

A Journal for Ideas and
Criticism in Architecture

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Theory

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Editors

Peter Eisenman
Kenneth Frampton
Mario Gandelsonas

Managing Editor

Julia Bloomfield

Designer

Massimo Vignelli

Production

Marc Berman
Abigail Moseley

Editorial Consultant

David Morton

Translators

Victor Caliendo
Angela Giral

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Editorial Statement

OPPOSITIONS 3 attempts to widen the basis of our discourse by publishing theoretical developments taken at different moments in history from Germany and France; specifically through our presentation of two articles, one dealing with the evolution of critical design theory at the Hochschule für Gestaltung at Ulm, the other dealing with the part played by Jean Giraudoux in “national socialist” circles in France. Of particular import is the article on Giraudoux which throws new light on the development of CIAM ideology both before and after the publication of *La Charte d’Athènes* in 1933.

The historical side of OPPOSITIONS 3 is complemented by a theoretical essay by the Italian critic Manfredo Tafuri, by Charles Moore’s criticism of Werner Seligmann’s housing in Ithaca and by two further theoretical pieces—a little known study on symmetry by William Huff which we have reproduced here in facsimile and a short essay by Rem Koolhaas which attempts to capture something of the bizarre climate that attended the heyday of the Art Deco in New York.

It is probably some measure of the general cultural predicament of the twentieth century that architecture, whose traditional object has been largely lost, should have also become a convenient scapegoat for the disfunctions of society. Hardly a day passes but that the practice of architecture is not taken to task for its manifest failures, and it makes little difference whether this criticism

comes from the liberal right or left. For where the former in the name of an assumed populism will level the charge of elitism against design; the latter, in the name of social injustice will challenge architecture *per se* as the traditional agent of repression. At face value, this criticism of the time honored role of architecture can hardly be refuted, but at the same time, the preemptive nature of this attack affords little indication as to how the human environment is to be structured in a significant way.

Given that the dominant mode of production and consumption has little use for architecture in any profound sense, we are more than commonly aware of the need to justify the existence of a magazine, which persists in attempting to offer a critical discourse on a subject matter whose essence and meaning are only too marginal to the basic interests of the society at large. A prevailing sense of skepticism compels us to question and re-question where we stand in respect to such a dilemma both collectively and independently and to ask ourselves what, if anything, constitutes the common factor of our editorial position.

It has gradually become clear to us that we are sharply divided as to the importance which each of us attaches to the relationship of architecture and society. While even those of us who tend to stress this factor are split again as to the editorial stance we should adopt in respect to such an issue. In the last analysis there are perhaps only two factors that hold us together,

apart from our mutual awareness of the marginal role played by architecture in a society dedicated to consumption: firstly, a faith in the importance of architecture as a poetic manifestation and secondly, a belief in the importance of criticism as a necessary force set in perennial opposition to the established values of an empirically oriented society. Beyond this limited area of agreement our respective positions as editors are of more consequence for the way in which they differ than for what they have in common.

In short we have become increasingly aware of the impossibility of writing a joint editorial with the result that we have come to the resolution that this will be our last common effort. Given that from now on editorials will be written and signed individually, all we can do for the moment is to identify the issues which each one of us will take up. The following points may be taken as defining a common area of debate:

1. As a preliminary to formulating a model for the relationship of architecture and society, we will each try to indicate in turn the way in which different cultural and ideological circumstances have shaped our divergent views as to *the nature of architecture and society*.
2. We will each attempt to formulate in turn *the role of theory in relation to practice* and the manner in which this relationship is able to exert an influence over architectural production.

3. We will also attempt to establish *the essence of the nature of architecture as a critical agent* and the degree to which this critique is affected by an opposition between the human lifeworld and the idea of “progress.”

4. Finally we will try to engage the issue as to whether architecture is subject in the last analysis to an overriding cultural or existential determinant or as to whether it is limited solely by a universal construct of the mind.

In subsequent editorials various and different aspects of this discourse will be examined in detail by each of the editors in turn. The presentation of a divergence of opinion united only in a common belief in the value of architecture as a critical agent mitigating the dominating influence of empiricism.

Peter Eisenman
Kenneth Frampton
Mario Gandelsonas

**After a New Architecture:
The Best Shape for a Chimera**

Charles Moore

The Elm Street Housing by Werner Seligmann for the New York State Urban Development Corporation has already been widely published. Our intention here in publishing it once again is not so much to record, as it is to provide a critique of the work in its own terms. But further, in selecting Charles Moore to attempt this critique we were proposing that architects themselves not only should provide such critiques but also should see this work as an essential part of their ongoing activity. The fact that Moore has in the past done work which on the surface seems ideologically opposed to the Elm Street Housing seemed an initial basis for such a critique. Yet while Moore's text displays his own modesty of style and gentleness of manner as well as unquestionable insight, it fails to address certain issues over which we feel Moore and Seligmann stand opposed.

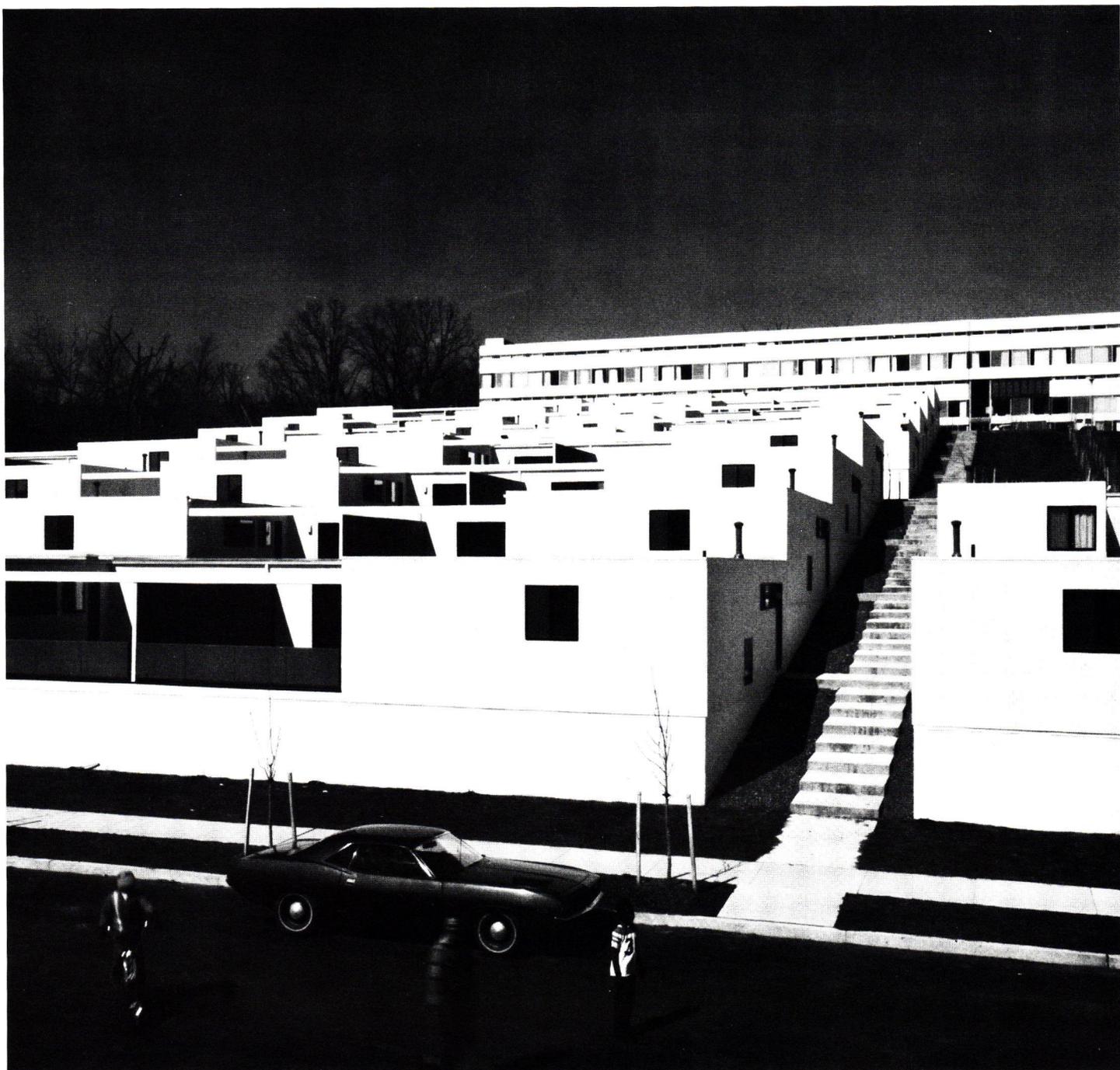
First, Seligmann's housing makes its appearance as a cultural object against the backdrop of recent housing which could be used to situate it in a critical framework. Second, the housing makes a strong statement about the nature of a suburban lifestyle and posits an alternative. Third, the housing is an evocative image which certainly raises the issue of metaphor and symbol—both public and private—and the potential for housing to play a part in the iconic realm.

Here, despite the general validity and the evident sensitivity of much of Moore's criticism, all of these issues are still regrettably left unjoined.

Charles Moore was born in Michigan in 1925. He received his M.F.A. and Ph.D. at Princeton University. He taught at Princeton University and the University of California, Berkeley, and was Chairman of the Department of Architecture at Yale University (1965-68); Dean of Architecture and Planning at Yale (1969-71); Professor at Yale University (1971-74); and is currently Professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has been in partnership practice since 1961, forming his own practice in 1970. His recent built works include Church Street South housing, New Haven (1970); low-cost housing, Middletown, Conn. (1970); housing in Orono, Maine (1972); Kresge College, University of California at Santa Cruz (1973); and housing at Huntington, Long Island (1974). He is co-author with Donlyn Lyndon and Gerald Allen of *The Place of Houses* to be published this fall.

Figure 1. Elm Street Housing, Ithaca, New York. Werner Seligmann and Associates, architects, 1971. Stepped pedestrian walkway through atrium units.

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1.

Werner Seligmann and Associates of Cortland, New York have lately designed and very lately gotten built 235 units of moderate-income housing in Ithaca, New York, for the New York State Urban Development Corporation under the Federal Housing Authority's 236 program (not presently active). During the last years of the Great Society, this provided a federal subsidy which in effect reduced interest rates to 1 percent to allow people of limited income to rent new dwellings they could not have afforded on the open market. The project, called the UDC Ithaca Scattered Site Housing Project, Elm Street site, has attracted considerable attention, with a cover on *Progressive Architecture* magazine and a lot of spirited discussion among architects and, I gather, the residents of Ithaca, due to its powerful but controversial (that is to say suspect) images.

The editors of *Oppositions* asked me to write about the Elm Street housing partly because I have also been the architect of moderate-income subsidized housing projects, one of which made it as well to the cover of *Progressive Architecture*, partly because my projects look altogether unlike Seligmann's, and because some of my published attitudes have revealed some hostility to the kind of modern architecture orthodoxy he espouses. I said I would write about the project and went to Ithaca (where I had never been before) not knowing what to expect, nor even if I would be a sympathetic observer. I had read the piece in *Progressive Architecture*, admired the handsome photographs, been angered by the site plan, and confused by the critique, which seemed at once a paean, a plug (for the UDC), and an apology ("It is unfortunate that budget limitations do not allow more amenities in publicly assisted housing.")¹ My journey added more layers of conflict: I enjoyed my visit, and felt altogether sympathetic to the concerns Seligmann described as he showed me around; I was astonished at the vigor with which some other (obviously anonymous) architects in town loathed the project; and I kept on realizing that I couldn't, or wouldn't make the formal choices Seligmann's group had. I then wrote a paper saying rather vaguely about architectural language that purity is bunk, and *Oppositions'* editors asked me please to say what I really meant. This is an attempt to do that, confused by the suspicion that though the battle lines have been so badly drawn and often seem not to

exist, they really are lying about somewhere.

I shall arrange my reactions in three parts: first, some wonder about the subsidized housing project as a type; second, some concerns about the images and influences present in this one; and third, a look inside the project itself.

First the format. For something like forty years, the Federal Housing Authority has been guaranteeing mortgages on single-family houses in the suburbs for middle-income people, in what amounts to a giant subsidy for those rich enough to qualify. Now this has had some desirable effects if you like suburbs, and some disastrous ones, helping as it did to bring on the death of the cities with the separation of subsidized middle-income, single-family dwellers from those too poor to merit subsidy, who were abandoned in the city's heart where mortgages were not available. After urban renewal had delivered the coup de grâce to the city center, and the poor seemed restless, a rather pallid system of supports was designed (FHA 221(d)3, 235, 236, and others) to dole out mortgage subsidies for rental or co-op housing, exacting as return for the gift a set of agreements meant to prevent the poor from profiting from their houses, as their economic betters had. (Thanks to long-range inflation, of course, a little house bought for \$500 down in 1947 might have been worth \$30,000 in 1967 when the mortgage was paid off, so the fortunate owners might retire to Florida, while a family who hadn't qualified for the FHA mortgage insurance, having spent about the same monthly amount for rental housing, could "retire" with nothing.)

Thanks to this bad new deal there is a lot of "antsiness" about nomenclature. "Project" is a mildly dirty word, hinting at the separation of the people locked in this bargain from their home-owning neighbors, who may object to their color or their kids. "Village" is an okay word, with overtones of permissible, even laudable ethnicity, and the expectation of some kind of rich connections among neighbors. Seligmann and I both use "village" and are dismayed when, for instance, the laundry rooms we had seen as a kind of village pump are vandalized by the tenants' children, then locked up by the management whose real desire is for a board room.