

A Journal for Ideas and
Criticism in Architecture

Published for The Institute
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Francesco Dal Co

Translation by Diane Ghirardo

The will to power as knowledge

*Criticism of the concept of the 'true world' and the 'apparent world'.
Of the two, the first is merely fictitious, formed out of merely imaginary things.*

'Appearance' belongs also to reality: it is a form of its being; that is, in a world in which there is no one being, it is possible to create a certain, calculable, world of identical cases only through semblance: a rhythm in which observation and confrontation, etc., are possible.

'Appearance' is a world accommodated and simplified, which our practical instincts have developed . . .

The world, if our condition of living-in-it is left out of consideration—the world that we have not reduced to our own being, to our own logic and psychological prejudices—this world does not exist as a world 'in itself'; it is essentially a world of relationships: in particular circumstances it has a different face from every different point of view; its being is essentially diverse in every point.

*F. Nietzsche, "Posthumous Fragments, 1888–1889"
Opere, Vol. VIII.¹*



1 G. Grosz and J. Heartfield at the Dada Exhibition, Berlin 1920.

Part One

“Appearance,” wrote Nietzsche, “belongs also to *reality*; it is a form of its being,” allowing identical events to be calculated through their “semblance.”²

The study of contemporary architecture might well take this text as its motto. For by asserting the “reality of appearance,” Nietzsche allows us to see that the formal “images” produced by the act of designing might be separate entities in themselves, autonomous from, yet equally valid as the procedures that engendered them. The traditional way of analyzing the development of architectural culture has emphasized a “reality” that has to be sought beneath the “surface” of events, or has seen the architectural form as a determined response to another reality based in economics, politics, or society; in all cases it has tried to tie an appearance back to its presumed cause. Following Nietzsche’s argument, however, it should be possible to concentrate on just this appearance—the *image* of architectural design—as a reality of its own. Such a “reading,” carefully conducted, of the images or formal manifestations of architecture might provide a more certain account of how architectural culture exists than any reconstruction of how that form was produced by the various modes of design activity.

If Nietzsche’s proposition raises these historiographical questions, it has no less serious implications for understanding the activity of architectural design itself. In fact, it opens the possibility of overturning the ideological mechanisms by which form and content are commonly related. At the same time it indicates the scope of a new and different critical responsibility toward design.

Such a new criticism is urgently required, not so much as a response to the comprehensive transformation of architectural culture in the recent past, but more fundamentally because of the backwardness of the different branches of activity that comprise this culture. These branches—criticism, history, design, and so on—have, through the vicissitudes of the avant-garde, ever sought to reinforce their own internal, stabilizing ties. In this process a mutual dependency has been developed between *criticism* and the *work* of architecture. The backwardness

of criticism can be traced to this relationship, which has insured the absolute impermeability of architectural culture in the face of an increasingly specialized critical function. Further, the complete interdependence of criticism and design has meant that it has been impossible to identify any autonomous “appearance” by which to measure the history of contemporary design practice; all the images we possess of its development, rather than clarifying its processes, end up by simply *representing* already determined values. These values are themselves determined by the creative and designing will. Thus the images which architecture provides of itself coincide precisely with these values, as their extensions and projections; they possess no autonomy of their own, and therefore no *appearance*. In this sense, Nietzsche’s understanding of “appearance” is very close to the meaning which Wittgenstein gives to the word “*bild*” or “image,” in the *Tractatus*: “the image represents what it represents, independently of its own truth or falsity, by means of the form of representation.”³ Here the word “*bild*” and the word “*bilden*” are related, as the “form” or “image” is to the “process of formation.” The *bild* or appearance of the thing, then, can never be a microcosmic metaphor for the entire world, never a total reflection of all the values of this world (as traditional idealistic aesthetics would have it). It can represent only the precise moment in which form is given to one small particle of this world. The appearance of a thing, rather than revealing mechanically the ideology of its production, exists simply as the place where its absolute autonomy from the act which produced it is revealed. Image and act of production are separate, but equal. Whereas idealism, and some forms of deterministic economism propose that the world is a unity, and its meaning is divulged in the unitary images that are produced out of it, both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein see the world as fundamentally *divided*; in such a world all acts—of production, of formation, of appearance—can only express their “own” reality, never those of others. This is what is meant then, by Nietzsche’s statement that “appearance” belongs to reality; neither caused by, nor an effect of, reality, appearance is simply one reality among all realities. Accordingly it can only be measured, read, and *known*, if it is seen as autonomous of all those “realities” to which

traditional historiography in general, and architectural ideology in particular, have always tried to tie it back. Thus when the form of representation is simply seen as a process that mechanically represents ideology it becomes unreadable for itself, and thereby unreadable as its own form of reality. 3

While this argument might seem extremely abstract in the context of an architectural discourse, it becomes important in questioning the tie between the act of production (designing) and the form of representation (the image) which has bound architectural criticism and history for nearly two centuries. No forms of historical analysis have, up till now, been able to resist the tendency to identify basic processes, phenomena which are in fact no more than the visible manifestations of the detritus left in the wake of a whole complex of different processes.

Previously, the study of contemporary architectural development has fallen into two equally dangerous modes: the first has tended to recognize only quantitative measurements and statistically demonstrated trends which deny the validity of any variations in appearances as superficial. The second has been content to “enrich” the work of architecture by critical allusion and explanation, confirming a solidarity between design and criticism. The problem is more complex. If anything it demands a step backward to inquire into the relationship that exists among the “forms of representation” and the infinite multiplicity of “appearances.”

In such an inquiry, the first question to be asked is whether the process of the development of modern architecture was not in fact coincidental with a reinforced attempt to destroy any autonomy of the “image,” or better, with an attempt to mystify the nature of architecture as a representation of a reality that might “represent a possibility of the existence or non-existence of things.”⁴ That is, the “images” of modern architecture were directed toward reaffirming a causal link with the act of designing, thus confirming its “truth.” Through criticism, this mechanism has been extended to apply to the entire realm of production and its products. Thus as modern architecture

4 has proposed successive “images” of itself, through a process that has concretized its own projected will, so in the end architectural objects have been denied any real autonomy; their life has been concealed within the act that produced them; in this act the object has been “privately” dissolved. So conceived, the architectural image no longer explains the complexity of the process that has carried all the passages of production to their fulfillment; rather it becomes the place where contradictions are concealed. Architecture has thus developed as a struggle against the measurability of its own appearances; the form it produces is a tangle of “images” calculated to mythicize its own origins. In the grand, extreme syntheses of “radical” modern architecture, even as in the more ambitious projects of the avant-garde, the relation between *image* and *object* has undergone a definitive transformation, an explicit artistic sublimation: the “image” is a complex form constructed to lay a false trail.

Is it possible to come to terms with this situation, to overturn it without resorting to any crude operations of critical leveling? Do we have at our disposal any instruments of historical analysis with which to reconstruct the process of modern architectural development, or any critical tools sufficiently evolved to disassemble its mechanism? The reply is necessarily negative: criticism and history seem to have conspired to create a situation entirely hostile to such an act. Criticism has too often done no more than prop up with theory the process of architectural development, depriving it in this way of any real liberty. To think of constructing a *genealogy* of the products of contemporary architecture is thus difficult. Yet it remains a worthwhile undertaking; especially if begun modestly, with limited studies, resisting the temptations of “the big picture,” the laying out of which has so often led criticism to blunt its own analytical weapons.

The problem, then, is to re-establish critical *distance*, and to recognize the specificity of the undertaking; to break, both in the domain of history and of criticism, these alliances which were so firmly cemented in the “age of manifestos.” If the architectural image has as its predominant concern “construction in order to conceal,” it can in fact

be analyzed from two parallel points of view: on the one hand, as a historical construction in itself, that is to say, as a process of specialization, the solution and perfection of always more refined instruments of camouflage; on the other hand, as the history of concealed objects, of unacknowledged secrets. The genealogy of images would thus coincide with the practice of these two histories, the one speaking of the resistance of architecture to revealing the modes of its own projective activity, the other of the struggle to preserve such activity outside the multiple realities of production. Interweaving these two histories, while at the same time placing them side by side with the specificity of architectural products, should also enable us to understand how the objects that architecture produces are themselves destined to respond, not to any “state of things” as they are, but exclusively to the design activity that contains them. They do not enjoy a public life: the more they struggle against the inevitable loss of meaning and of values, the more they are revealed as destined for a private existence, to remain prisoners of the creative act that formalized them.

Obviously such a hypothesis is only valid for a few distinct points in the modern tradition; but the closer we come to the present, the more appropriate it seems as a description of the enigmatic experimentation of those rare but original episodes of architectural “research” in Italy and the United States—a “high” research that both resists that tendency of current work to borrow its rationale from production and “marketing” and at the same time falls easily into subjectivity, speaking only of the relationship between what remains of design as artistic creation and the impossibility for any product to display an autonomous function in reality. In both cases architecture seems to have lost the way of pursuing a *real* specialization of its own function and its own role.

Critical lucidity alone is not enough to clarify such a situation. First there must be an indictment of the complicity, cemented by tradition, between criticism and design. This complicity has succeeded in making the limits of architecture the same as those of criticism—they share the same crisis. A preliminary act of separation is there-