



# CRAFT & ARCHITECTURE

*MODULUS 22*  
The Architectural Review  
at the University of Virginia

H O V S T O N  
4 Feb 1995

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The Architectural Review  
at the University of Virginia  
MCMXCIII

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Distributed by  
Princeton Architectural Press  
37 East Seventh Street  
New York, New York 10003

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The Architectural Review  
at the University Virginia  
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Printed in the United States of America  
ISBN 1-878271-94-6  
ISSN 0191-4022

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Front Cover. Marco Frascari, *An Angelic View of Compasses*. 1991. Courtesy of the Artist.

Back Cover. A selection of compasses. Courtesy of Marco Frascari.

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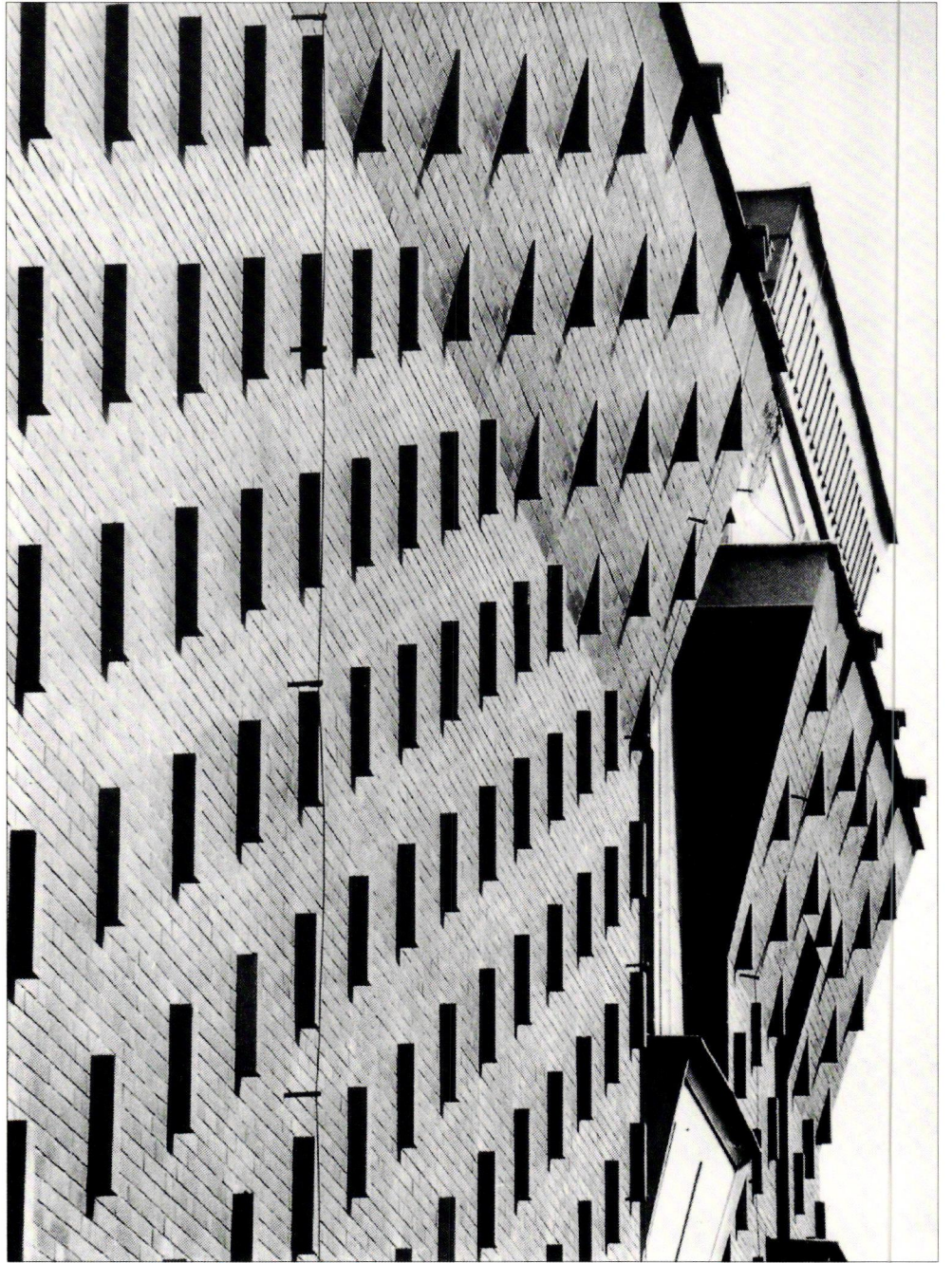
*The purpose of Modulus 22 is to establish a critical approach to the making of architecture. To serve this purpose, the issue will address the relationship between craft and the art of building.*

*It is essential to conceive of craft as a vital source for design rather than as a nostalgic or ephemeral end in itself. Craft is what mediates between the idea and the reality of building. Through it, man articulates the logic and cultural myths of construction—shelter, technology, permanence—and so articulates a place for himself in the world. The elaboration and necessity of material, assemblage, and structure are the stuff and test of architecture.*

*Modulus 22 will examine how craft can inform and influence design. It will investigate contemporary possibilities and historical examples.*

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*Statement of Intent. November 1990.*



*Sacred Heart Church, Prague. Jozef Plecnik, 1928. Photograph by François Burkhardt. Reprinted by permission of the MIT Press.*

# INTRODUCTION

Mason Hollier Disosway

1

*Cum autem cotidie faciendo tritiores manus ad aedificandum perfecissent et sollertia ingenia exercendo per consuetudinem ad artes pervenissent, tum etiam industria in animis eorum adiecta perfecit, ut, qui fuerunt in his studiosiores, fabros esse se profiterentur. Cum ergo haec ita fuerint primo constituta et natura non solum sensibus ornavisset gentes quemadmodum reliqua animalia, sed etiam cogitationibus et consiliis armavisset mentes et subiecisset cetera animalia sub potestate, tunc vero et fabricationibus aedificiorum gradatim progressi ad ceteras artes et disciplinas, e fera agrestique vita ad mansuetam perduxerunt humanitatem.*

—Marcus Vitruvius Pollio  
*Dieci Libri Architecturae*, II,1,vi

[As men made progress by becoming daily more expert in building, and as their ingenuity was increased by their dexterity so that from habit they attained to considerable skill, their intelligence was enlarged by their industry until the more proficient adopted the trade of carpenters. From these early beginnings, and from the

fact that nature had not only endowed the human race with senses like the rest of the animals, but had also equipped their minds with the powers of thought and understanding, thus putting all other animals under their sway, they next gradually advanced from the construction of buildings to the other arts and sciences, and so passed from a rude and barbarous mode of life to civilization and refinement.<sup>1</sup>]

In his account of the origin of the dwelling house, Vitruvius describes two sorts of wisdom possessed by the carpenters of yore. The first, "industry," is acquired from physical experiences of building committed to memory. It involves knowledge of the necessary exigencies and form-giving capacity of material, component, assemblage, and structure; and the ability to put this knowledge into practice with facility and exactitude.

The second, "intelligence," is acquired through sustained and critical engagement of civil society. It involves knowledge of the cultural myths of construction, such as the primitive hut; and the ability to articu-

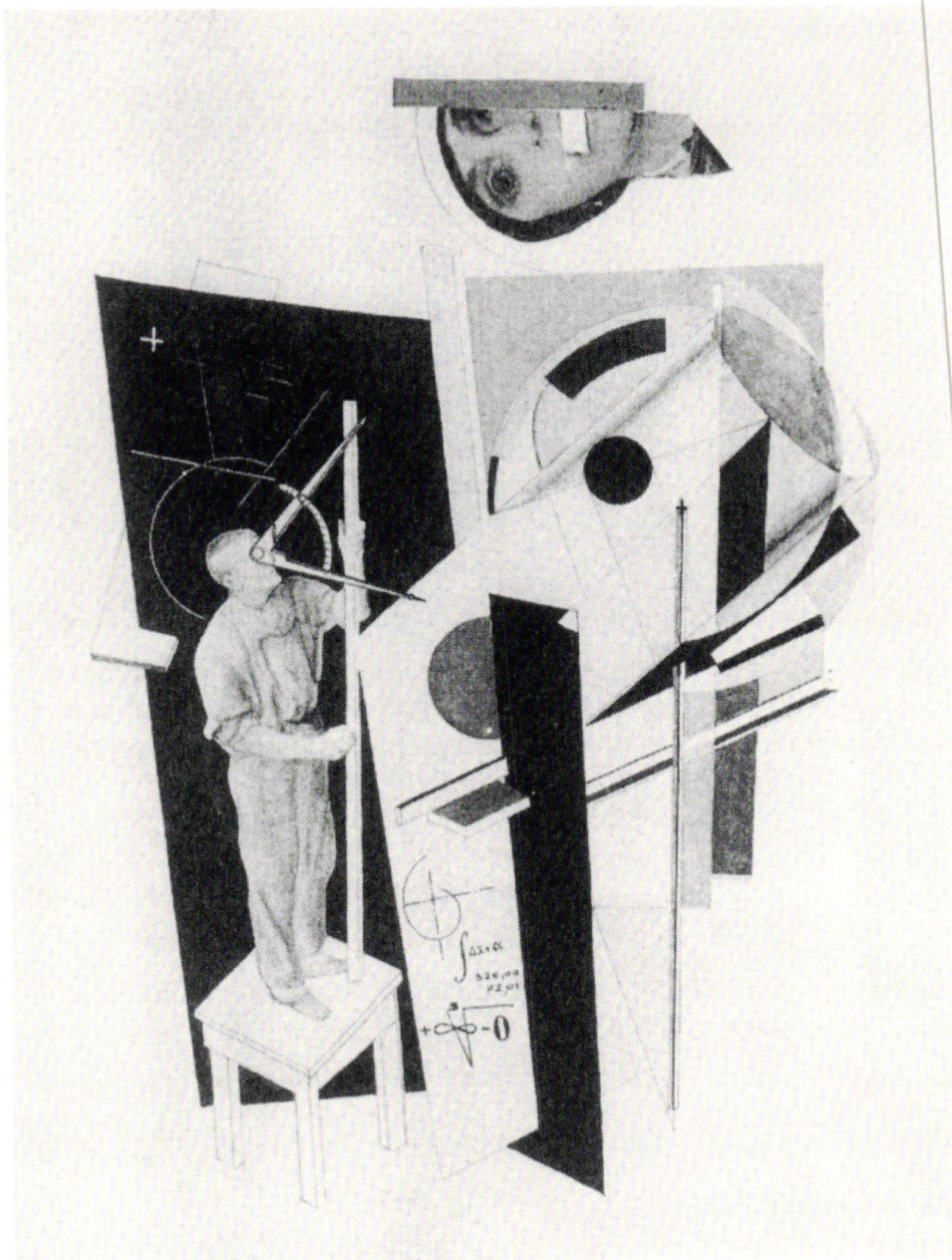
late and elaborate this knowledge to further man's understanding of himself as *homo faber*, he who makes.<sup>2</sup>

The potential symbiosis of these two uniquely human faculties is what this issue of *Modulus* is about. The articles and projects herein investigate how we might develop from the rudiments of shelter a speculative architecture that both demonstrates cultivated skill and manifests reasoned intent. Such an architecture finds an implicit source and inspiration in the craft of building.

1. Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris Hickey Morgan (New York: Dover, 1960), 40.

2. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), esp. 167-74.

I should like to thank Robert Dripps, 3rd, for his support and advisal throughout the initiation and production of this issue. I should also like to acknowledge the extraordinary contributions of Alyson Steele, and to wish her luck with 24.



*Frontispiece. Tatlin at Work on the Monument of the Third International. El Lissitzky, 1920.*

The most mesmerizing image of my architectural education is a Proun, a Constructivist representation devised by the Russian architect and graphic designer El Lissitzky.<sup>1</sup> I saw this picture a long time ago, when I was a third year student of architecture, in the Aula del Miracolo at the monastery of the Tolentini in Venice.<sup>2</sup> Sergio Los, one of the assistants of Professor Carlo Scarpa, was showing slides of Russian architecture in an attempt to recruit a group of students to build a reconstruction of Vladimir Tatlin's model for the Monument of the Third International.<sup>3</sup>

As a modern emblem, a sublime memory device, this unusual Proun returns to my mind constantly. Every time, its visual fullness suggests new and precious meditations on the theory and practice of the craft of architecture. The Proun which struck my imagination is entitled "Tatlin at Work on the Monument of the Third International" (frontispiece). There is something extraordinary in this Proun. Tatlin himself, standing on a square stool, is tucked into the geometric composition, looking at an interpretative image of the model.<sup>4</sup> A compass, like a phenomenological theodolite, is coming out of one of

his eyes.<sup>5</sup> A circle surrounds the head of the Russian architect in the fashion of a divine halo. The halo completes visually the round bar of the compass set between the two legs to hold the distance constant. This picture is not only an abstract representation of colors and geometric shapes: it has a significant symbolic dimension achieved through the use of photomontage. A representation between painting and architecture, a geometrical limbo, the power of this eidetic construction is in the incorporation of a human form within an abstract context of geometrical forms. This is neither an objective nor a subjective construct, but a sedimentation of experience formed by matter and memory. The Proun is a memory device and the representation of an intuition, a flowing of patterns.<sup>6</sup> These patterns are architectural images, presented in perception, which take into account the sensible qualities of architectural artifacts.

This cryptic Proun is an unstable isometric, an enigmatic expression of the power of the *mundus imaginalis*.<sup>7</sup> The human figure inserted into the Proun becomes a sort of holy icon, as demonstrated by the halo. The puzzling image of the compass and

the circular nature of the halo are the sources for the following meditations on architectural aporias. Tatlin's compass inspires this allegorical narration of a discreet architectural theory. A circular rather than linear tale, this is a theoretical examination of the cunning nature of architecture. Unlike historical accounts or empiricist surveys, this inquiry progresses in a round fashion, as do myths.

In contemplating this unusual Proun, the first thought which comes to mind is that Tatlin's theodolite is a visual rendition of a pervasive Renaissance metaphor, i.e., Michelangelo's influential notion of the *seste dell'occhio*, the compass of the eye. The compass of the eye is a pragmatic and precise tool for measuring which can also become an instrument of theoretical reasoning, i.e., the *seste del giudizio*, the compass of judgment.<sup>8</sup> This visual paradigm is the basis for our understanding of eidetic processes and of our grasping of theory and cognition.

Enlarging the knowledge of Lissitzky's work, two other symbolic representations of compasses can further direct this theoretical probing toward an understanding