

# The Harvard Architecture Review

A publication of students of the  
Graduate School of Design,  
Harvard University  
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Volume 1 Spring 1980

## Beyond the Modern Movement

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Formalism and the  
Polemical Use of History

Eduard Sekler

Architectural Taste  
in a Pluralistic Society

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'Beyond the Modern Movement,'

a conference sponsored by the *Review*

November 1977

### Building Documentation

Hotel Berlin, O M Ungers, Architect

### Interview

Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown

### Exhibition Review

'Seven Chicago Architects' and

'Immanent Domains'

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# Beyond the Modern Movement

## Editorial

New journals of architecture are most often launched amid a barrage of brave new words as to the high purposes and fine ideals behind their creation. Let us say only this: we are concerned with the role of ideas in architecture, and with their relationship to the art of building. We are moved by the conviction, perhaps naive, that the creation of significant architecture depends on the formation, beforehand, of a set of ideas about architecture—that is, that in each program does not inherently reside the sources for its own *architectural* solution.

This journal, then, is about ideas in architecture and the related arts. It will be comprised of essays by contemporary architects, critics, historians, and students, documentation of built and projected works, exhibition and book reviews, and any additional features which present diverse viewpoints on issues of interest to the architectural community. The *Review* is a student-initiated and student-run endeavor, and as such will reflect the interests and inputs of its (changing) student editorial staff. The expected audience, however, is much wider. We hope to appeal to a broad spectrum of those concerned with architecture and the urban environment, who seek some middle ground between the picture-book approach of some periodicals and the verbal enigmas of others. Finally, the *Review* is a topical publication, organized to provide a variety of opinion and insight into a single issue, theme, or critical proposition.

Along with high-minded words and intentions at their inception, new publications are also marked by an urgent sense of purpose, a perception of important new problems and possibilities, or a mission of improvement through necessary and rapid change. While architects of every age like to claim responsibility for significant advances in architectural theory and practice, we believe that today we *are* witnessing such significant change; and the appearance of new ideas seems to represent more than the vagaries of style and fashion. It is the intention of the *Review* to focus on these changes in architectural sensibility, and of the first issue to explore their most visible embodiment—that work which is moved by a critical attitude toward Modern Movement Architecture.

To this end we have assembled a number of essays and articles which may be included under this general organizational rubric, as well as some dissenting voices as to the meaning or desirability of an architecture

‘Beyond the Modern Movement.’ The material that follows is accordingly diverse and disjointed, yet may ultimately reveal commonalities not apparent at first glance.

We have not let these responses stand alone, however. In our own process of research, compilation, and review, we have sought to isolate the salient characteristics of this overall phenomenon, and have evolved our own sense of order and significance. These views are provided in the following editorial essay and in brief editorial introductions to each feature, which relate certain ideas found there to our overall editorial position. Our intention, though, is neither simple advocacy nor general opprobrium, but the free exchange and discussion of ideas which may form the basis of a significant approach to architecture today.

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If architectural history may be understood, in broad terms, as a dialectical process, then we may place much recent work in architecture in familiar dress: as the logical hypotheses to the Modern Movement’s radical and dramatic thesis about a new way of making architecture. What has been variously called, ‘Post-Modernism,’ ‘Super-mannerism,’ or, as in our case, architecture ‘Beyond the Modern Movement,’ can thus be understood as a reactionary phenomenon opposed to a commonly perceived antagonist, with its roots in a long line of criticism of Modern Movement Architecture. But if such a formulation is used to explain and justify the genesis of a large body of architectural work, an obligation arises to address several important questions, some of which have already been raised elsewhere. First, if one must isolate an antagonist, it must have a recognizable and consistent identity. One of the common misconceptions about Post-Modernism<sup>1</sup> is its supposed opposition to *all* of Modern Architecture. Obviously this is far too broad a target, and meaningless as a foil for critical discussion. Thus, Post-Modernism limits its discussion to the architecture of the *Modern Movement*, which is a better defined and more limited entity, with both stylistic and ideological attributes—a cohesive set of formal, social, and technical principles which can be isolated among a wider body of contemporary work. We are speaking here of the architecture of Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Mies, of JJP Oud, Ludwig Hilbersheimer, and Hannes Meyer; of a design method informed by the principles of functionalism,

1 This term we use with great reluctance. It is doubly misleading, as will be explained below, and it has been much-abused and misunderstood in the press. Yet it is more convenient than our own bulky ‘Beyond the

Modern Movement,’ and it is useful to have a single term to represent a diverse body of thought with very little in common save its shared critical referent. The use of this term should not be taken to suggest

association with or endorsement of previous definitions or usages, and we will provide our own definition to avoid any misconception in this regard.