s vision of the *dom-kommunas* extended the physical model to include the total de-personalization of everyday life. See Anatole Kopp, *Town and Revolution* (New York: Braziller, 1970), pp. 152–155.
2. See Berthold Lubetkin, “Soviet Architecture: Notes on Developments from 1917–1935,” *Architectural Association Journal*, May and Sept./Oct. 1976.

Figure Credits

1–7 Reprinted from N. A. Miliutin, *Sotsgorod: The Problem of Building Socialist Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1975).

To the Editors:

There is every reason to rejoice when such tasty morsels as the writings of the *Gruppo Sette* are served up to English readers. However, when the host is *Oppositions*, and Peter Eisenman the maître d'hôtel, even the lowliest scullion rightfully expects complete accuracy.

Alas, such is not the case.

In her introduction (*Oppositions* 7, Fall 1976), Ellen Shapiro writes, "Fascism,' Mussolini once wrote, 'must be a glass house into which everyone can see;" her source is *Quadrante* n. 35, p. 15. A quick check reveals this to be part of Giuseppe Terragni's essay on his building, and his words are, "Il fascismo è una casa di vetro,' dichiara el Duce;" translation: "Fascism is a house of glass,' declares the Duce," (emphasis mine). Perhaps Ms. Shapiro meant to quote Terragni from p. 6 of the same issue; he wrote, "Ecco il concetto mussoliniano che il fascismo è una casa di vetro in cui tutti possono guardare"("Here is the mussolinian concept that fascism is a house of glass into which everyone can look"). The presence of "che," which normally signals the subjunctive, may have thrown Ms. Shapiro off, but the alert historian would note Terragni's apparently deliberate avoidance of the weaker "dovrebbe essere" ("should be") and the use of the strong, affirmative, but grammatically incorrect "is." (See also the caption on p. 18 of the same *Quadrante* issue, which repeats the other two quotes.) If Carlo Belli gave a correct direct quote from Mussolini (*Quadrante*, n. 35, p. 4)—"The casa del Fascio must be a house of glass into which everyone can look"—then Terragni's repeated alteration to "Fascism is a house of glass"—and in 1935, too—merits some attention.

My objection is more than a mere grammatical quibble. It seems to me that a very careful reading of these and other writings from the period suggests that

the situation in Italy for the Rationalists and other architects is more complex than the traditional historical explanation, ably outlined by Ms. Shapiro in her introduction, would have us believe. Sincerely,
Diane Ghirardo
Rome, Italy

To the Editors:

I would like to bring to your attention the close parallel between the following two paragraphs. I believe a reference to Kuhn's book would be quite appropriate in this case.

"Most architects work from paradigms acquired through education and through subsequent exposure to architectural literature, often without quite knowing what characteristics have given these paradigms the status of rules or, by inversion, that such paradigms imply subsequent taboos. These paradigm-taboos may be more binding and more complex than any set of rules that might be abstracted from them; they remain entrenched because of the difficulty in unveiling the hidden rules that have guided the particular architectural approaches that have generated them. Rules stay obscured, for schools of architecture never teach concepts or theories in the abstract." Bernard Tschumi, "Architecture and Transgression," *Oppositions* 7, p. 61.

"Scientists work from models acquired through education and through subsequent exposure to the literature, often without quite knowing or needing to know what characteristics have given these models the status of community paradigms. . . . Paradigms may be prior to, more binding and more complete than any set of rules for research that could be unequivocally abstracted from them. . . . (There is) the severe difficulty of discovering the rules that have guided particular normal science traditions, (for)

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scientists never learn concepts, laws and theories in the abstract." Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill. (p.46). Sincerely,
Mirian Gusevich
Ithaca, New York

Kuhn, of course, should have been quoted here. I am afraid this was an inexcusable oversight on my part.
Bernard Tschumi
New York, New York

To the Editors:

I've just received *Oppositions* (Winter 76/7) and was once again embarrassed to find the reportage of one of your parties illustrated with personality photos, seducing us into believing that we are in the company of the great and almost so. This fan picture stuff undercuts the magazine's position and plays very handily into the hands of those who would dismiss it as a vanity press. A west coast friend said it best: "I'd rather know a movie star than an architect."

Otherwise, I'm happy to have a new issue in the house. Yours Truly,
Donald McKay
Toronto, Canada

- 118 *The author of the following letter is Antoine Quatremère de Gutman. He is a member of the Order of French Architects, a graduate of the Ecole, and was a student and friend of Le Corbusier. In fact, he accompanied Corbusier on his visit to the U.S. in 1935. The letter was read at the Oppositions Forum on 27 January 1977 by Robert Gutman, a distant relative, who had sent him an advance copy of the exhibition poster. Although elderly and no longer active in his office, Antoine de Gutman apparently continues to keep in touch with the architectural scene. However, the ambiguities of the title of the exhibition seem to have presented an almost insupportable burden to his ratiocinative faculties. In this respect, without being present, he anticipated the unease of the Forum participants and the audience. The translation is by Robert Gutman.*

Cher Robert:

Thank you very much for sending me the poster of the exhibition which your school is holding at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies. It is very handsome. I intend to display it in my office where it is certain to provoke commentary.

In describing the Institute to me, did not you and Françoise compare it to a *salon des refuses*? Did you not assert that it had been established to combat the stultifying atmosphere of university-based schools of architecture in the United States? But now this avant-garde group is host to the work of an academy? Surely the muse of history must be laughing.

When I visited New York City last year, I attempted on several occasions successively to have a meeting with your friend, Dr. Eisenman. I telephoned his office at least two times and on both occasions it was reported to me that he was at *squash*. I also spoke with Mrs. Eisenman when I telephoned his apartment and she said he was in the *garden*. This was quite bewildering at first since I could not recall that you have mentioned that he was *un horticulteur*. But then Mrs. Eisenman explained further that the garden was the Madison Square Garden. Well, as Le Corbusier used to say, in America, everyone is urged to become an athlete!

Were you able to find the ice skates which I gave to your father? I used them in my last competition. I can recall his saying that he would save them to give to you. I was not able to view any skating competition in the Garden, but I did see a basketball contest. That young man Bradley played magnificently. I had not been aware that he was a Princeton graduate. When Le Corbusier and I were in Princeton, the students had just won the soccer competition. Did Bradley attend the Beaux Arts school or the new academic one?

I suppose there will be a party in association with the exposition. From the photos in *Oppositions*, it seems that all the architects in New York must come to those parties. Don't they have work to do? Is it too juvenile to ask whether, given the theme of the exposition, you will have *un bal* this time rather than *un coctail*?

Academicism still is a term of opprobrium in Paris and therefore I am fascinated that anyone would wish to call himself an academic, new or old. I am aware of the American urge to defy history and culture and to give unfamiliar definitions to common words. But have you not gone too far? Perhaps it is because your country has never had a genuine academy that you do not realize what the word has meant to artists in the past. Or is it because there is no indigenous academic tradition that every group wishes to assert its claim. But I am surprised that your colleagues, so many of whom seem to regard Le Corbusier as their master, have neglected his warnings that it is the design schools which lead to the death of architecture (*pace* Prof. Tafuri).

The architecture of your colleague, Michael Graves, is much admired in Paris now. He is a great favorite of the younger architects who are astounded by his gift for plastic inventiveness, his skill at using structural frameworks to control three-dimensional space, and his innovations in the introduction of color. Have you discussed the exhibition with Prof. Graves? I cannot imagine that he would accept the designation of an academic architect. Or is the exposition of your school, Robert, intending to claim that modernism is now so well entrenched in the United States that it has become the academy?

It was very good of Prof. Vidler to deliver the poster by hand, since it enables me to imagine that I am joining the festivities of your opening day. I had

1 The exhibition.

2 Charles Moore.

3 Robert Gutman reading the letter from Paris.

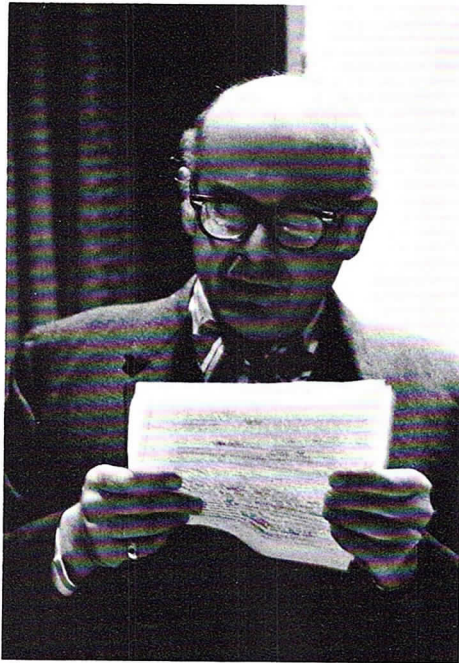
4 Donlyn Lyndon.

5 Michael Wurmfeld.

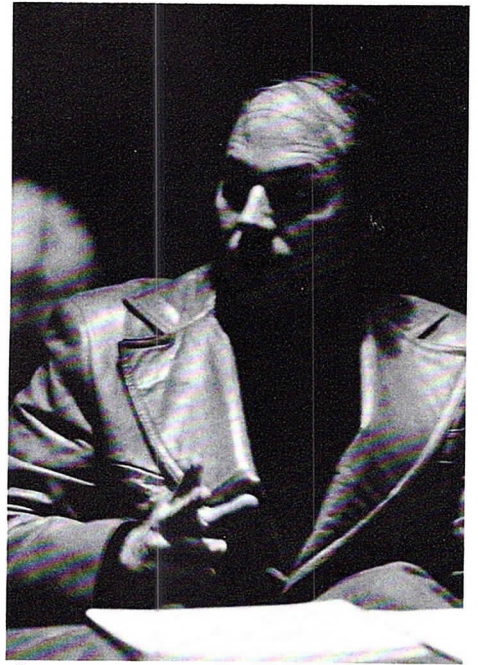
6 Hugh Hardy.



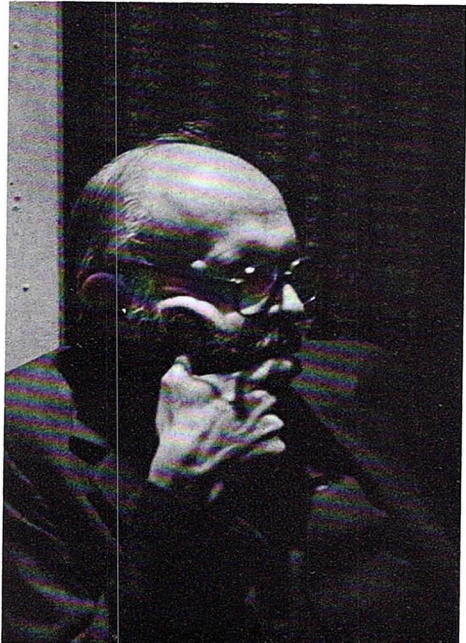
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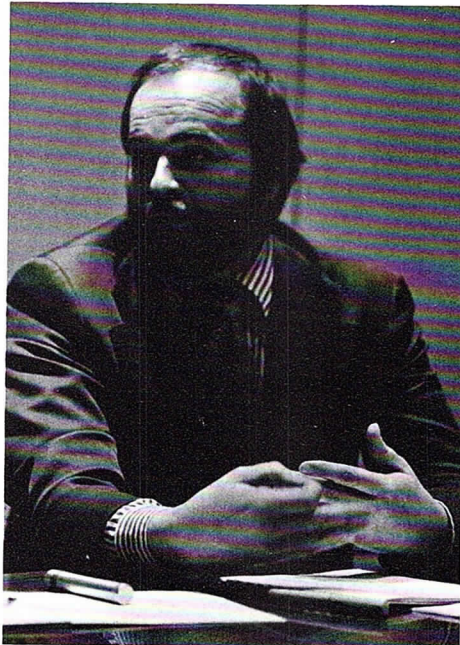
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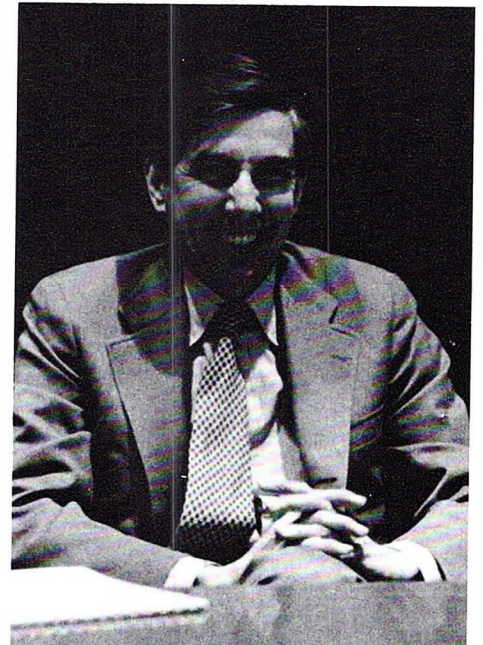
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7 Peter Eisenman introducing the Forum.

8 The audience.

9 Raimund Abraham, Federico Correa, and Mario Gandelsonas.

10 Robert Geddes, Mario Gandelsonas, Suzanne Stephens, and Cesar Pelli.

11 Robert Geddes and Peter Eisenman.

12 Julia Bloomfield, Massimo Vignelli, Rafael Moneo, and Peter Eisenman.

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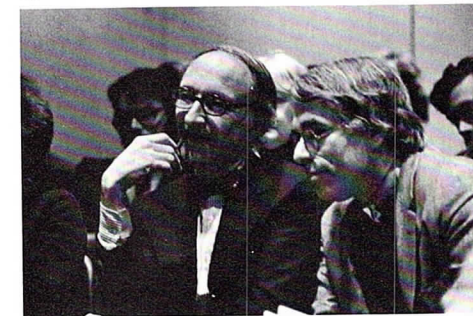
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13 Robert Stern and Rem Koolhaas.

14 Michael Graves.

Figure Credits

Photographs by Dorothy Alexander.

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never met him before; in wit and learning, he fully lived up to his reputation. As you might suppose, we discussed the architecture of masonic lodges. He said that he would be finished at the end of the year. I neglected to ask him whether he meant that his research would be completed, or whether he would receive his masonic degree this year. I hope that Prof. Vidler realizes that the building industry is transformed since the eighteenth century, and that a degree in masonry is now *not* regarded as the equivalent of registration. If Prof. Vidler has overlooked this fact, then I could better understand what Princeton means by calling itself academic.

I am really fascinated to learn that you had a Beaux Arts school at Princeton. Was the atelier in McCormick Hall or on Nassau Street? When Le Corbusier and I were there in 1935, I don't think we were ever shown this Beaux Arts School. We did meet Prof. Labatut, of course, whom I liked very much, and also the students, who were devoted to him. I recall the three of us conversing about how it still was a question of the Academy vs. Life, and Labatut said it was just as much a problem in America as here. You know, of course, that Le Corbusier wrote about his visit to Princeton, and in his account praised his friend for the innovative and liberal-spirited curriculum he had developed. Did the Beaux Arts school come later on, after Labatut retired, when Geddes took over?

I thought you had told me that Prof. Geddes was a student of Gropius? Is he not the man who heads a very successful and well-regarded architectural practice? Was it not his firm which was the winner of the competition for the renewal of Vienna? America must have changed gain in the short time since I have been here, to now equate professional achievement with academic architecture. I assume it is Prof. Geddes who sends me each year the working papers of the

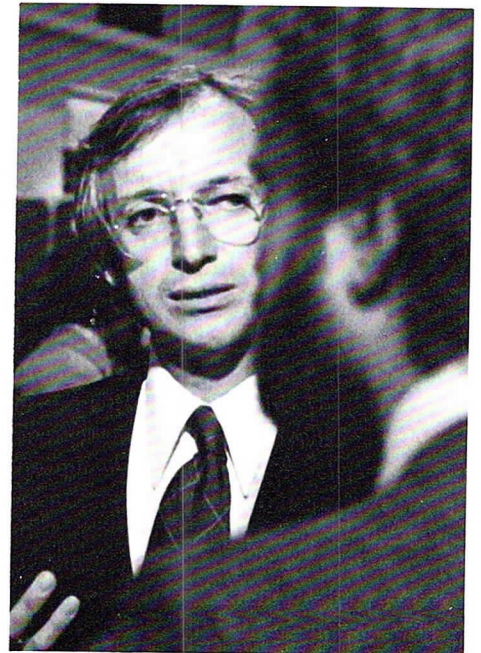
school and the newsletter. From these advertisements I learn all about the school's research on industrialized building systems, mortgage banking, user requirements, residential fires, and solar energy. To me, this is much more reminiscent of the Bauhaus and Ulm and I wonder why there are no references to the influences of these schools in your exposition. Not that I am unhappy about the neglect of these German ventures—you are familiar already with my attitude toward the Bauhaus and toward Maldonado—but I find it puzzling to reconcile these other evidences of your school's program with the message of the poster for the exhibition.

Do enlighten me about the significance of these different messages which come from Princeton. However, I must admit confusion is not limited to the architecture of your country. Would I have ever thought that the quarter where we went to eat good food after the theater, that Les Halles, the belly of Paris, almost the soul of France, would be transformed by *foreigners*(!) into a cultural center. Could I ever have imagined that they would construct there a museum with the appearance of a factory to shelter a contemporary art which has rejected the esthetic of the machine age? Discontinuities are all we have left, along with novelty. Perhaps novelty is what will distinguish your exposition, too. Journalists will seize on it because it is so true that when it becomes difficult to identify what is truly important, then we substitute *news*.

Please give my beneficent wishes to Prof. Geddes, Dr. Eisenman, and Mr. Wurmfeld. If they, too, are concerned about what your exposition means, recall to them that Le Corbusier once wrote that New York is the home of some god of modern life. May that god bless you and confer outstanding success on the exposition. Affectionately, Mémé
Paris, January 20th, 1977.



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Oriol Bohigas

122 *Oriol Bohigas was born in Barcelona in 1925. He received his degree in architecture from the University of Barcelona in 1951 where he is currently a professor. He has also taught at the Universidad de La Plata, Mexico (1974) and at Ball State University, Indiana (1977). His published books include: Arquitectura Modernista (Barcelona: Editorial Lumen, 1968); Contra una arquitectura adjetivada (Barcelona: Editorial Seix y Barral, 1969); La Arquitectura Española de la Segunda República (Barcelona: Tusquets Editor, 1970); Proceso y erótica del diseño (Barcelona: La Gaya Ciencia, 1972). He has written numerous articles for L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, Techniques et Architecture, Architectural Review, Architectural Design, Lotus, Punto, Revista Nacional de Arquitectura, Nueva Forma, Hogar y Arquitectura, Cuadernos de Arquitectura, Cuadernos de Arquitectura, and Arquitecturas-bis. He has his own architectural practice in Barcelona with Josep Martorell and David Mackay.*

Francesco Dal Co was born in Ferrara, Italy, in 1945. He graduated in architecture in 1970 from the Instituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia where he is presently a professor of the History of Architecture. He has also lectured extensively in Europe and America. From 1974–1976 he was a member of the Commission for Architecture and Visual Arts of the Biennale di Venezia and organized an exhibition "Cinema, città, avanguardia" for the 1974 Biennale. He was also the author of the two catalogues of this exhibition. His published works include: Hannes Meyer, Scritti, 1921–1942, Francesco Dal Co, editor (Venice/Padua: Marsilio, 1969); De la vanguardia a la metropoli (in collaboration with M. Cacciari and M. Tafuri [Barcelona: Gili, 1972]); La città americana dalla guerra civile al New Deal (in collaboration with others [Bari: Laterza, 1973]); Architettura contemporanea (with M. Tafuri [Milan: Electa, 1976]). He is presently working on two books, one on the works of recent outstanding architects, and the other a collection of essays on architectural culture in America.

Kurt Forster was born in Zurich in 1935. He has studied in Germany, England, and Italy, and received his Ph.D. in the History of Art and Architecture from Zurich University in 1961. He has taught at Yale University, the University of California at Berkeley, and is currently a full professor at Stanford University, specializing in the History of Renaissance art and architecture. For the past two years he has been director of the Swiss Institute in Rome. His publications include a monograph on Pontormo, a study of Gottfried Honegger's work and many articles on Italian Renaissance art and architecture, Cubism, and methodological issues which appeared in L'Arte, the Mitteilungen des kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz, the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Architettura, Bollettino del C.I.S.A., New Literary History, Daedalus, and elsewhere. He is now completing a book on the urban architecture of Mantua during the Renaissance and further articles on Giulio Romano, aspects of architectural practice during the Renaissance, and on the traditions of vernacular building. He is in charge of Giulio Romano's transformation in the Palazzo Ducale at Mantua for the international research project of L'Europa delle corti. He is also working on a study of urban spaces and public buildings in Renaissance Italy.

Kenneth Frampton was born in England in 1930. He is a Fellow of The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York, Associate Professor at Columbia University. From 1959 to 1965 he was an associate of Douglas Stephen and Partners, London. From 1962 to 1965 he was technical editor of the magazine Architectural Design and from 1966 until 1972 he was a member of the faculty of Princeton University. In the spring of 1973, he was a Loeb Fellow at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University. He has worked as an architect in England, Israel, and the United States where he collaborated in the design of a low-rise housing prototype for the New York State Urban Development Corporation. A developed version of this prototype is nearing completion in Brooklyn, New York. He is currently working on two books to be published in 1978.

Thomas Schumacher was born in New York City in 1941. He received his Bachelor of Architecture from Cornell University in 1963, and a Masters from Cornell in 1966. From 1967-1969 he was a Fellow in architecture at the American Academy in Rome. Since 1972 he has taught at Princeton University where he is currently Assistant Professor of Architecture. He is the author of a book on the Danteum project, Il Danteum di Terragni, which will be published by Officina Edizioni in 1977.

Jorge Silvetti was born in Argentina in 1942. He received his degree in architecture from the Universidad de Buenos Aires in 1966, his Master's degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1969. As a practicing architect, he has received prizes in architectural competitions in South America, a 1975 Progressive Architecture award for his "Fountain House" (designed in collaboration with Rodolfo Machado), and the second prize in the international competition for the renovation of the La Villette sector of Paris, France (in collaboration with D. Agrest and M. Gandelsonas). He has taught at the University of California at Berkeley, Carnegie Mellon University, and is currently Assistant Professor of Architecture at Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

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