

A Journal for Ideas and  
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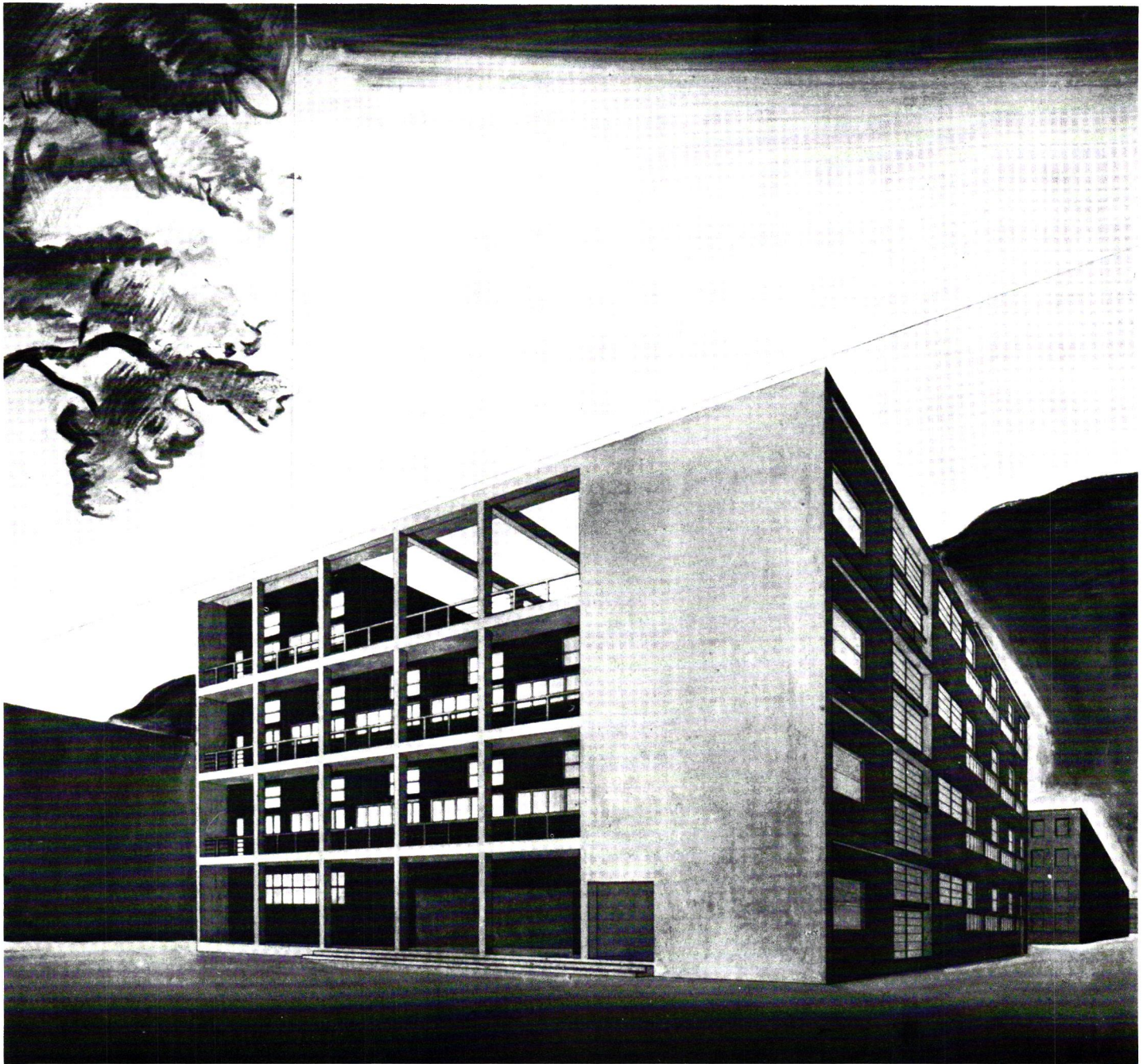
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Giuseppe Terragni: Subject and "Mask"

Manfredo Tafuri

*Translation by Diane Ghirardo*



1 (frontispiece) Casa del Fascio, Como. G. Terragni, architect, 1932-1936.

2 Palazzo del Littorio, Rome. G. Terragni with A. Carminati, P. Lingeri, M. Nizzoli, E. Saliva, M. Sironi, L. Vietti, architects, 1934. Model, Solution A, First Level.

3 "Sala del '22," Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, Rome. G. Terragni, architect, 1932.

4 Villa Saibene, Como. G. Terragni, architect, 1926. Project.

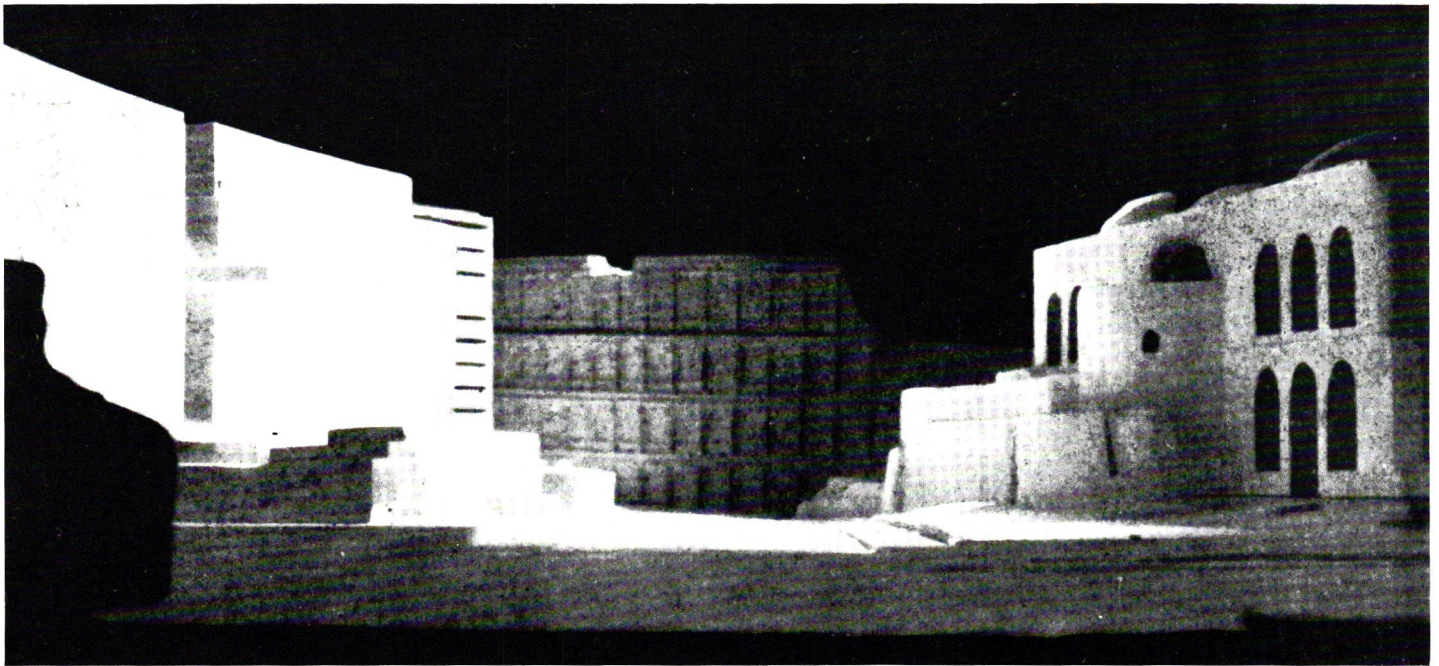
5 Palazzo del Littorio, Rome. G. Terragni with A. Carminati, P. Lingeri, M. Nizzoli, E. Saliva,

M. Sironi, L. Vietti, architects, 1934. Site plan, Solution A, First Level.

6 Detail of model, showing the "dam," the "cleavage," and Mussolini's platform.

7 "Tattooed" wall showing isostatic lines.

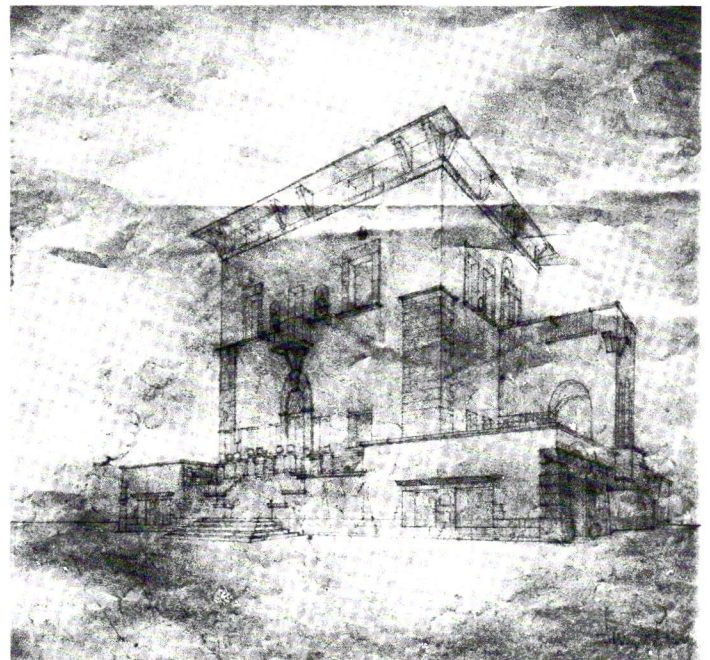
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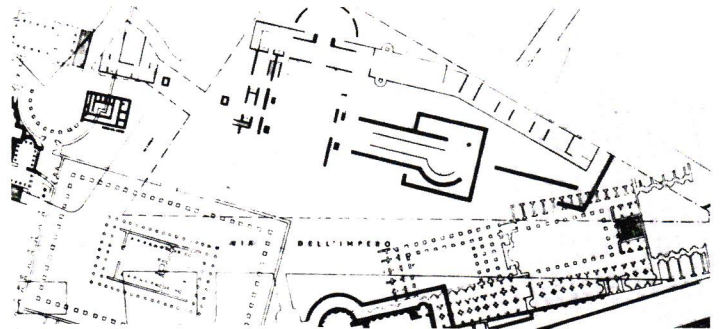


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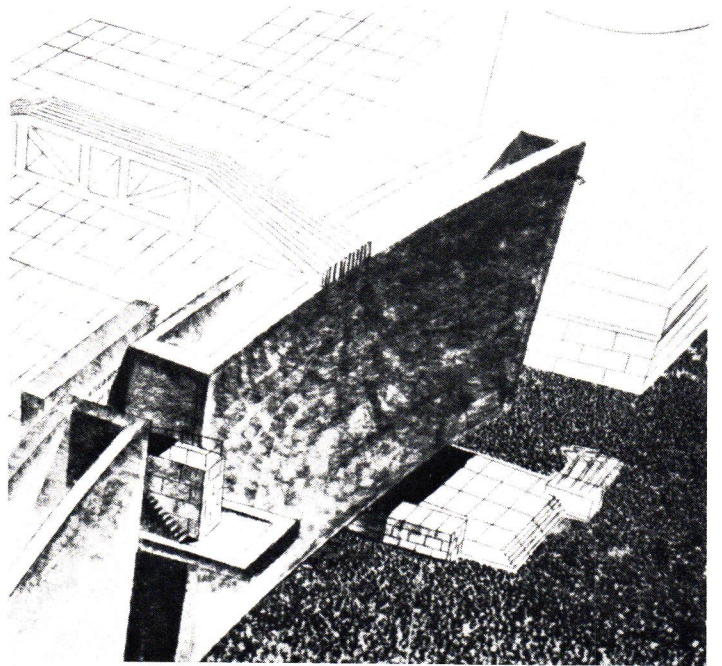
With his Solution A (1934) submitted for the Palazzo del Littorio competition in Rome (figs. 2, 5–7), Terragni seems to hurl a challenge at the transparency of language. This effort to reveal the power of the “word”—as he had already attempted in his “Sala del ’22” (fig. 3) at the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (1932)—is an attempt to force a division, a laceration, a profound fracture, in discourse; having acquired power, the “word” shatters language, designs its dissipation, and constrains it to become the locus of a confrontation. When did language ever constitute a problem for Terragni? Beginning with the design for the Villa Saibene (fig. 4) in 1926, “written” in the manner of the “Novecento,” or with the Novocomum, a masterpiece of reticent ambiguity, language appears *already given*. There is room for nothing but an internal process of resolution, even if it must divide, separate, and dissolve connections.

For Terragni there is nothing beyond such *analytical work*, no “discourse,” no message, no “sound.” The dialogue occurs entirely within architectural writing, never emerges from it and never becomes polemical with respect to “the world as it is.” Pagano’s profound antipathy for Terragni originates here. The moralism of the director of *Casabella* clashes head on with the atonal, wholly amoral aphorisms of the architect from Como. It is hardly surprising that Italian criticism so often finds itself in difficulty with respect to Terragni. On the one hand it repeats Pagano’s intolerant value judgments in somewhat more sophisticated tones, while on the other it desperately attempts to bring his work back within the reassuring fold of the Modern Movement.

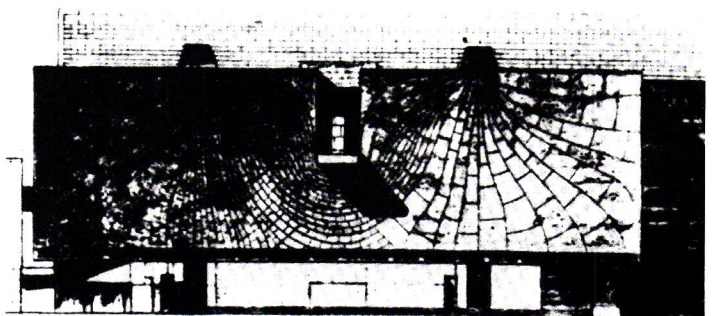
But faced with Solution A, these critical postions find themselves more than metaphorically up against a “wall,” an eighty meter long curved mass of porphyry: a limit, an embankment, a dam. In siting the building with respect to the axis of Via dell’Impero (fig. 5), on an angle similar to that of the Basilica of Maxentius, the design of Terragni, Carminati, Lingeri, Vietti, Saliva, Nizzoli, and Sironi seeks a confrontation with that Roman monument. Although the curvature of the “dam” of the Palazzo del Littorio responds to the projection of the apse from the pierced solid of the Basilica, it principally responds to its “cleavage” (fig. 6).



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- 4 The organic character of the Roman basilica is reflected only in one element: emerging now as “word,” it “dissolves connections.” And in fact, in isolating the theme of the wall, making its materiality evident (note that materiality does not mean material qua material), the continuity of the discourse is already shattered. To reconnect that “thing alone” to the “rest” becomes the theme of a merciless syntactic analysis. Only artifice permits that reconnection, as in the metal girders emerging at the top and not visible from below; but once the schism is opened, it is clear that it cannot be healed.

Not just a wall, but a wall suspended from the earth: this first element of construction at once exposes and dissembles. As caesura, impassable limit, it annuls or pushes to the margins as superfluous the articulations of the organism. To the extent that this wall is a mass floating in the air, in its turn shattered—with perverse neatness—by a cut that permits the “surprise” outward thrust of Mussolini’s platform (see fig. 6), it declares itself “mask.” The essentiality of this primary structure, with its chorus of tones, yields an awareness that its apodictic security hides something. Although undisputed protagonist, it is a “character in search of an author.” Moreover, because the curved, boxlike structure does not embrace space—in the end, the curve is too weak—neither does it precisely delimit it. As has been noted, the curve appears flat to the crowd thronged before it, while in a tangential view the foreshortening inexorably conducts the eye to the problem constituted by the vertical aperture. Beyond this, however, an immense nude wall alludes to infinite and ineffable occurrences. But Terragni’s wall is “tattooed”: clearly the aphorism divides further on. A diagram of isostatic lines, studied experimentally on a pheonolite model, stands out on the continuous surface (fig. 7). Somehow those isostatic lines explain the form of the vertical incision, marking a weak point in the curved structure; nonetheless the reason for them is still not entirely clear. A more important point is that having revealed the hidden composition of the forces internal to the structure, and reduced them to arabesque, to “design,” the lines further divide the connections between the multiple “sounds” emitted by that which seemed to constitute an apodictic “word.”

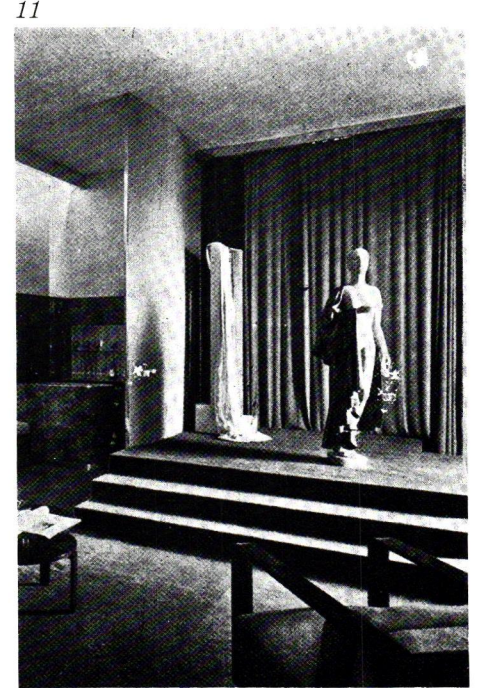
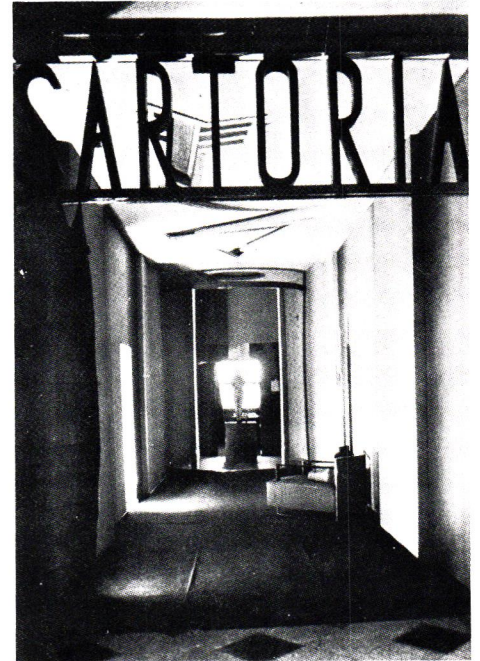
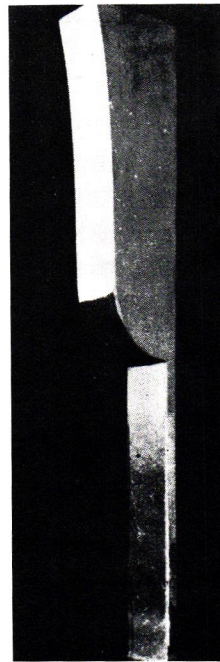
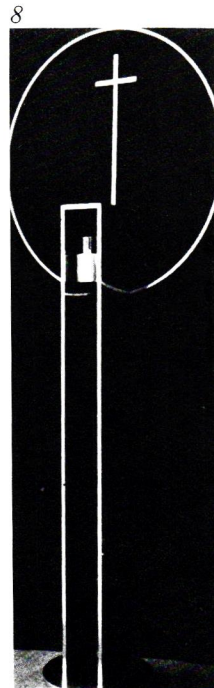
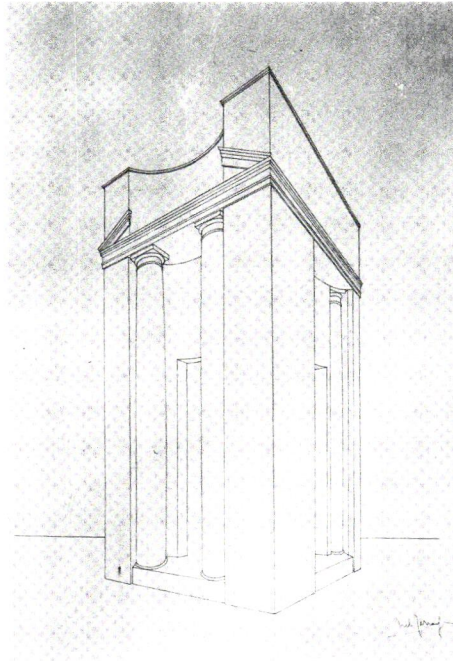
In this way, form and structure trade hermetic glances, asking one another why they “stay together,” why they lie together in the same background. In reality, the wordless dialogue between the withdrawal into itself of the wall—its *minus dicere*—and the “indecent” revelation of the isostatic lines—their *plus dicere*—literally dissolves the consistency of what at first appears an unyielding dam. Terragni thus involves his forms in a game of conceptual inversions. The line-forces of the structure, as they become elements of an abstract cobweb, weaken the peremptory nature of the immense wall. In feigning to tell the “truth,” the lines reveal the ultimate meaning of the wall, that of being a sham. Considered as pure arabesque, moreover, they manifest paradoxically the transience of form. Like the volutes and golden backgrounds of Klimt, they assail the limits of the neutral camp from which they issue. Only the void—the vertical fissure and eruption into space of the Duce’s platform—resists that transience. The curved wall now seems like a huge theatrical curtain (see fig. 2); only one character emerges from it, a character who does not acknowledge human presence. The hallucinatory geometry of a parallelepiped mounted on a horizontal plane outstretched toward the Basilica of Maxentius makes him a second “character in search of an author.”

Curtain and mask: perhaps Solution A for the Palazzo del Littorio tells more about Terragni than any other of his works. Terragni, the painter who does not align himself with the abstract artists of Como in his paintings *à la* Achille Funi; who abandons himself to references halfway between “metaphysics” and *Valori Plastici* in the Stecchini tomb at Como of 1930 (fig. 8), in the ecclesiastical implements designed in 1932 (figs. 9, 10), and in the “Sartoria Moderna” at the Fourth Biennale at Monza of 1930 (figs. 11, 12); who transforms himself into an able if detached “professional” in the Ghiringhelli, Toninello, Lavezzari, and Rustici apartment houses in Milan of 1933–35 (figs. 13–20); who seems to accept the lesson of Loos in the Sarfatti monument at Col d’Echele of 1934–35 (fig. 21); who involves himself in urbanism as if to expiate secret guilt complexes: *this* Terragni is already himself a Pirandelloesque character. For him reality and appearance are equivalent existential dimensions; the supreme game will be to interpenetrate

8 *Stecchini tomb, Como. G. Terragni, architect, 1930.*

9, 10 *Ecclesiastical implements. G. Terragni, architect, 1932.*

11, 12 *"Sartoria Moderna," Fourth Biennale at Monza. G. Terragni, architect, 1930.*



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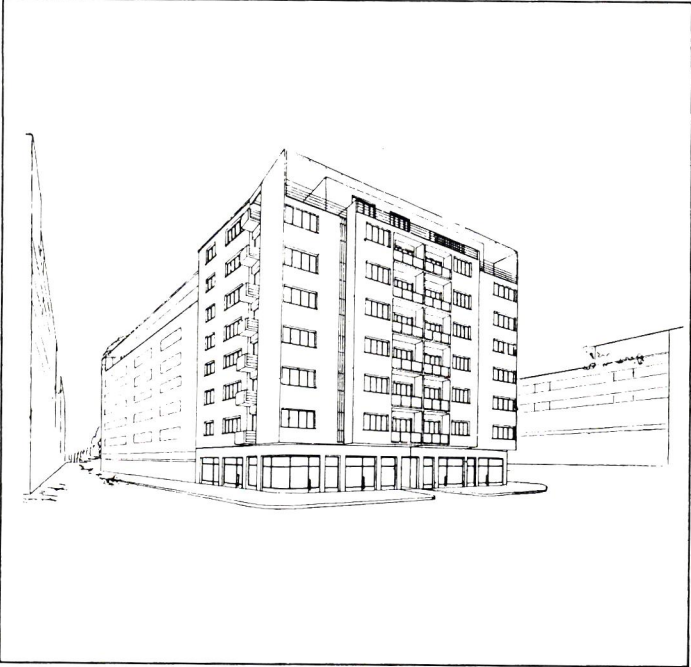
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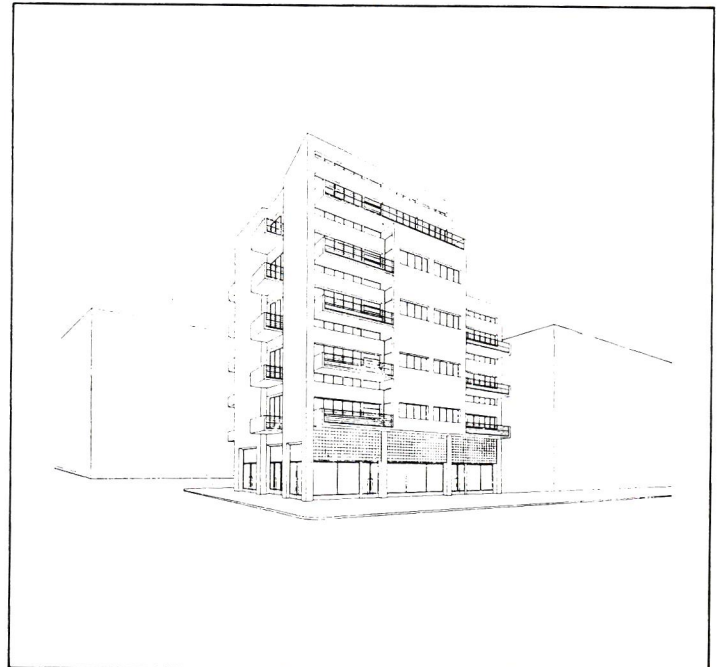
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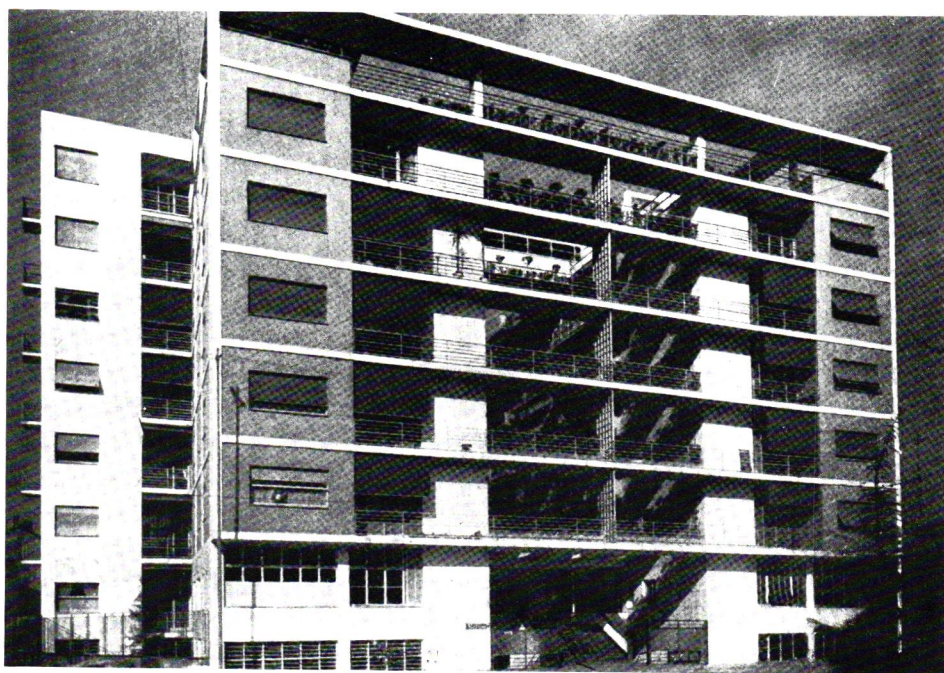
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13, 14 Ghiringhelli apartment house,  
Milan. G. Terragni with P. Lingeri,  
architects, 1933-1935.

15, 16 Lavezzari apartment house,  
Milan. G. Terragni with P. Lingeri,  
architects, 1933-1935.

17, 18 Toninello apartment house,  
Milan. G. Terragni with P. Lingeri,  
architects, 1933-1935.

19, 20 Rustici apartment house,  
Milan. G. Terragni with P. Lingeri,  
architects, 1933-1935.



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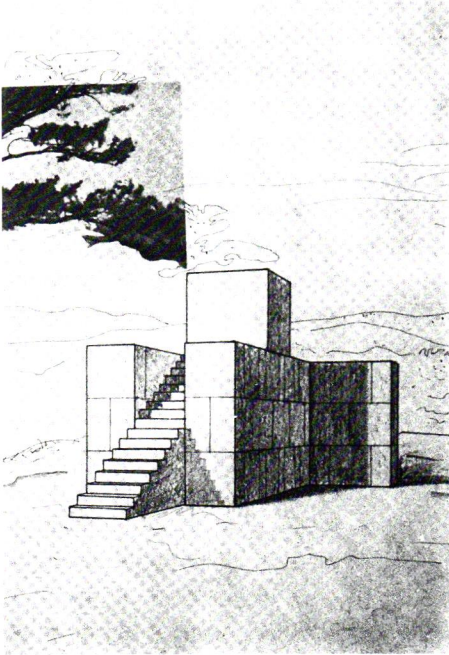
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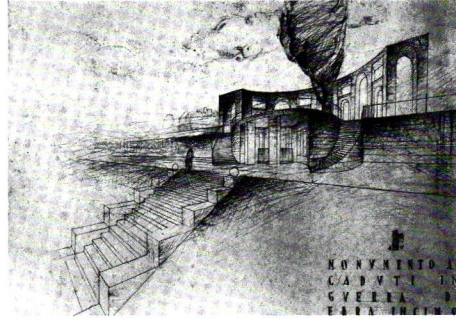
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21 Roberto Sarfatti monument at Col d'Echele. G. Terragni, architect, 1934–1935.

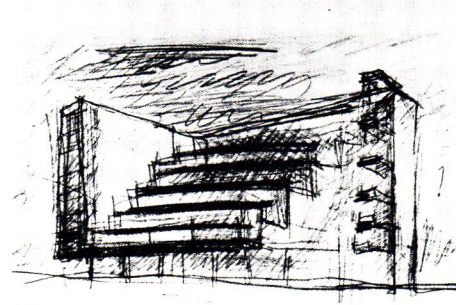


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22 War Monument to the Fallen of Erba Incino, Como. G. Terragni, architect, 1927–1932.

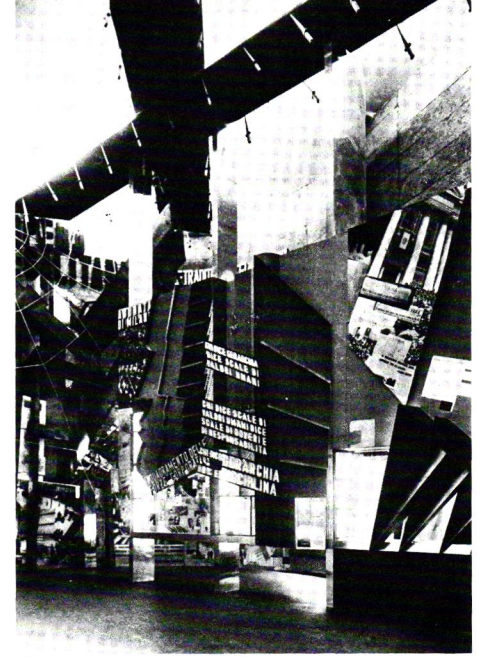


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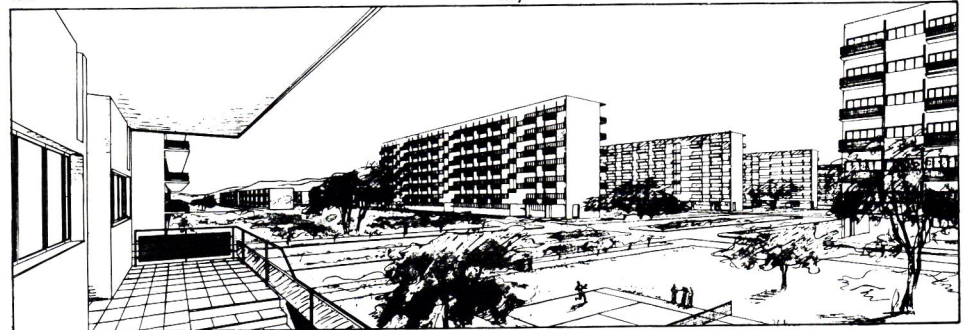
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24 "Sala del '22," Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, Rome. G. Terragni, architect, 1932.

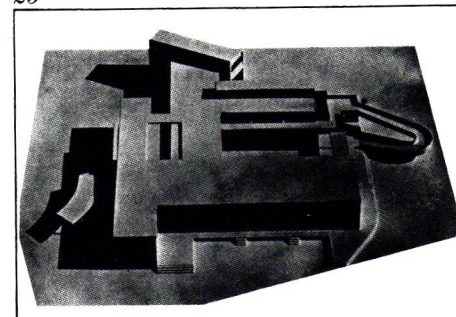


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25 Satellite housing quarter at Rebbio, Como. G. Terragni, architect, 1938.

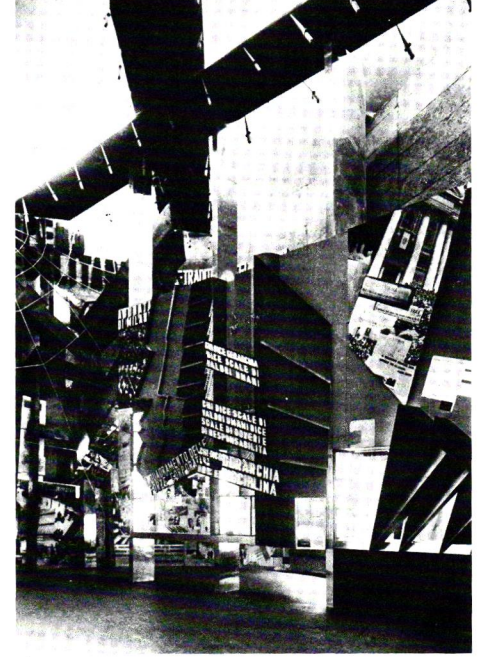


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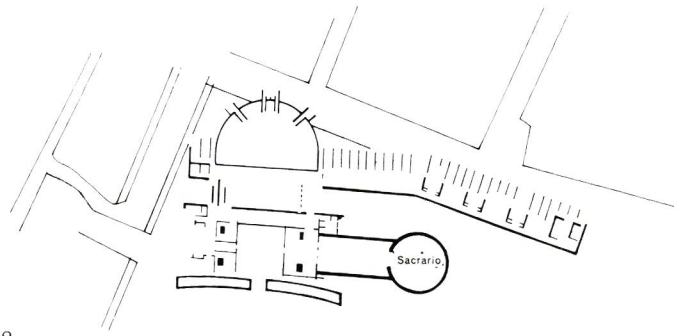
26 Sant'Elia Nursery School, Como. G. Terragni, 1936–1937. Model.



27

27 *Casa del Fascio, Lissone.*  
G. Terragni with A. Carminati,  
architects, 1938–1939.

28 *Palazzo del Littorio, Rome.*  
G. Terragni with A. Carminati,  
P. Lingeri, M. Nizzoli, E. Saliva,  
M. Sironi, L. Vietti, architects, 1934.  
Plan showing circular *Sacrario*,  
Solution A, First Level.



them so as to make the mask a reality and dissolve every “will of form” in it.

But now that “indecent” apparition of isostatic lines, that transformation of the “truth” of the structure with a linear network that becomes a “naked mask,” also manifests the frontal opposition between the Palazzo del Littorio and the Basilica of Maxentius (both of them in the shadow of the Colosseum, now rendered an *objet trouvé*), as well as the opposition between two ways of interpreting the relationship of space and time. The Basilica gathers into itself the flux of time: the succession of the crossings and the opening into space of its limits clearly enunciate what Alois Riegl intuited about the essence of the *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*. Time erodes space, corrodes its limits, “dirties” the form, and compromises it with the flux of the lived, of everyday life.

Terragni’s design eliminates any temporality: the disclosure of the veil from which it emerges is *timeless* in a disquieting silence; the geometrical object upon which Mussolini (or any other “actor”) would have pronounced words is rendered superfluous and ridiculous by the quality of “everything already said” in the architecture. The mask, in this case, is the face; the body—that is, the organism developing behind and to the sides—is free to speak *other languages*. And in fact, the parallelepiped that detaches itself from the central nucleus to surround the circular *Sacrario* (fig. 28) and the “bent” block of the offices overlooking Via del Colosseo both adopt a style of “writing” having little relation to the “suspended forms” of the curved facade. In relation to this last, the *Sacrario* is really an “accident,” clearly misplaced. The complex game of the open stairs linking the two rooms in the back opposes the bared essentiality of the volume of the offices to a density that seeks to be Constructivist, but reveals itself instead as a Surrealist intrusion. We are back in the theater, not observing the “naked masks” of Pirandello, but a Surrealist play, a game of surprises not far from the “theater of cruelty” of Antonin Artaud.

Here too, subject and supporting parts exchange roles. The two vertically connected rooms concede the protagonist’s

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role to the overtly mechanistic flight of stairs, an independent object endowed with its own autonomous and impenetrable language. As pure “gesture,” the stairs are alien to the volumetric stability from which they issue: although exciting in themselves, ultimately they have nothing to say concerning the purism of the volume of offices. They demonstrate the battle that takes place between the actors in turmoil “behind the scene.” In this sense, they complete the “game of appearances” unfolded by the “great wall.” At this point, the latter comes to assume the value of a dam, restraining ebullient forces and impeding them from appearing on the scene. Our earlier observation was correct then: the emergence of the “fullness of the word”—so full that it is pregnant with ambiguity—divides, breaks, and fragments the order of the discourse. Yet only when fragmented, only when analyzed in their infinite self-transformations, do the many “writings” of Terragni arrive at their objective of obstinately closing themselves in the atonality of a dated aphorism, where deprived of time they glide through the world and refuse to compromise with it. 9

The forms of Project A for the Palazzo del Littorio live their transformations in short bursts then. Cracks and irruptions: instruments already enunciated in the sketches for the War Monument to the Fallen of Erba Incino of 1927–1932 (fig. 22); in the solutions for the corners of the Novocomum, inflected more with tonality in the manner of Schwitters than with foolish Futurist ambitions; in the agitated spatial collages of the “Sala del ’22” for the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (fig. 24); in the design for a stepped housing block in Como (fig. 23) and for a flight of stairs at the Sant’Elia Nursery School of 1936–1937 (fig. 26). But one searches in vain for the use of these same instruments in other designs by Terragni: not in the apartment houses in Milan (see figs. 13–20), nor in the satellite housing quarter at Rebbio of 1938 (fig. 25), nor in the Casa del Fascio at Lissone of 1938–1939 (fig. 27). Where Terragni chooses to adhere strictly to a “code,” he seems to want to annul that tension that renders his historically most incisive works “suspended identities.”

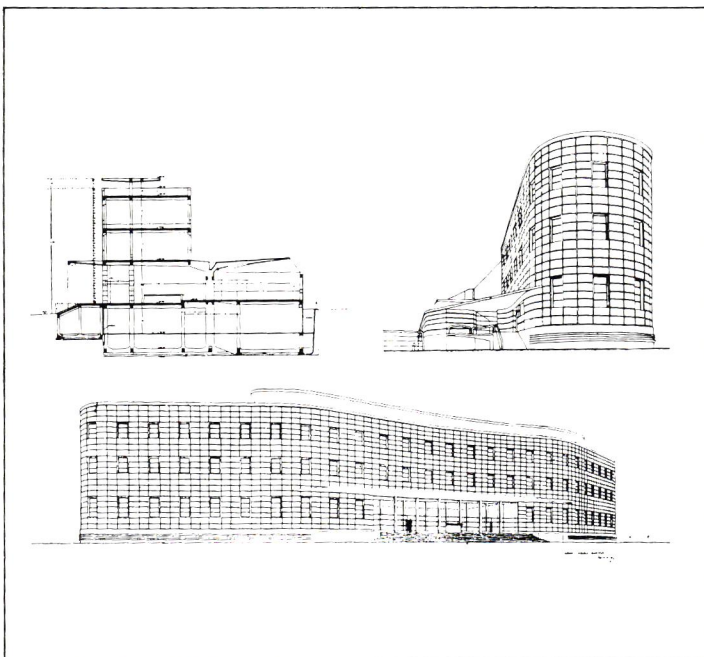
It is precisely the same for Pirandello, in whom Asor Rosa has described “suspended identity.” But Terragni’s brand

29 Post office, Piazza Bologna,  
Rome. M. Ridolfi, architect, 1933.

30 Post office on the Aventine, Rome.  
A. Libera with M. de Renzi,  
architects, 1933.

31 Villa Malaparte, Capri.  
A. Libera, architect, 1940.

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of irrationality has a direct and precise literary reference. Associated with Massimo Bontempelli (and P. Maria Bardi) in the *Quadrante* enterprise, Terragni seems to participate in more than one aspect of what Bontempelli would call “magic realism.”

The “Justification” that Bontempelli published in the first issue of *900*,<sup>1</sup> a magazine with the significant subtitle *Cahiers d’Italie et d’Europe*, opens by singling out the reconstruction of time and space as the precise task of the twentieth century. Here time and space no longer have *a priori* Kantian transcendence; they are instead so objectified as to become hermetic objects of infinite manipulations. “After having restored them to their eternity,” writes Bontempelli, “their immobility and coldness, we will take care to put them back into the place they have lost, in the three dimensions of infinity, *outside man* [emphasis added]. When we have managed to believe again in objective and absolute time and space, extending from man to infinity, it will be simple to separate matter from substance, and to begin again to combine the innumerable variations of their harmonies.”<sup>2</sup> Clearly Bontempelli’s *900* bears little relation to Margherita Sarfatti’s movement. Only in distancing space and time from the subject, making them obstacles to the transforming will of the artist, does Bontempelli consider it possible to reconquer a “solidity” of the real. It is too simple to make this aspiration of recovering a “solid” world coincide with the generalized appeals for a “return to the order of the day” in the Europe of the twenties. The Bontempellian “solid world,” like that created by Terragni, is an expedient, a search for limits in order to weigh the potential of the imagination, to test the capacity of a subject estranged from the real in order to hurl himself against it.

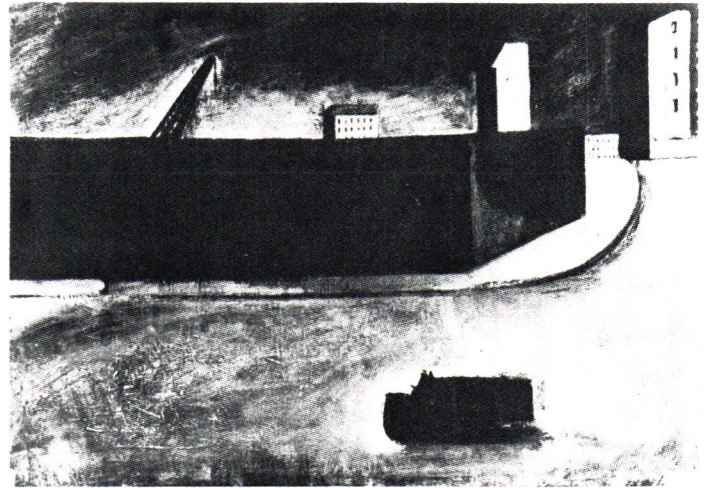
Indeed, Bontempelli continues, “Our only tool will be imagination. We must learn the art of building again in order to invent totally new myths capable of giving birth to the new atmosphere we need in order to breathe.” The new “art of building a real world beyond man” would have to pass through *magic*: for Bontempelli, the magic will is intrinsic to the creation of this “new atmosphere.” The *900* movement does nothing but represent and favor, catalyzing existing ferments. Magic assaults the real: *art becomes a*

*perilous adventure*. “The very exercise of art becomes a continuous risk. Never to be sure of its effect. To always fear that inspiration is but artifice. . . . No law, no comparison to enable us to judge our results. On this one cannot construct poetic arts. Always to be on a tightrope or on the crest of a wave, all the while smiling and lighting a pipe. No laws. Each work, each chapter, each page will itself dictate its unique and draconian laws, laws that will not serve for another time.”<sup>3</sup>

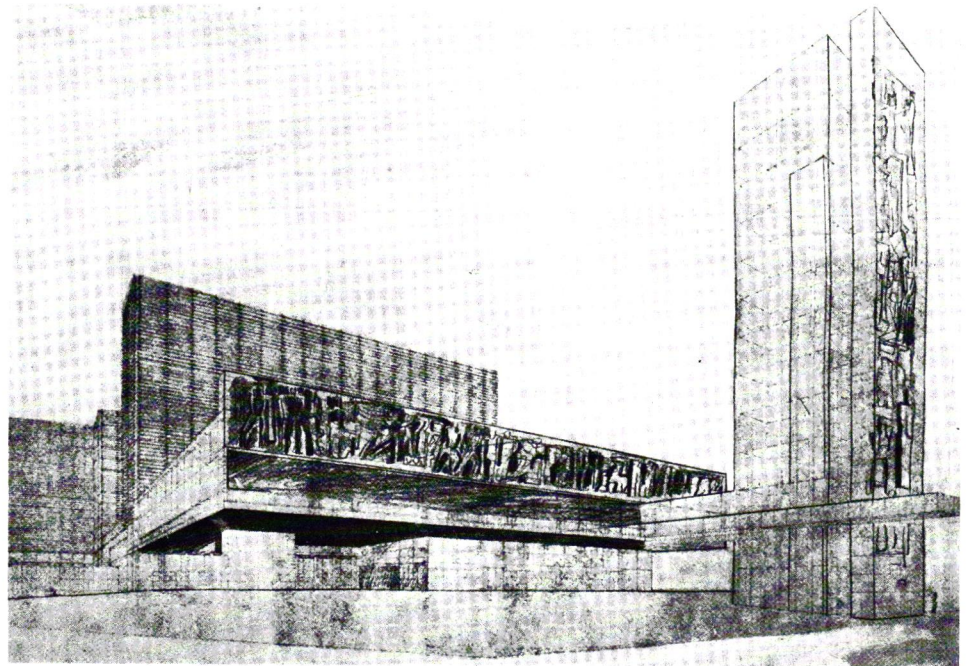
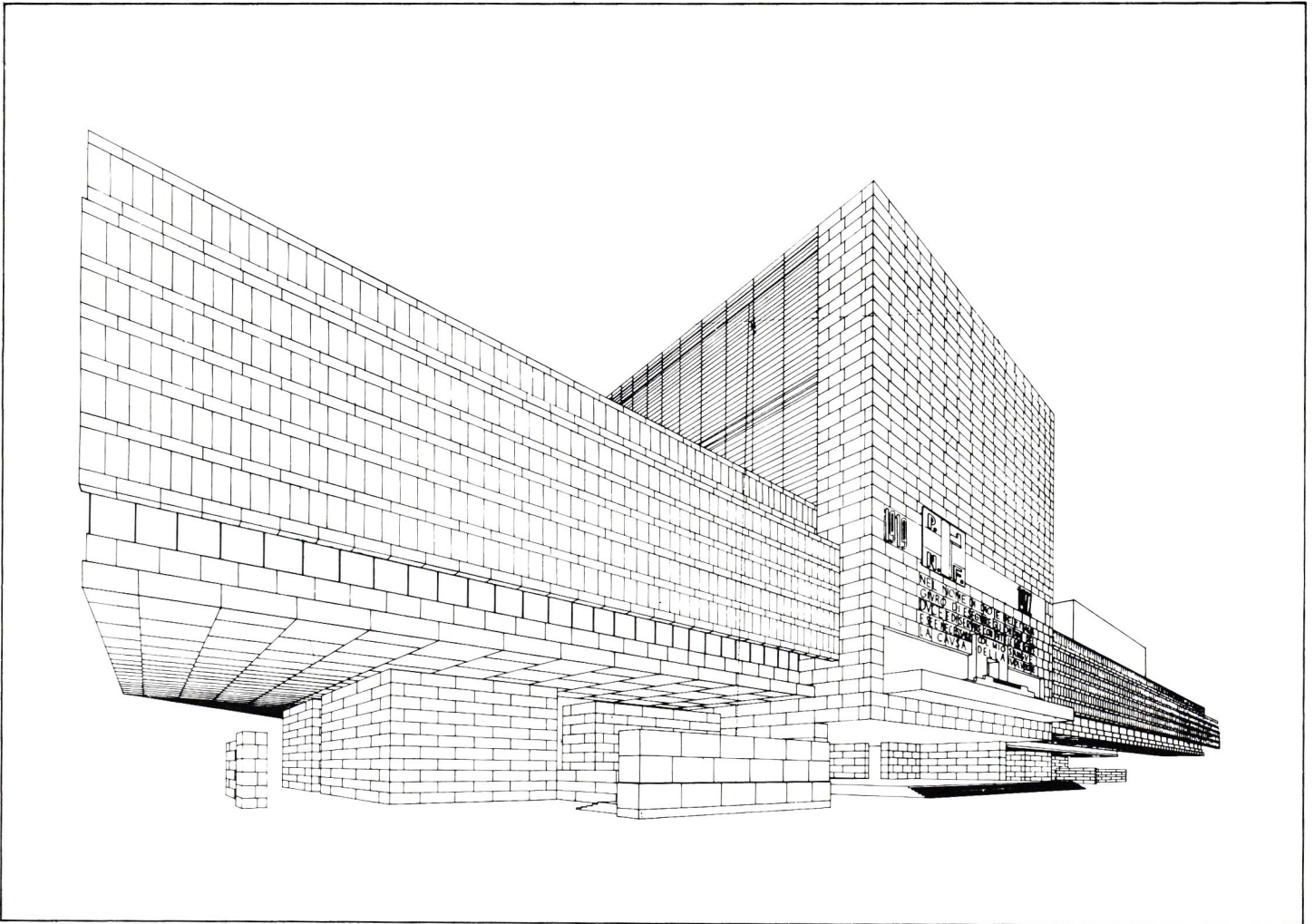
With Bontempelli’s “manifesto” we are less than four years from the second Surrealist Manifesto, but not far from certain aspects of the early Surrealism, mediated by the tradition of metaphysical painting and its wavering between the reality of desiccated memories, Montale’s *Sepia bones*, and attempts to make these same memories transmigrate to universes where the symbolic is flattened against evidence that is “too evident.”

Art thus finds itself in an interregnum, in the grasp of “many languages,” a theater where a game of “draconian (but unrepeatably) laws” reigns supreme, the player balanced on a tightrope he has strung for himself, all the while *smiling and lighting his pipe*. One could observe that Terragni is not the only one immersed in such an atmosphere. If one looks closely, Cattaneo is closer than Lingeri to him in this respect. The first works of the “Roman School”—the young Libera, Mario Ridolfi, and, with certain qualifications, Pietro Aschieri—are without doubt impregnated with an atmosphere somewhere between metaphysics and Futurism. However, in Aschieri’s *palazzine* or the projects of Ridolfi and Libera—not only the early ones, but also their post offices in the Piazza Bologna and on the Aventine (figs. 29, 30)—alienation is “recounted.” Architecture enters the city “as a foreign country,” *yet it enters*, either at the price of expressing a sort of stupor in its own presence (the mixed lines of the facade of the Ridolfian post offices), or by resorting to frozen contrasts with Futurist residues (as in the post offices of Libera or in his Malaparte house on Capri, see fig. 31).

In Terragni, alienation is undeclared; rather it shows itself alive and wanting to be lived beyond any narration. How



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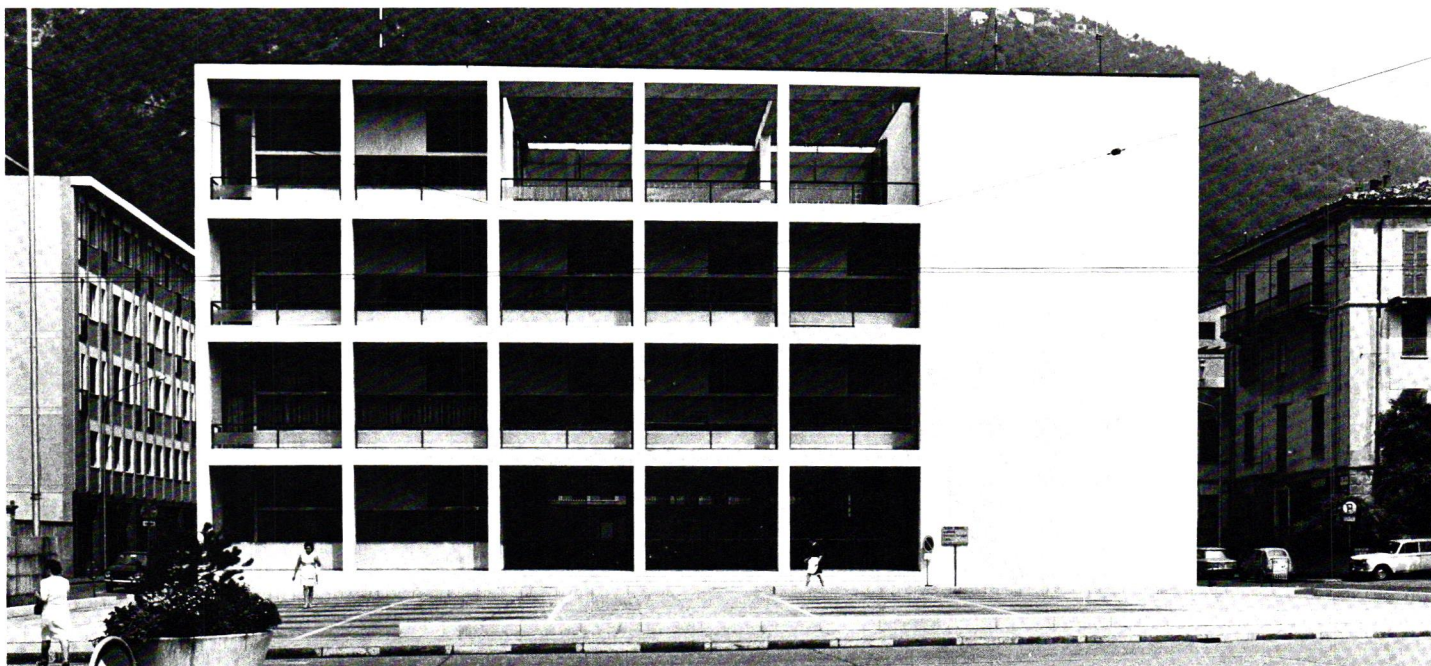


33 Palazzo del Littorio, Rome.  
G. Terragni with A. Carminati,  
P. Lingeri, M. Nizzoli, E. Saliva,  
M. Sironi, L. Vietti, architects, 1934.  
Solution B, First Level.

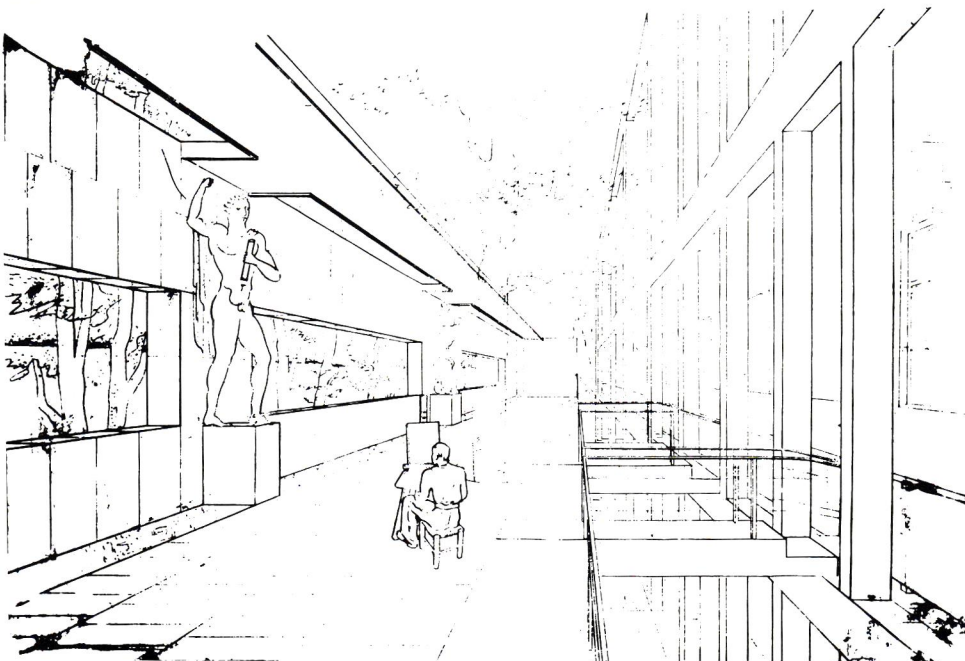
34 Palazzo del Littorio, Rome.  
Second Level, 1937.

35 Casa del Fascio, Como.  
G. Terragni, architect, 1932-1936.

36 Brera Academy, Milan.  
G. Terragni with P. Lingeri,  
L. Figini, G. Pollini, Mariani,  
architects, 1935-1936.



35



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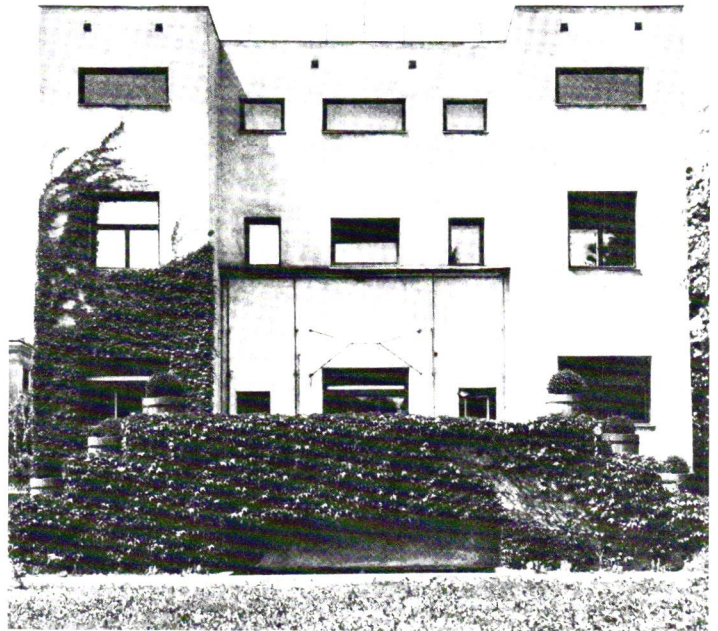
14 do we explain the presence around Terragni of painters as different as Sironi and Nizzoli, not just in the projects considered thus far, but within the frame of all of his activity? "Sironi," Paolo Fossati recently wrote, "eternally titanic, challenges the fatal condemnation of both nature and the city; takes upon himself the challenge of violence to a pre-modern, agrarian level of humanity; takes on in a modern, urban sense, a coarseness, an ethic of brutality welling up from deep within against fatality. Sironi's city is like his countryside (fig. 32), the locus of a gesture that assumes the fatality of sin, of a deaf violence: it neither adds nor removes anything else." Beyond the forms, perhaps what creates the elective affinity between Sironi and Terragni is that unwillingness to add to or remove from the gesture anything that assumes the fatality of sin.

Nevertheless, Terragni's "gesture" fixes its own objective on an atemporal horizon. No analogy links Project A for the Palazzo del Littorio (see figs. 2, 5-7) with Project B of 1934 (fig. 33) or with the second level design of 1937 (fig. 34). The shrine of glass in Solution B isolates and delimits itself with precision: but, as in the projects for the school at the Brera Academy (fig. 36, developed with Lingeri, Figini, Pollini, and Mariani), Terragni trusts to a sure calligraphy, too sure to be convincing. He does this to ask himself if the basic themes of Solution A find their development in the final version of the Casa del Fascio at Como (fig. 35 and frontispiece). A precise reading of Terragni's complex design procedures brings to light a series of antitheses—stasis/rotation, addition/subtraction, symmetry/asymmetry—that render the Casa del Fascio a real and true "transformational machine." In these terms, it responds to an appeal totally foreign to the technique of the avant-garde. Where the avant-garde bases itself on a teeming mass of transgressions, like a bombardment of shocks passing among them, a syntax *that reveals its own transformations* assumes the *game* as the recovery of a "grand form."

The "grand form" is that which accepts the pitiless law upon which language is based; that is, language *is not invented*, rather *it is transformed*. It is the great lesson of the later Wittgenstein, as well as of the other "great Vi-

37 Steiner House, Vienna. Adolf Loos, architect, 1910.

38 Building on the Michaelerplatz, Vienna. Adolf Loos, architect, 1910-1911.



37



38

ennese masters of language”: Alois Riegl, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Gustav Mahler, Gustav Klimt, Otto Wagner. In addition to flattening history, the fable of the Modern Movement has destroyed opposition between the different tendencies—the diverse “interrupted paths”—that spring from the same source: the rupture of the linearity of the “classical” dialectic, of the Socratic *logos*, the myth of *philosophia perennis*. The heirs apparent of “negative thinking” are not the only ones who move beneath the sign of Nietzsche. The *negatives Denken* is not really expressed in sacred buffoonery, somewhere between the mysticism and the tormented laughter of Hugo Ball in the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, or in the impotent will to power expressed by the “Futurist reconstructions of the universe.” The seventh proposition of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, where he writes: “About that which one cannot speak it is best to remain silent,” is far more than an ethic of transgression “beyond good and evil.”

This does not necessarily lead to the “noisy silence” of the Loos of the Steiner house (fig. 37) or the building on Michaelerplatz (fig. 38). The imperative of remaining obstinately within the *limits* that create the conditions of a sense of communication implies the full assumption of the rules of a game that are *given*: but in the process of playing the game, the structure of the game itself is “transformed.” In that sense we spoke at the outset of an “analytical work” that, for Terragni, is “put into play” *à la* Schiller, beyond any utopian or moral pretext. Terragni’s atonality makes the “resonant word” fall into the void, as was seen in Project A, inexorably detaching *names* from *things*. The same evocations of Constructivist or Futurist linguistic techniques, where the artist instrumentally chooses to adopt them, are handy materials for manipulation. The dimension of memory itself is inexorably crushed.

Is Terragni then “indifferent,” in the meaning offered in Alberto Moravia’s symptomatic novel? Is it possible, pushing that hypothesis further, to connect the intellectual figure of Terragni to a typology of a man of culture who chose a declared apathy in the climate of Fascism? For our taste, there is too much moralism in this interpretation to allow us to fully accept it. If it holds as an attempt to “explain”

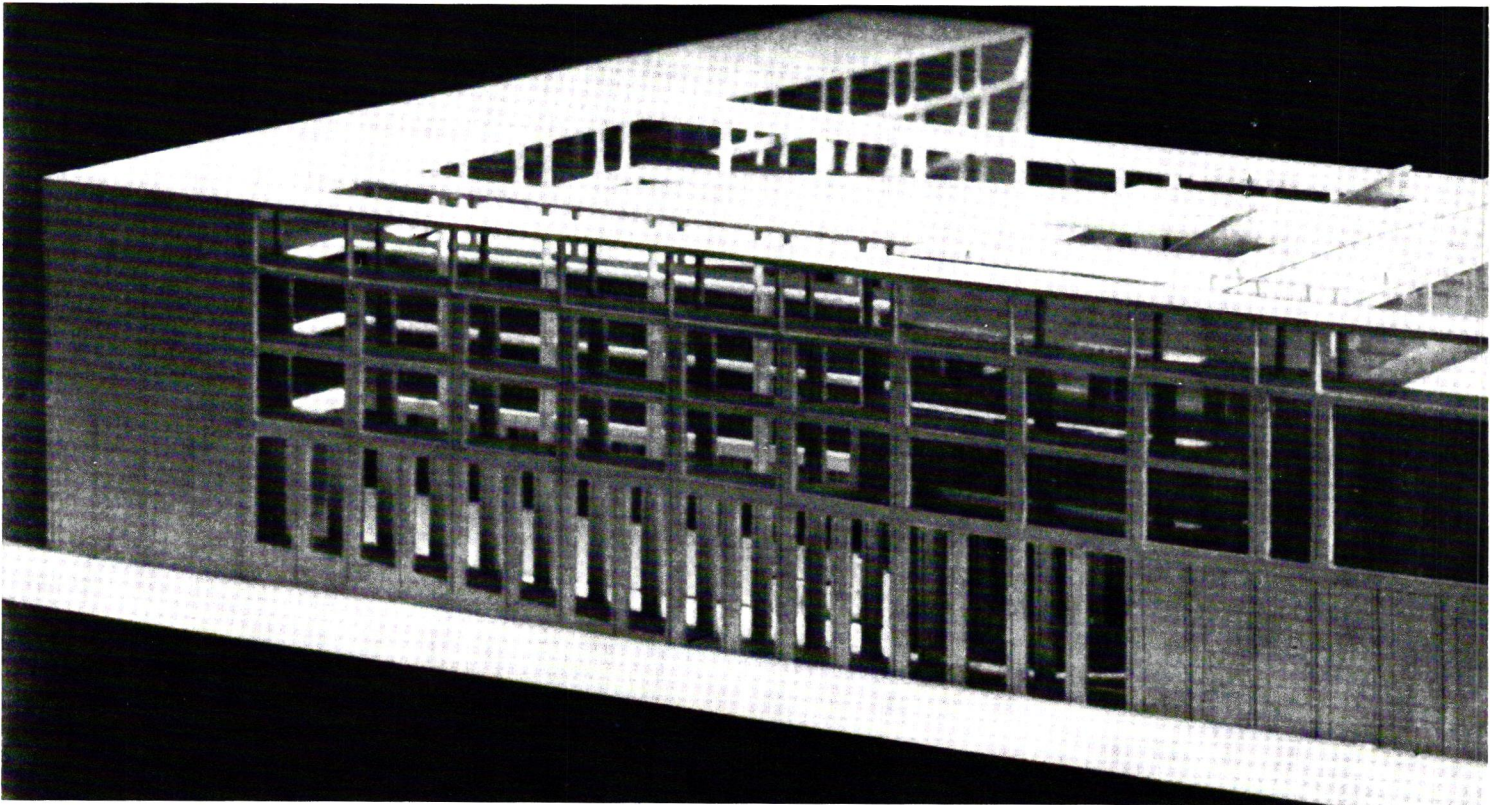
contingent aspects of Italian culture during the notorious twenty-year period, it is incapable, at the same time, of historically situating a search that has origins of a very different nature, as has already been suggested, and that presents itself again today with problematic accents too visible to be confined to considerations peripheral to the texts in which that search is conducted.

Only after this necessary clarification can we turn to examining the Casa del Fascio in Como, asking ourselves if a hidden relationship with the syntactic method recognized in Project A lies within. A solid undergoes a process of erosion, but at the same time an unstable grid appears in a game of transparencies, seeking solid holds to grasp and projecting itself onto a plane, tending to develop itself as a three dimensional space, but *encountering resistance*. Let us try to examine the grid that incessantly mimes the solid stillness of the generating organism. Is there something in it analogous to the perverse “revelations” of the isostatic lines responsible for the overcharged nature of the curved slab of Project A? Also, in the frontal view of the Casa del Fascio, *that which is exposed* distances, consumes, and emarginates a materiality that is imposed as apparent subject. Turned into a physical and transparent network, the arabesque of those isostatic lines here is transformed into yet another “mask,” no longer to isolate itself as a curtain, but in order to reappear continuously, bursting through passages involving the entire formal object. The battle between forms is thus placated. The dialogue between the opposites now assumes an Apollonian stability. By chance, in the annulment of the grid as a transparency of voids, in the surfaces that stand out toward the sky, or in the toning down of the great nothingness of the wall—silence or musical pause that permits the theme to share tonality with the variation of the facades—one can perceive the enigmatic smile of Dionysius, surreptitiously speaking with the voice of Apollo.

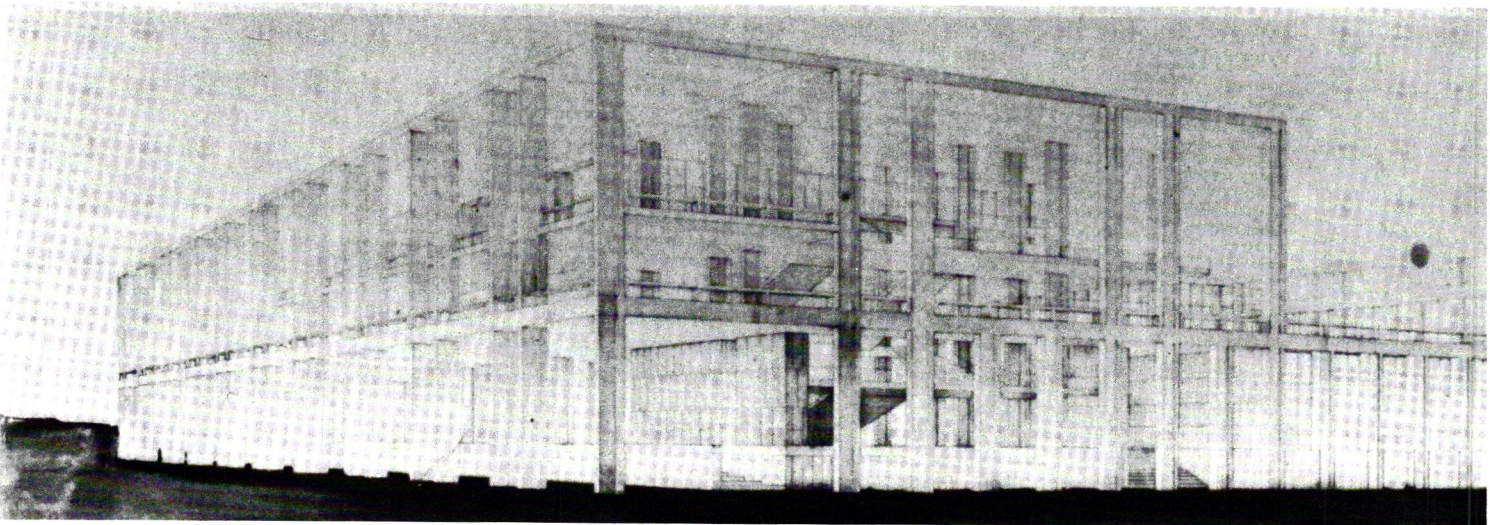
The authentic enigma is not in that calculated exchange of roles. Instead, it lies in the total annulment of any dialogue between the forms. Frozen in its absolute metaphysical dimensions, Terragni’s object rests casually on the ground: the fragment of a conceptual interregnum, it accentuates

39, 40 Palazzo dei Congressi at E'42,  
competition. G. Terragni with  
P. Lingeri and C. Cattaneo,  
architects, 1938-1939.

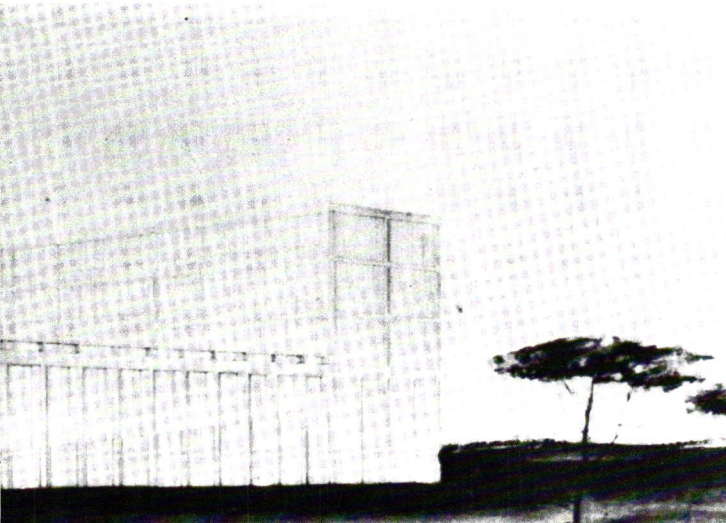
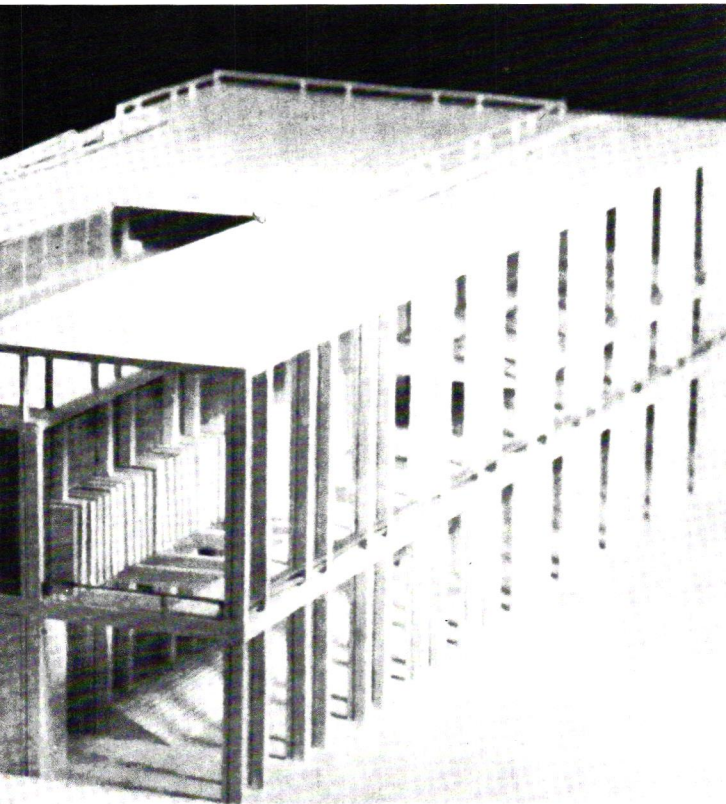
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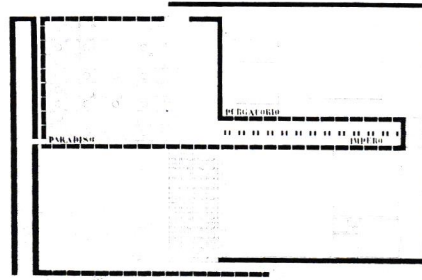
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its own lack of place, or, more accurately, the *absence of desire for place*. The same attitudes put the relationship between city and building into abeyance. The context exists: Terragni's architecture wants neither to add nor to remove anything from it. Certainly, the new presence modifies the context, and through absolute withdrawal assumes the astonished state of being only a sign, compelled with dissembling shrewdness into being that which it is *and nothing more*. Here is the Surrealist basis linking Terragni once more to Bontempelli. "Realism" is to make the real reveal itself to its full extent, and collide with magic boxes that refute any dialogue. Magic assumes a Bretonian tonality, beyond the writing of signs. "The words make love to one another," and have nothing to say beyond their egotistical pleasure, in which no voyeur can ever participate. 17

In other words, Terragni's "naked masks" in the Casa del Fascio are no longer "in search of an author." The truth of the mask is *everything*, as, with greater eloquence, Terragni wants to demonstrate (with Lingeri and Cattaneo) in the design for the second level of the competition for the Palazzo dei Congressi at E'42 of 1938-1939 (figs. 39, 40). Numerical relationships, golden sections, regular rhythms: in the resolution of his project Terragni enunciates laws of composition evocative of a "classical" discipline. "The mesh of the reinforced concrete framework," he wrote in the report accompanying the project for E'42, "extends throughout the building according to a regular numerical rhythm . . . it was held to large bays only where parallel to the facade, where greater necessity prevailed; the bays instead were reduced in the normal way to little more than three meters, so as to create a series of pilasters along the sides, which, beyond determining a 'meaning' immediately distinguishing the external structural aspect of the facade from that of the sides, gave place to an interesting architectural game on the sides."

But in the building for E'42, what is "facade" and what is "side"? The alternate bays destroy, both internally and externally, the concept of "facade," while the loosening of their rhythm, their variation, their intersection with full slabs or shifting planes only accentuate their true function: the setting forth of a non-homogeneous structure as if it



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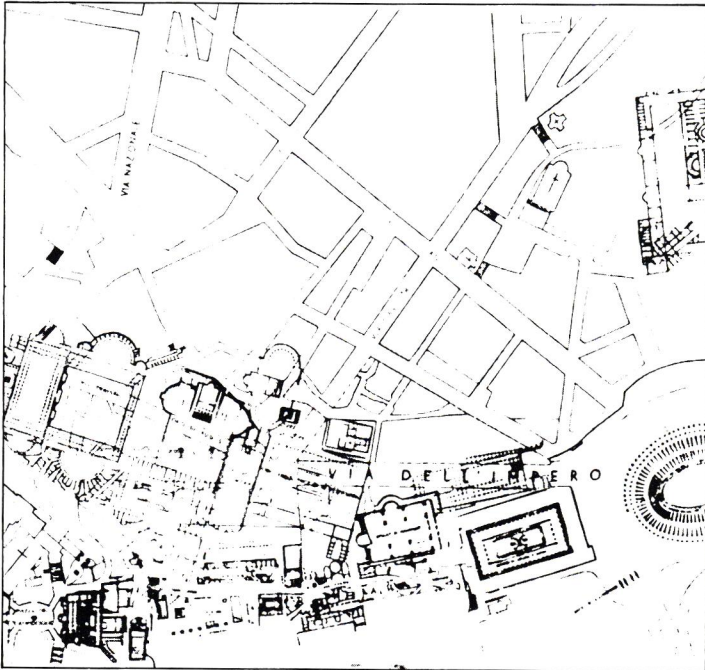
were homogeneous, a demarcation that at once reveals its own infinite multiplication and game of divisions, yet remains *itself*.

The labyrinth thus evoked seems to detach itself from the body of the architectural writing. It is the spectator, pulled along by the deception of his eye, who will find labyrinthine the forged “clarity” of that structure. It becomes clear that in some way the spectator, here as in the Casa del Fascio, is an intruder. His presence is not requested. But once having entered into a game of forms that turn their back to him, he must be alert to the fact that he is not in the presence of relationships between characters, themes, and narrations, but rather before a concatenation of logical-formal relationships, a rarefied exteriority.

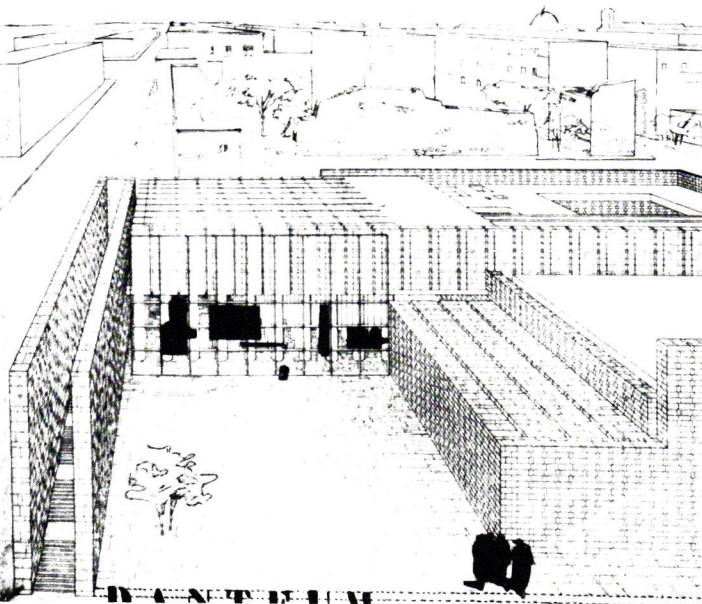
But why the hallucinating rarefication? And how does one bring the absolute formalism into accord with the illusive-ness of a divisional process that transforms a “classically” composed structure into a metaphor?

The coming into being of the forms, both in the Casa del Fascio and in the building at E'42, is not, in effect, a simple sequence of changes. For these forms, definition is a condition of their disconcertingly provocative behavior. Terragni demonstrates that the finitude of the object divides and connects this latter from and to other objects—defining them precisely, holding them together as if they were *above all relative*, in particular, relative to the game established *a priori*. The divided forms—illusory, transparent, and nevertheless legible as univocal, stable, full—tell the truth about the relativity of the forms they oppose. Put another way, the metaphor no longer appears as such; it is revealed now as a nuance that permits a gathering of the differences that are conditions of the work and illuminates the shadings that thrust the forms into an ambiguous suspension of their meaning. Ambiguous suspension and not equivocal fluttering, to be sure.

Suspension of meaning thus becomes the authentic subject of Terragni's “masks.” The “mask” *in itself* comprises reality, as well as the shame that restrains Terragni, a “difficult man,” from indecently exhibiting the private nucleus of his



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41 *Danteum* project, Rome.  
G. Terragni and P. Lingeri,  
architects, 1938. Detail of site plan.

42 *Danteum*.

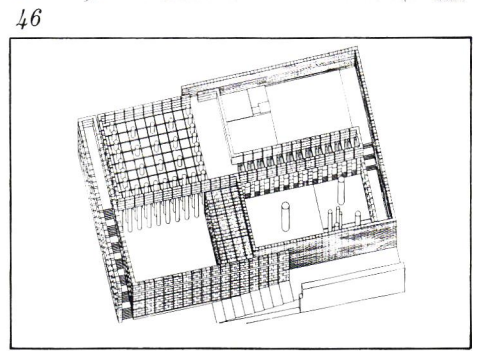
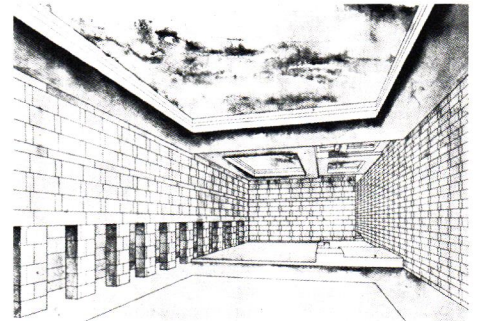
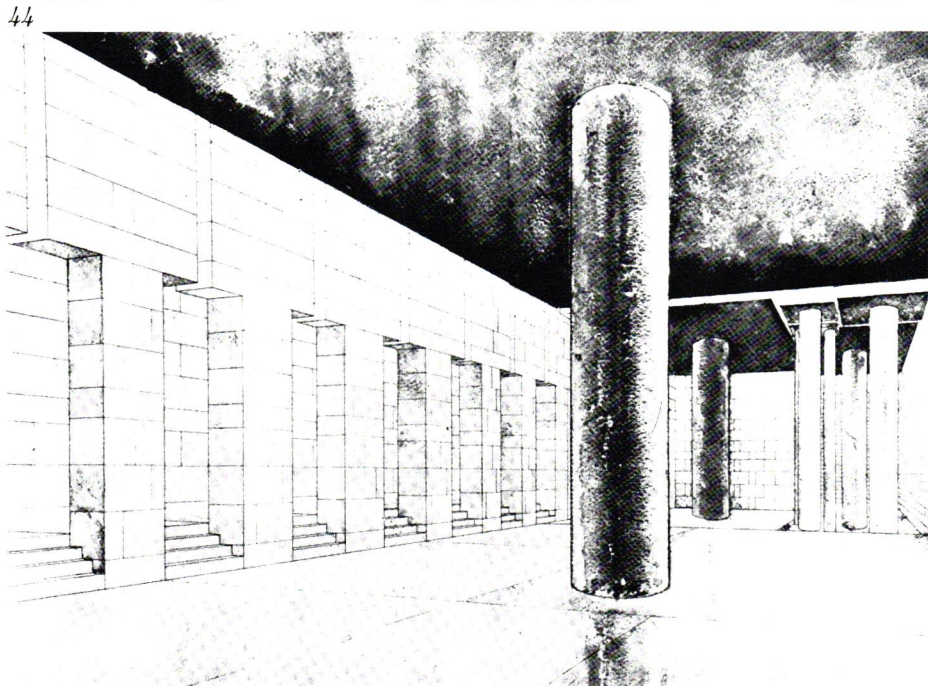
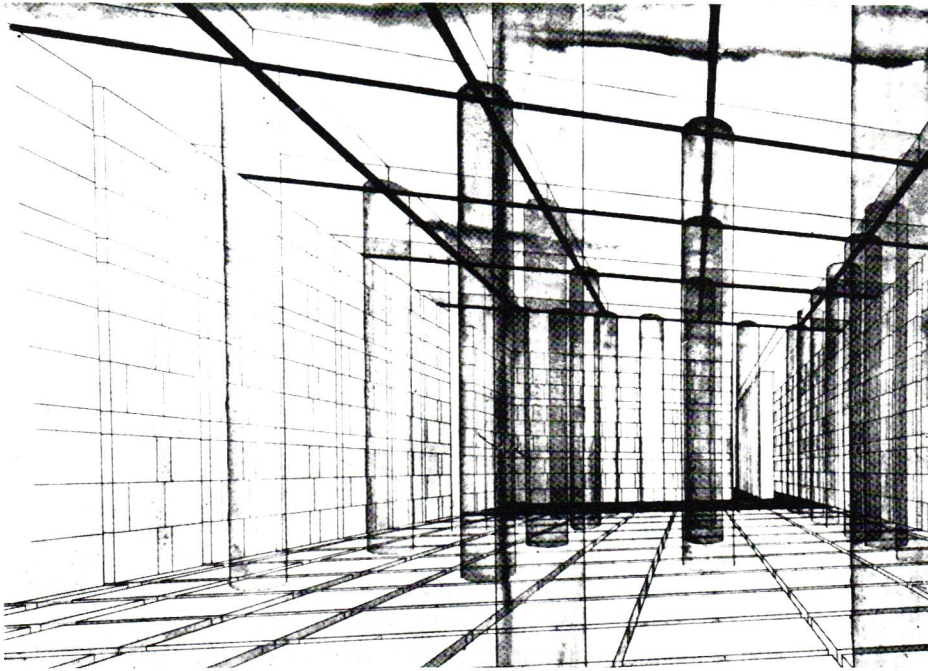
43 *Danteum*. Plan.

44 *Danteum*. Paradise.

45 *Danteum*. Inferno.

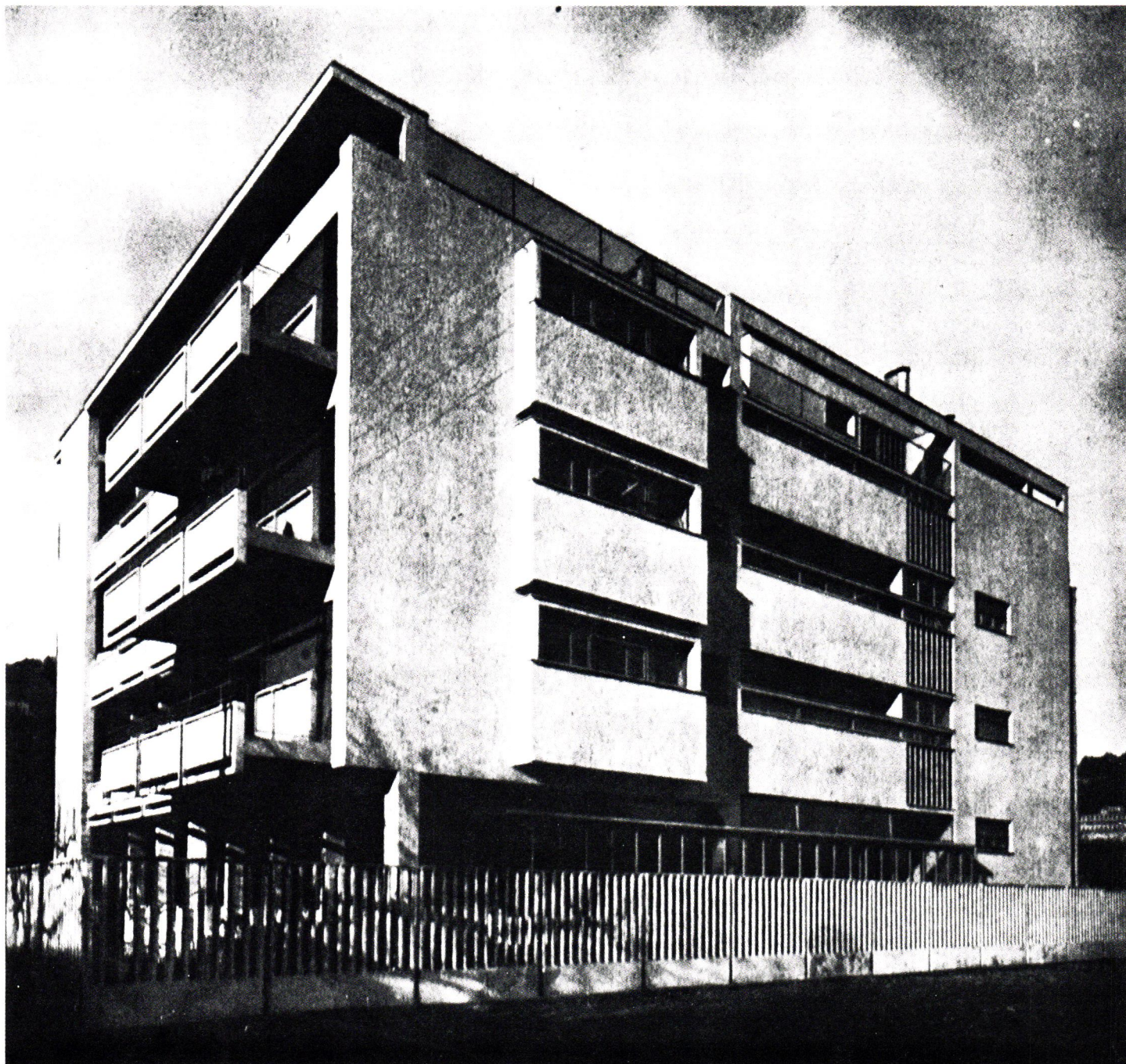
46 *Danteum*. Purgatory.

47 *Danteum*. Axonometric.



*48 Giuliani-Frigerio apartment  
block, Como. G. Terragni, architect,  
1939-1940.*

20



poetic world. To build houses that speak of the impossibility of “offering shelter” is the ultimate meaning of his “act of composing.” It does not seem alien to Terragni to welcome allegory as further material for his transformational games. But, as Walter Benjamin observed, “if the key figure of the old allegory is the cadaver, the key figure of the new allegory is remembrance [*Andenken*]. Remembrance is the scheme of the transformation of merchandise into collector’s items.”

Remembrance is not memory: it evokes *temps intérieur*, but in order to exorcize power, to re-encounter the “time of estranged labor” deposited in the object-commodity. This is a further explanation for the alienation Terragni introduces in his enigmatic interregnums. Remembrance and estrangement thus can be played in unison: returning to design again with his Danteum on the Via dell’Impero in 1938 (fig. 41), Terragni clearly shows that the “artificial place”—a street interrupts the continuity of the antique forums, annulling history, proposing itself as metaphysical route—is the most adequate means of transforming a willed congealing of remembrance into deceptive allegories. The allegory of the Danteum, in that sense, is truly a bridge between the key figure of the cadaver and that of remembrance; the deceit lies in the presentation of that *bridge* as a symbolic figure, while once again symbol is only the perverse mask of a formal absolute.

The Danteum, with its rectangular plan, confronts anew the Basilica of Maxentius and assumes a fixed rapport between geometric and numerical codes (fig. 43). The relationships of 1:3, 3:7, and 1:3:7:10, superimpose themselves onto a rectangle which in turn is composed of a square and of a second rectangle generated by the golden means. “Three rectangular spaces,” Terragni writes in his project description of the Danteum, “declare in a clear manner the theme of the rectangle . . . there remains a fourth space, excluded: a closed court . . . and we can thus speak of a reference to the life of Dante up to his thirty-fifth year and thus ‘lost’ . . . So we can say the same of all the connections: here, in fact, is the ‘forest’ of a hundred columns. The cruciform layout in plan determines the division into one (open court) and three (large, temple-like rooms dedicated

to the three cantos, figs. 42, 47), in elevation the interior differentiates the interior spaces on three levels. These two fundamental schemes are intersected by a third scheme formed by the ‘longitudinal spine’ of three walls (alternately solid and perforated), which defines, at the top of the building, the Imperial concept of Dante, and comes to represent the germ of the architectural whole, the result of the sum of the spaces traversed from the Inferno to Purgatory to Paradise . . . .”

In reality, what has Terragni told us thus far? About coded transformations that rest on primary elements—walls, columns, spaces, shifting planes—recognized as signifiers arbitrarily connected to *signifieds*. Here the dimension of remembrance is assumed as “pre-text”: the *Divine Comedy* is turned into a “human, all too human” comedy, deprived of even a stage, since theater blends with actor and the actor is only an incessantly changing *pure sign*. The walls that contain the court in front of the portico of the hundred columns divide and connect the space in which the same columns, freeing themselves from the pitiless law of identity imposed on them in Inferno, are disposed in varied dimensions within a chessboard equally pitilessly isolating them from one another. The sign game destroys the deceit of the symbol; the chessboard without a center represents not Dantesque sequences but the hallucinating fixity of the sign. Split from signifieds, sign becomes structure. It would only be ridiculous if it were reconnected to the symbols it feigns to carry. In fact, the full wall of the same portico also hides the long ascending stairway giving access to the evanescences of Paradise; but the direction it takes, constrained between the walls that contain it, has as its true conclusion the empty sky.

The grid of the Casa del Fascio also had the sky as its ultimate reference. In the Danteum, not only in the stairway but in the shifting planes of Purgatory and the portico of coupled pilasters in the corridor of the Impero, the fullness of the “obstacles”—wall, perforated covering planes, rhythmic obsessiveness of supports—compels a confrontation between material density and infinite void. This is suggested by the frontal wall with its stone sculptures in high relief. It protects the secret of the architectural whole



22 from the Via dell'Impero and renders access to the internal *piazzale* difficult. One notes that the final tract of the same wall, when isolated as an independent vertical body, corresponds exactly to the beginning of the stairway closed within the obsessive box leading to Paradise. The process of the transformation of the material, ending in the infinity of space, is explicitly "written." To the hundred granite columns correspond, in the overlaid Paradise room, the thirty-three steel reinforced crystal columns supporting a transparent covering (fig. 44). The materials follow one another, underscoring their consistency or evanescence, even if Terragni needs a literary-symbolic pretext to facilitate acceptance of his game. It is useless, then, to ask which is Loosian, which Miesian. The adoption of a pretext—an opera libretto, a poetry to translate in *Lieder*—serves to reveal a system of differences interposed between literary space and architectural space, and in the process, accentuates the stupefying solitude of the latter.

As proof of this, one reflects on the counterposition of Inferno and Purgatory (figs. 45, 46) which have a basically identical division of their floors. The columns, compressed by a ceiling of massive blocks of granite in Inferno, have disappeared in Purgatory where the blocks determine the different levels of the floor in shifting planes of vaguely neoplastic composition. As if that were not enough, the ceiling in the Purgatory room, divided into dimensions that reflect the volumetric increments of the flooring, corresponds to the material character of the Inferno's ceiling. The two spaces thus reflect one another; the "disappearance" of full elements and the transformation of fulls into voids assume a specific significance, thanks also to the spine of the double corridor separating the two spaces displaced on different levels. Partitioned corridors, interrupted passages, forced directions and joints that render the route labyrinthian: *ars retorica* seizes the objects, but leaves them mute in an excess of ambiguity.

The dialectic between the Casa del Fascio in Como (see fig. 35 and frontispiece) and the Giuliani-Frigerio apartment block (fig. 48), seen as an atemporal architecture impossible to read as a linear sequence of forms, is the same that links the Casa del Fascio with the Danteum. The muteness of

the latter is revealed through excess: that is, simulated symbolic sequences that are disclosed as inessential once set into such architecture. Fragment and totality face one another in silence, the mask given body, the subject placed in parenthesis.

All this has been said in order to inquire both into the ultimate end of excavations into the transformation of forms, and into the possibility of relating Terragni's formal strategies to the theme tackled by Paul Valéry in his *Eupalinos*. "For us," Valéry writes, "all things are forms. Of them we conserve only the relationships, and as if held in a limpid light . . . we construct . . . temples of wisdom and science, such as to satisfy all reasoning beings. This great art demands of us a wonderfully exact language. The very name that designates it is also that of reason and calculation, and only one word, *logos*, says those three things. What in fact is reason if not discourse itself, when the meanings of the terms are well defined and certain of their permanence, and when those immutable meanings reciprocally adapt and clearly compose themselves? With calculation, this makes everything one."

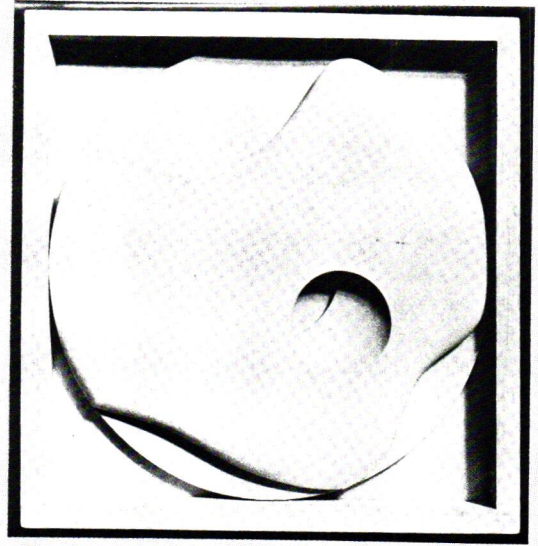
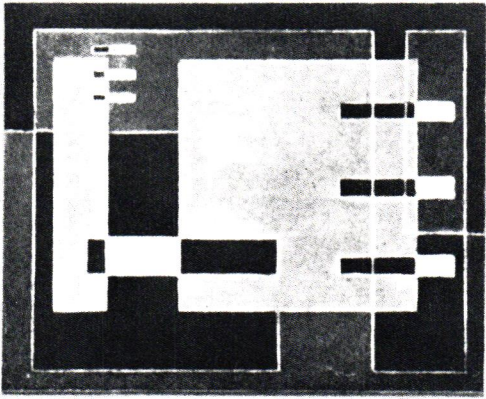
But if reason is discourse itself, nothing can assure a linear direction to the word. Only if the meanings are "immutable" can the *logos* appear as a burst of supreme "well-calculated" truth. If, on the contrary, the discourse is really autonomous, no *a priori* significance will appear on the horizon. It can remain the perfect delineation of terms, but not a certain manifestation of their "permanence," of their adherence to namable things. The *logos* enunciated by Valéry expresses nostalgia for a shelter within which to "rest" the forms dissolved into pure relationships. Such a nostalgia does not inhabit Terragni's work. Wisdom and science, for Terragni, do not emerge from the rigorously traced confines of a "name" signifying nothing but itself. For that reason, in Terragni the art of simulation assumes a thickness impossible to square with tools outside of his game. A tragic and ambiguous game—crowding masks and simulations into one another around "resistant" conceptual nuclei. There is, in fact, no extenuation in these tragic games; no idea of consumption. The atonality we have called forth in the works mentioned above is the first condition of the

49 *Mario Radice*, *Composizione N. 19*  
C.F., 1934-1935.

50 *Manlio Rho*, *Composizione 42*,  
1936.

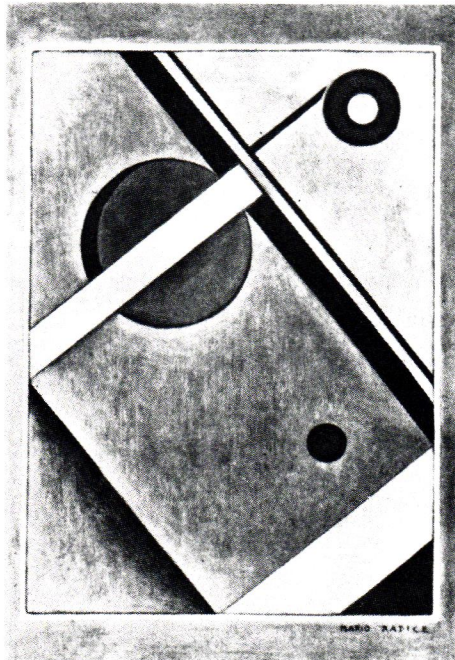
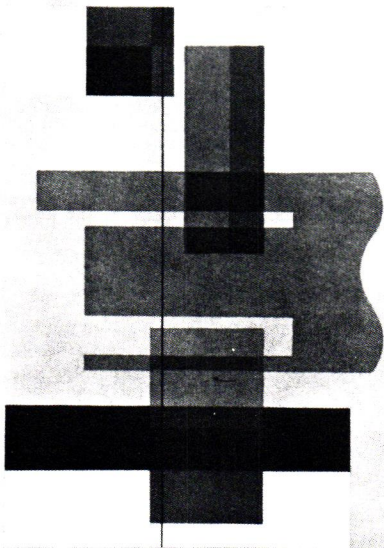
51 *Aldo Galli*, *Scultura-Rilievo*, 1938.

52 *Mario Radice*, *Composizione S. 9*,  
1934-1936.



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24 game's infinite changes. The theme always proves apparent, the only truth is the unlimited succession of happenings it permits.

Is it perhaps this "discovery" of Terragni that renders difficult his relationships with the abstract painters of the Como group—mainly Radice (figs. 49, 52) and Rho (fig. 50)—who nonetheless directly and indirectly provide him with ideas and suggestions? How can Terragni's hermeticism be reconciled with the religious cadences of Radice or the perception of time springing from Rho's paintings, influenced as they were by the Kandinsky exhibition held in 1934 at the Galleria del Milione? Perhaps in a figure such as Rho's friend, the sculptor Aldo Galli (fig. 51), thematic analogies with Terragni's investigations can be seen in the ability to make only an echo of space emerge from the plastic structures, a resonance of events whose origins remain artfully concealed. Is Terragni closer to Carlo Belli, author of that fundamental volume of Italian abstract art of the 1930's, *Kn* (1935)?

"The creator," wrote Belli in *Kn*, "guards against entering into his own work: the highest ambition an artist can have is for his own work to live an autonomous life, apart, like a splendid and absolute world. But the absolute is not relative except to itself, or rather it is not relative, and if the work is absolute it cannot but have its own life and not that of man or nature." For Belli, then, an absolute exists: the truth and the "selfness" of the work. The field of the spirit liberated from the object is *beyond the border*, and Fossati correctly recognized the mystical political nucleus of Belli's positions, which were not by chance resolved in an invocation of love for the masses on the part of the elect. "It is necessary," Belli continued in the third chapter of *Kn*, "that Italians return with fervor to Rosmini, to this terse revealer of God, who knew how to oppose, to the anguished reveries of Kant, the sunny and Italian idea of 'being', conductor of a classical order against all the arbitrary and romantic elasticity of the Hegelian 'I'. Of Rosmini it has been said that when love follows the order of being, there is calm, quiet, joy. When it moves away, there is tumult, disquiet, passion. And one can add, artifice, will, and falsehood."

For Belli, the intellectual mission is the communication of the incommunicable, beginning with a center of values already destroyed by the historic avant-garde—spiritualism again, as expressed in the single issue of *Valori Primordiali*, the publication directed by Ciliberti and founded with Ghiron, Lingeri and Terragni. But Terragni the publicist is at odds with Terragni the architect. That which for Carlo Belli is *artifice, will, and falsehood* is the subject of Terragni's real problem: the narrow relationship, the indissoluble knot that unites truth to falsehood; or better, the annulment of the distance between those two metaphysical entities.

Terragni's "signs" are much more hopeless than those of Mario Soldati's paintings or Fausto Melotti's sculptures: in them no spiritualism speaks, no nostalgia for lost "centers." This is the disenchantment of one who knows the "desert" in which he is as his homeland, where any movement is the result of arbitrary will, a will to be exposed as such. It is useless to seek other meanings in Terragni's architecture. The effect of that will of form, demonstrated without any reasons to justify it, is already too vivid.

*This text was originally written as an introduction to the book Giuseppe Terragni by Peter Eisenman to be published by the MIT Press in 1979. It is published here in a modified version with the kind permission of Roger Conover of the MIT Press.*

1. Massimo Bontempelli, "Justification," *900: Cahiers d'Italie et d'Europe* (Florence: La Voce Editions, 1926).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

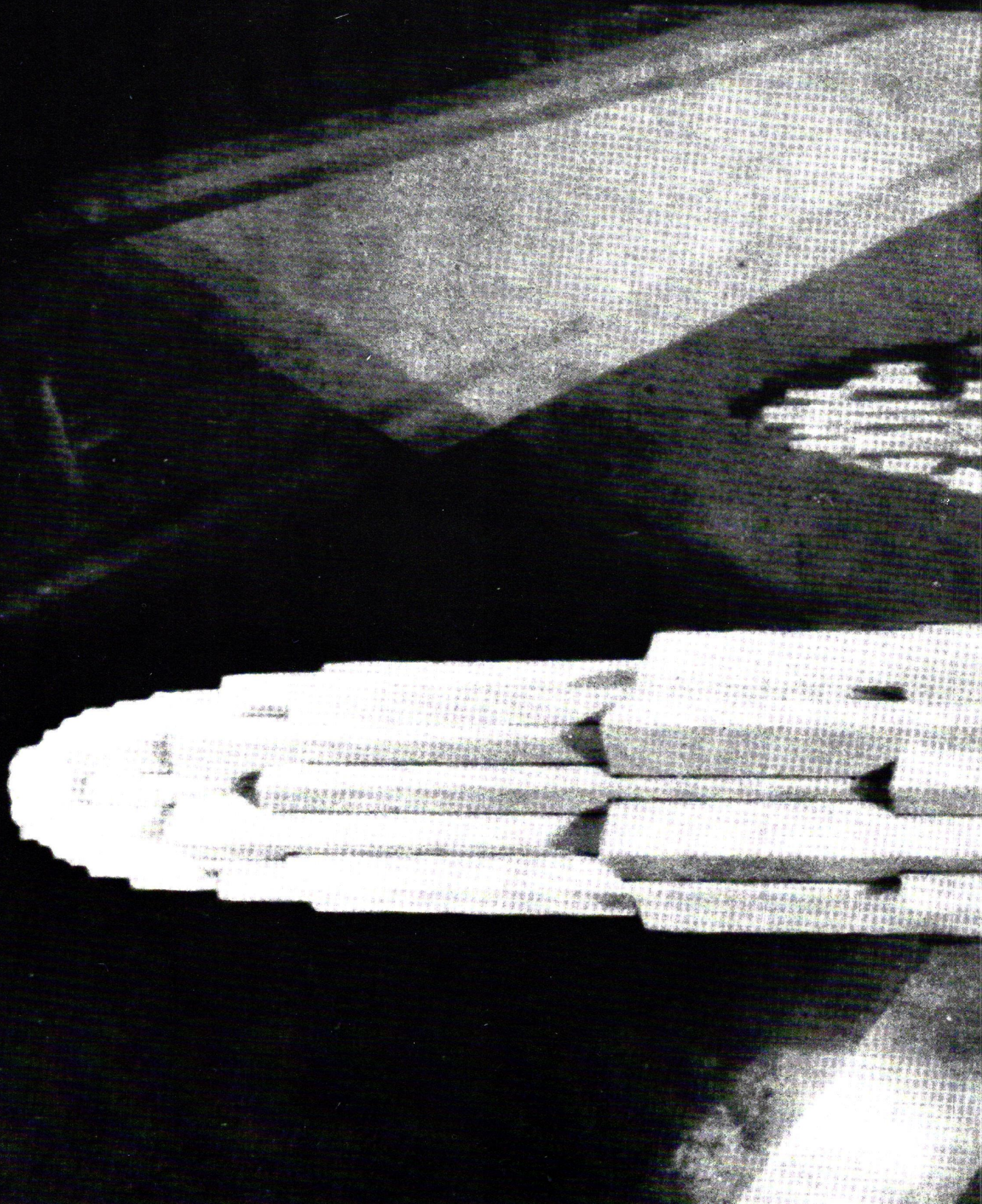
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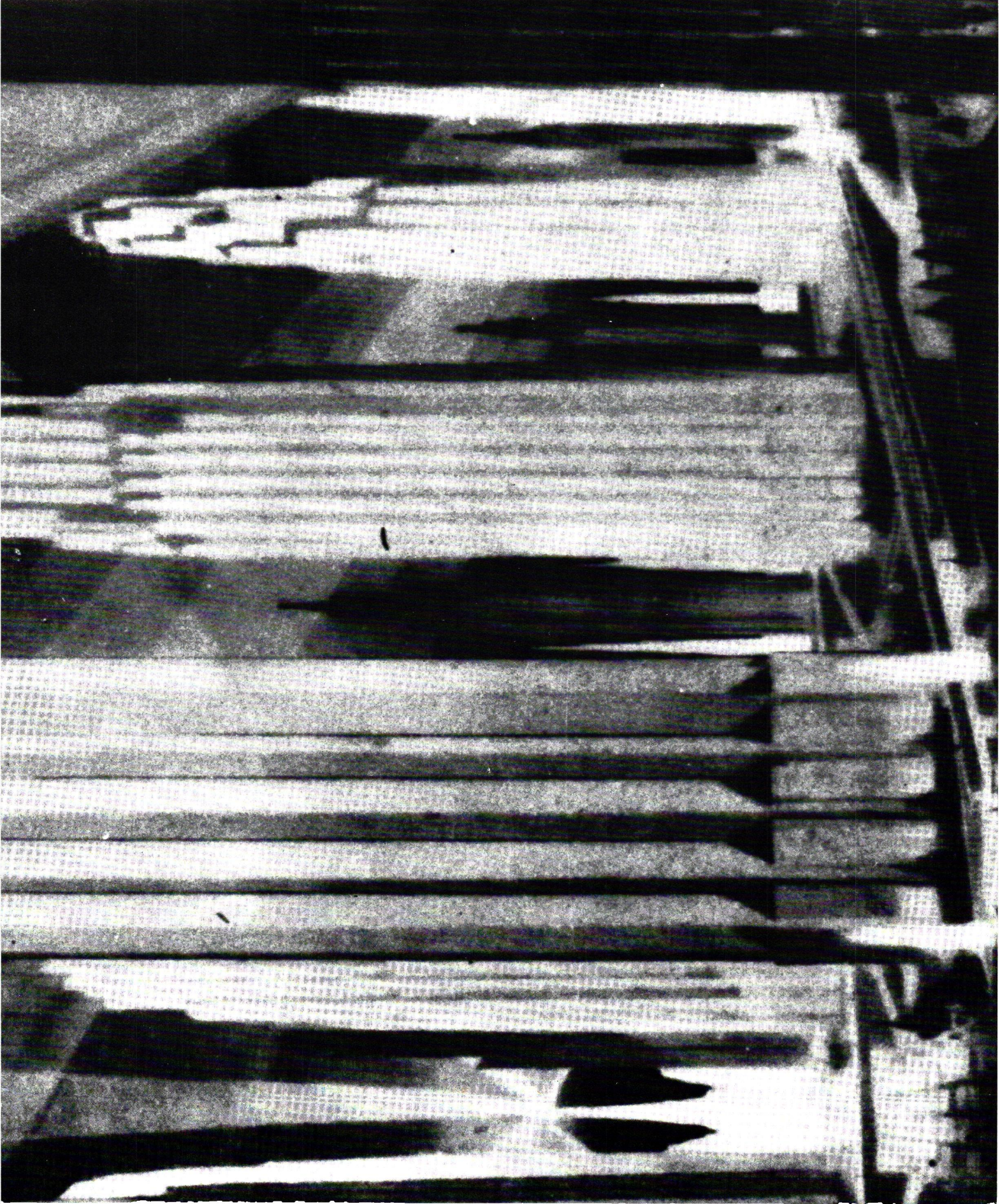
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- 5, 7, 23 Reprinted from Enrico Mantero, *Giuseppe Terragni e la città del razionalismo italiano* (Rome: Dedalo, 1969).
- 28 Courtesy Peter Eisenman. Redrawn by Raleigh Perkins.
- 29 Reprinted from *La Casa 6* (Rome: Edizioni de Luca, n.d.).
- 30, 33 Reprinted from *Il Razionalismo e l'architettura in Italia durante il fascismo*, Silvia Danesi and Luciano Patetta, eds. (Venice: Edizioni "La Biennale di Venezia," 1976).
- 31 Reprinted from *Lotus*, 16, Sept., 1977.
- 32 Reprinted from Mario de Micheli, *Le avanguardie artistiche del novecento* (Milan: Feltrinelli Economica, 1977).
- 37, 38 Reprinted from *Adolf Loos*, Ludwig Münz and Gustav Künstler, eds. (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1966).
- 49-52 Reprinted from Paolo Fossati, *L'immagine sospesa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971).

Theory

Architectural Anagrams: The Symbolic Performance of Skyscrapers

Diana Agrest





1 (frontispiece) *Verticals on Wide Avenues*. Drawing by Hugh Ferriss, 1929.

2 *Havermeyer Building, New York City*. George P. Post, architect, 1891–1892. Tripartite type.

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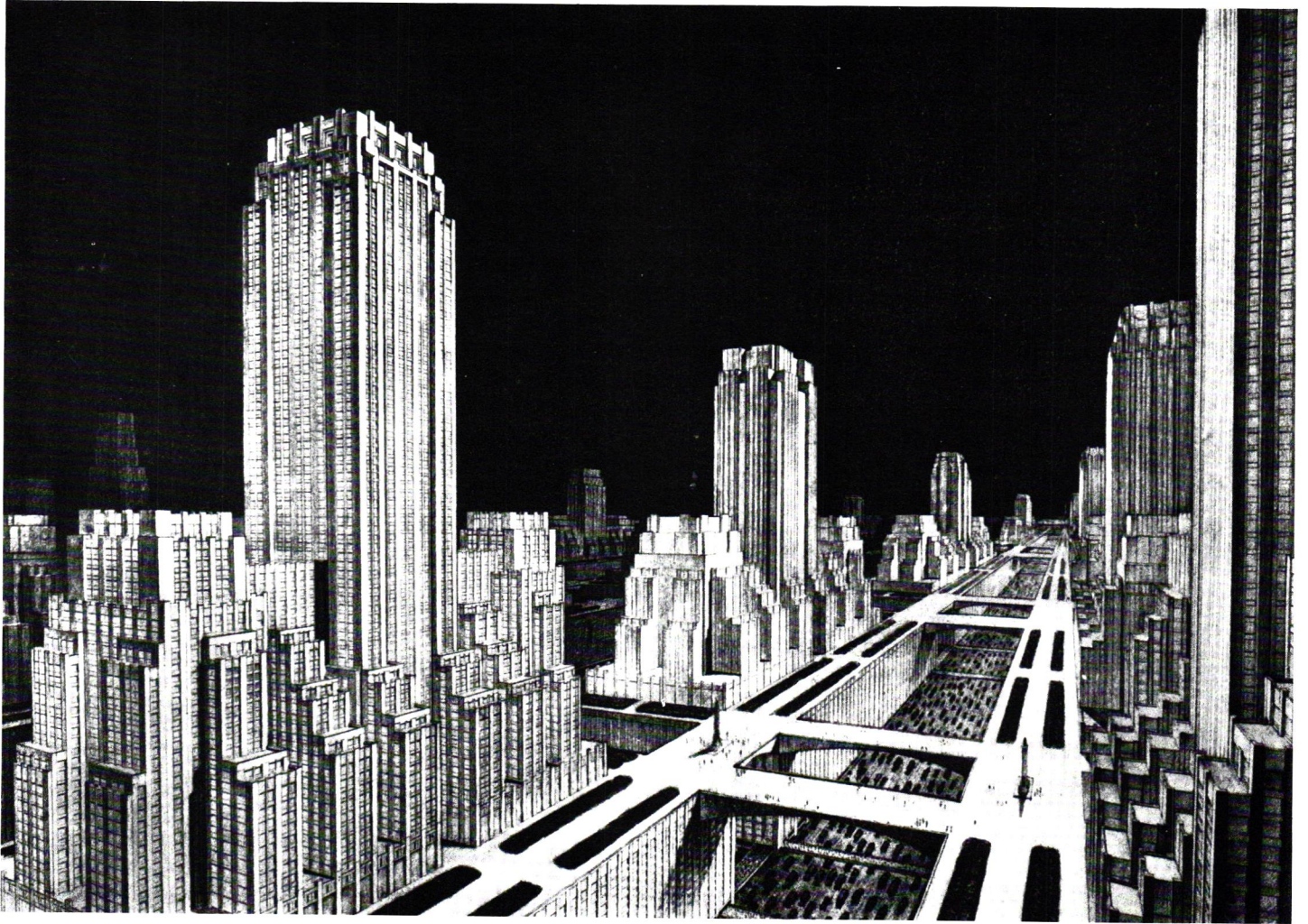
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This article analyzes the skyscraper with regard to the logic of its signifying functioning, an analysis which allows us not only to discuss issues that touch on the crisis of meaning in architecture but also to identify certain mechanisms of the production of meaning hitherto ignored by architectural criticism.

An adequate definition of the skyscraper—both as a type and as an object of study—is well established among historians and critics of architecture. Numerous histories and critical appraisals have focused on the problem of determining those characteristics of the skyscraper which would enable the first building of that type to be identified.<sup>1</sup> While structural technique and the elevator were initially decisive in determining the original appearance of the type, these were soon overwhelmed by the factor of height. These attributes of technique, elevator, and scale do not, however, account for an equally critical aspect of the skyscraper's development, namely the problem of meaning.

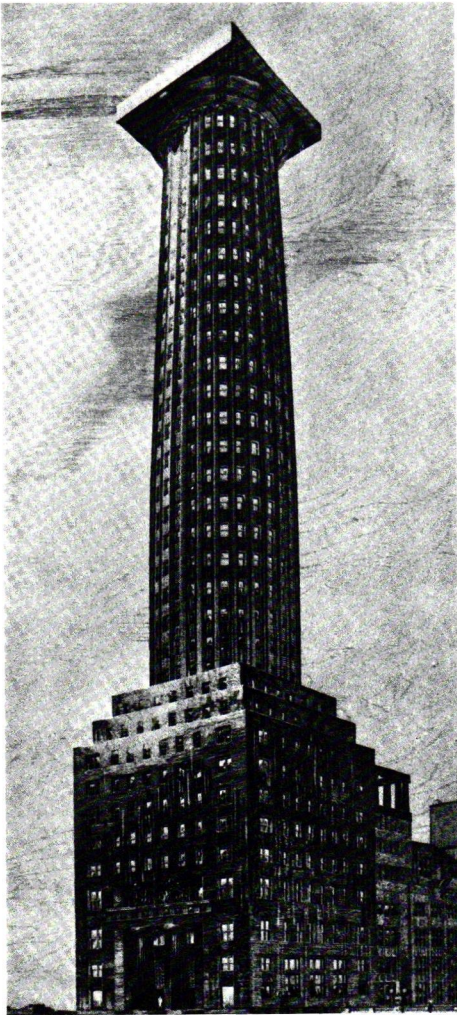
In his book *The History of Skyscrapers*, Francisco Mujica coined the term “Neo-American” architecture and argued that the Mayan pyramid, whose form was echoed in the setback building profile of the 1920's, could be seen as the first skyscraper (fig. 3). While Herbert Croly wrote about the scenographic nature of the skyscraper, Montgomery Schuyler proposed that the determining criteria for a new history of the skyscraper should be formal or typological rather than technical, functional, or economic in nature. Schuyler's proposition was followed by that of W. Weisman, whose typological study of the history of the skyscraper recognized seven phases, from the first or pre-skyscraper to the most recent architectural expression. Broadly speaking, Weisman's phases were established as follows: phase 1. pre-skyscraper (1849–1870); phase 2. initial evolution (1858–1870); phase 3. transition from mansard to flat roof (after 1878); phase 4. evolution of the tripartite composition (after 1880); phase 5. evolution of the tower (1888–1895); phase 6. the setback block (after 1916); and phase 7. evolution of the superblock (after 1930).<sup>2</sup>

Starting with the tripartite form posited by Weisman as being characteristic of phase 4, we will examine the trans-

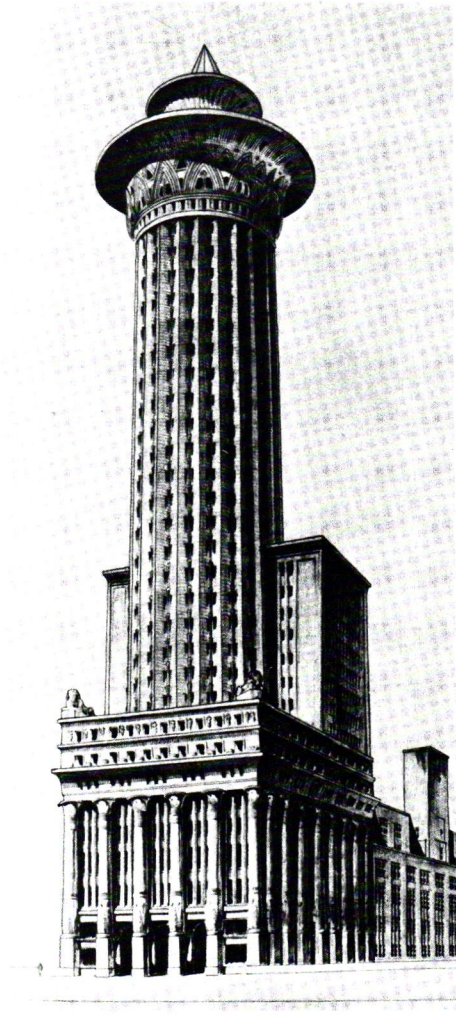


*3 The City of the Future: Hundred  
Story City in Neo-American Style.  
Francisco Mujica, architect, 1930.*

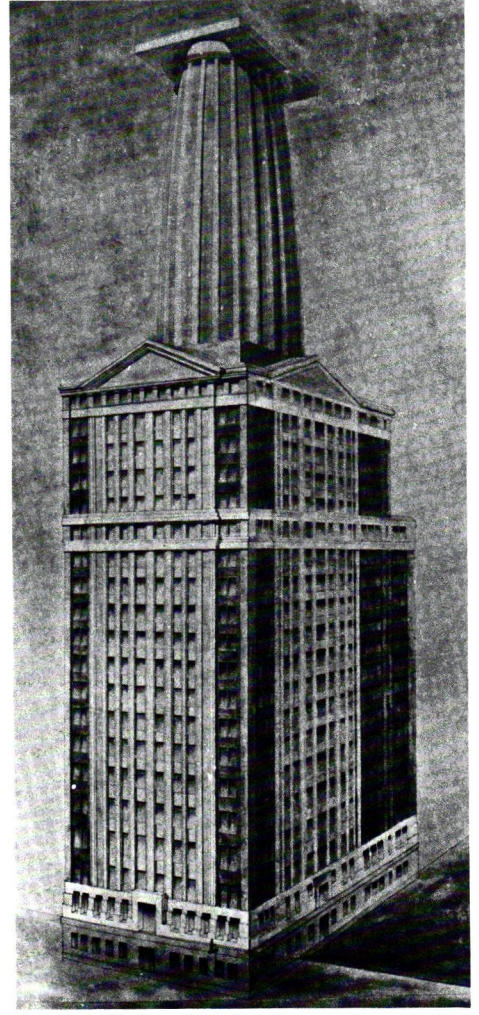




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4 *The Chicago Tribune Competition, 1924. Project by Adolf Loos.*

5 *Project by Paul Gerhard.*

6 *Project by Matthew Freeman.*

7 *Project by Erich Patelski.*

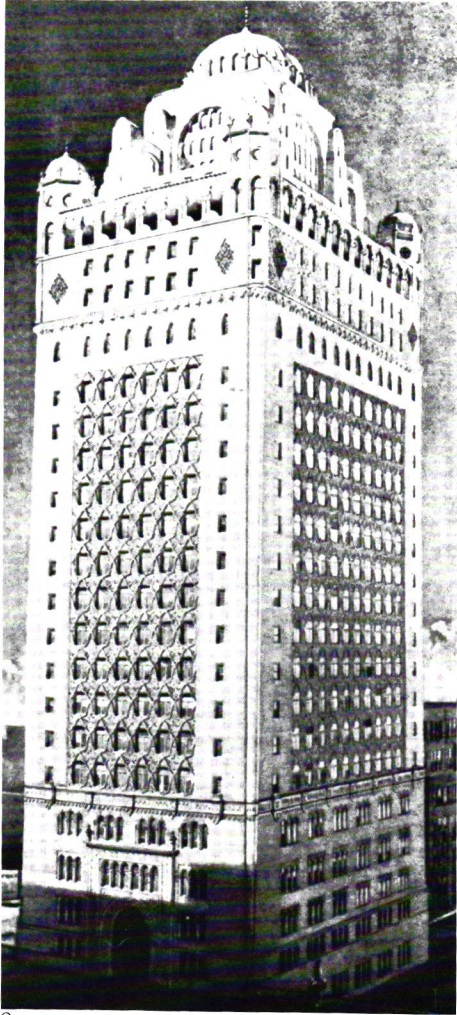
position of meaning that occurs as the type evolves from phase 5 to phase 7. In the following analysis of the structure of meaning in skyscraper form, we shall restrict ourselves solely to the following three aspects: 1) the problem of eclecticism, i.e., the recourse to diverse styles or modes such as the Gothic, Beaux-Arts, etc.; 2) the skyscraper's characteristic tripartite structure: base, shaft, and capital or crest; and 3) the relationship between the various parts of this "column."

The problem of eclecticism takes us back to a dominant feature of the skyscraper's origin; that is, its double signifying aspect, which manifests itself first as being relative to architecture and to architectural codes, and second as being related to other elements in the city. Both of these relationships, participating in a different kind of signifying functioning, are condensed and unified in the single architectural object. This phenomenon allows one to think about the function of meaning in architecture as a signifying super-position rather than a simple, singular meaning.

Although the tripartite-columnar character of the skyscraper was characterized as only an intermediate stage in the history of its evolution, it is a type of configuration that still prevails either in a latent or manifest form in high-rise building types of a later date (fig. 2). The tripartite analogy to the column, the architectural signifier *par excellence*,<sup>3</sup> appears in different forms in every architectural period. Buildings as columns were already being projected in the Enlightenment in, for example, the column house of the Desert de Retz near Marly by de Monville, where the building, a column in ruins, is both column and ruin. In the case of the skyscraper, its columnar form evokes a non-existent historical past and prefigures a city in ruins, which, like the ruins of the Roman Forum, is to be transformed into a city of columns, or rather megacolumns in this particular case.

The Chicago Tribune competition (figs. 4-7)<sup>4</sup> demonstrates this kind of primary myth in the various "column" entries (the most well-known being that of Adolf Loos, which posits itself as a direct and ironic symbolization of the building as column, see fig. 4). The functional structural element raised



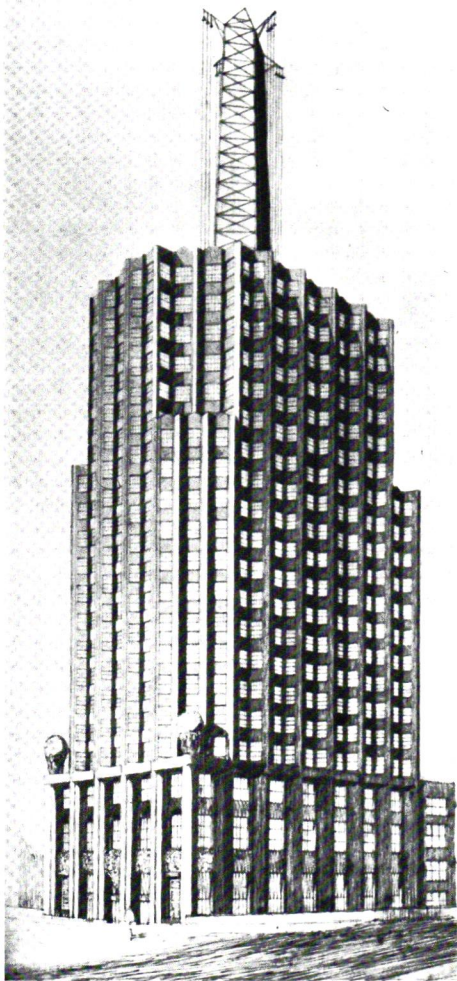


in this way to a symbolic position indicates the inevitable signifying existence of the element “column” itself, as well as the apparent contradiction between the symbolism and the technique. But what is it that the skyscraper as column supports? In Egyptian temples, the columns held up a painted sky ceiling.<sup>5</sup> This precise metaphor is repeated in one of the projects for the Chicago Tribune: P. Gerhard’s building in the form of an Egyptian column (see fig. 5) reminds us that skyscrapers are in effect columns supporting the sky.

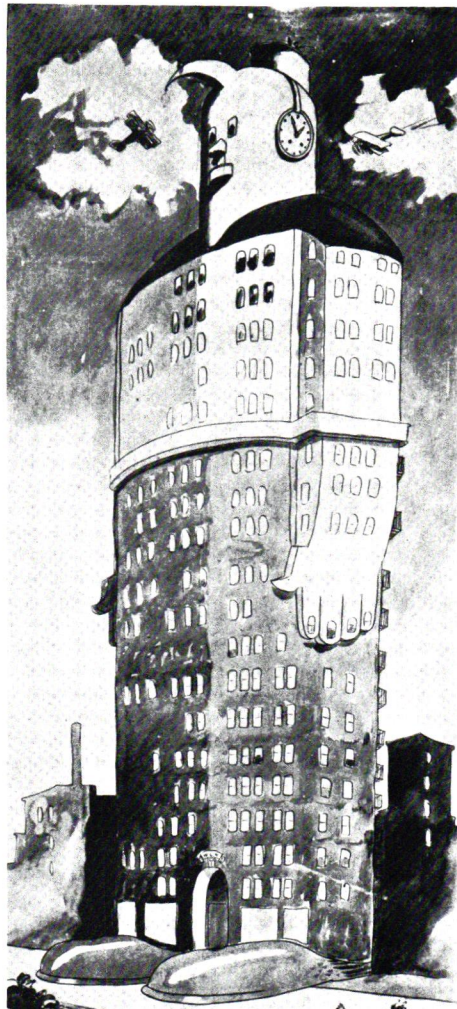
The development of each part of the column—base, shaft, and capital—accounts for this signifying transformation in the skyscraper, the base/capital-crest relationship returning us to the problem of architecture as a metalanguage. The upper terminal of the skyscraper, often designed as an exemplar of an individual building in itself, makes a commentary on the architecture absent in the base, thereby developing a parallel discourse which speaks about the fundamental contradiction of all architecture, namely, form versus function or art versus technique.

#### *Eclecticism*

Gothic, Roman, and Beaux-Arts styles serve as metaphors linking the new to the old and imposing something new by means of the familiar. These institutionalized forms make a certain acceptance possible, just as the trips to the moon in early science fiction films were filtered through the ideology of the period in order to transform fiction into verisimilitude. Even though the skyscraper is an achievable reality in technological terms, it is only acceptable if as a metaphor it has the capacity to represent at one and the same time past values (through the architectural styles) and the prevailing values of the time (progress). This displacement between technical development and the formal typology adopted, or the different architectural modes or styles, arises out of a more fundamental displacement between the economic and ideological levels which develop in different times and thus have no simple one to one correspondence. The inertia of formal ideology relative to the other levels is made manifest by the fact that while structural technique keeps pace with “technological utopia,” stylistic ideology remains rooted in some earlier period. This

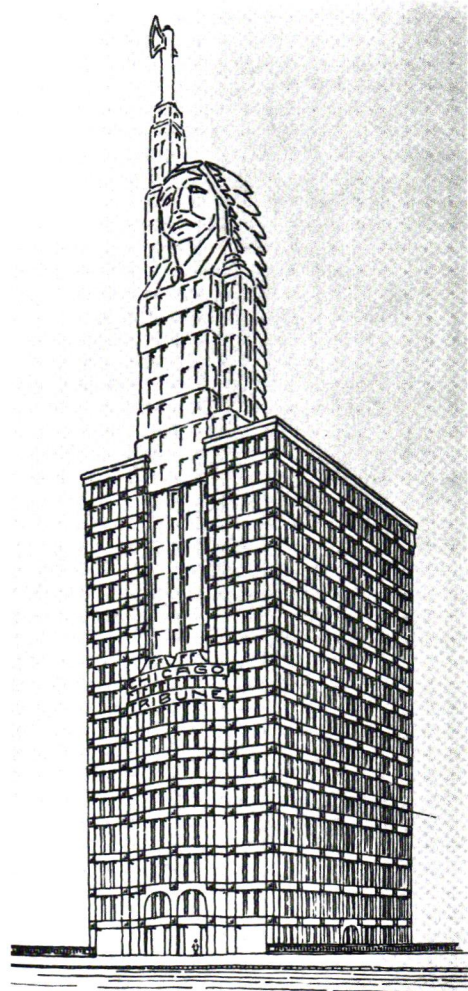


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8 The Chicago Tribune Competition,  
1924. Project by I. N. Phelps Stokes.

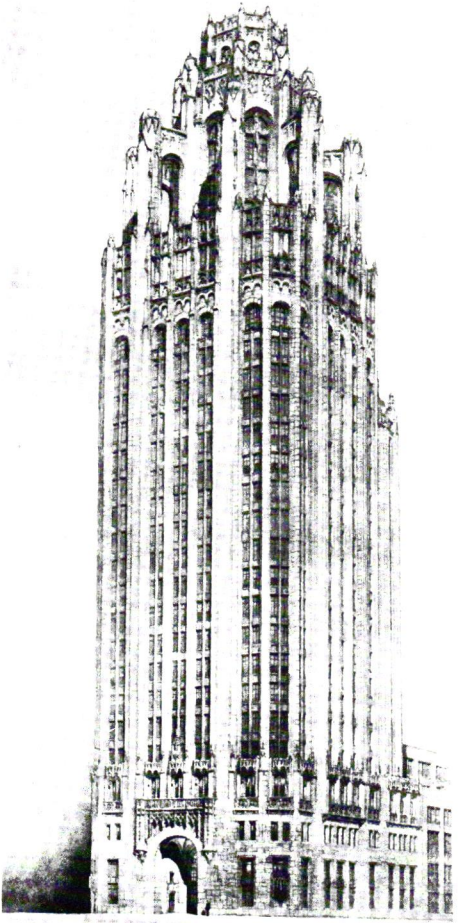


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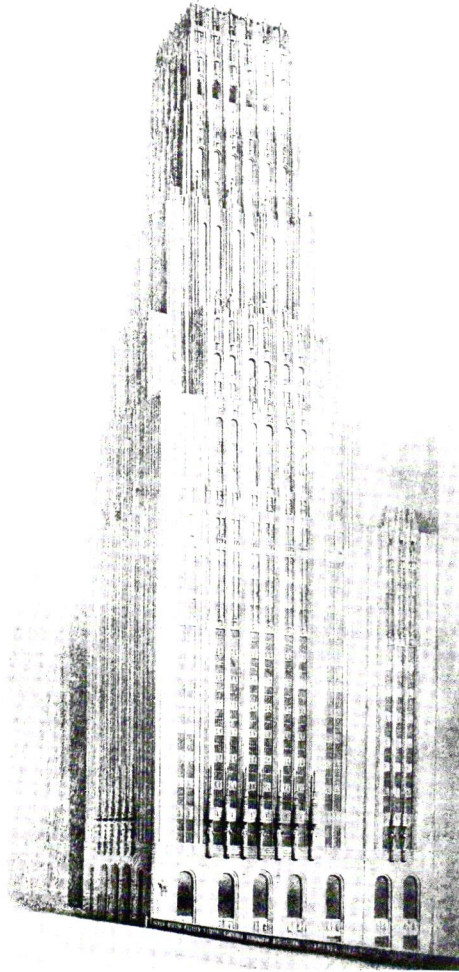
9 Project by Lossow and Kühne.  
10 Cartoon project by Frank King.  
11 Project by Heinrich Mossdorf.



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12 Chicago Tribune Competition,  
1924. Winning project by Raymond  
Hood.

13 Project by Eliel Saarinen, 2nd  
prize.

implies that economic considerations are incapable of directly determining the formal aspect.

The consequent separation of the skyscraper into two aspects—the structural and the symbolic—as represented by the facade treatment implies not only a certain reduction in formal emphasis to allow for the development of technique,<sup>6</sup> but furthermore stresses the signifying independence, the mask-like character, inherent in all facades and the scenographic nature of the architectural object.

From the outset, the skyscraper was conceived as a symbolic object in its totality—irrespective of the particular symbolism associated with its stylistic characteristics. The conventionality of the styles, which became manifest with eclecticism, was symptomatic not so much of a de-ideologization of architecture but rather of its re-ideologization.

Within the entire group of entries for the Chicago Tribune competition we can identify two fundamental operations that demonstrate this process, operations that relate to style and established codes (figs. 8–14). On the one hand, a metalinguistic operation appears in a number of the competition entries as a critical device which undermines the received tradition of architecture. On the other hand, a connotative operation is present in other projects as a mechanism for absorption and assimilation, which reinforces the established principles or codes of architecture. Thus, while some of the entries in the contest are metalinguistically ironic and sometimes cynical in attitude or effect, the winning entry by Howells and Hood, like its predecessor, the Woolworth Building by Cass Gilbert, is typically connotative of the Gothic now endowed with associations of splendor and wealth. This “Neo-Gothic” style is a manner which allowed for the evolutionary development of the present-day skyscraper, and indicates the struggle of language with its connotative possibilities against the explosive metalinguistic potential of eclecticism. Eclecticism thus provides the means for an ideological transformation of architecture in order to create a new vocabulary, a new language necessary for the consolidation of a new ideology.

The program for the Chicago Tribune competition emphasized the formal and visual over the technological aspect, in this way evidently searching to formulate a new typology, a quest which was to a certain extent successful.

The skyscraper plays an important role not only in terms of technological development and as a new manifestation of the ideology of free enterprise, competition, and consumption (that is, as a typology which is pertinent to that global ideology) but also in relationship to architectural ideology itself, that is, in relation to the *production* of meaning in architecture.

Critics<sup>7</sup> have emphasized the pragmatic nature of eclecticism in American architecture, that is, the application of styles independent of their intrinsic meaning (if such existed) or of the function of the building as a product of individual initiative in the capitalist city. Such an application of styles may also represent a consciousness that the apparent isolation in which each building is conceived is in reality fictitious. If eclecticism, developed as a more or less coherent style in the nineteenth century, originally had the critical role of demonstrating the arbitrariness of the relation between form and meaning, then the pragmatic eclecticism of the twentieth century skyscraper fulfills a dual role. On the one hand, in relation to the building itself, it shows the non-intrinsic or arbitrary character of meaning; on the other hand, in relation to the building in the city, it demonstrates that meaning is a relation of value—as physical and conceptual contiguity—which arises when architecture is considered as an urban element and not as a single monument. This double role might seem paradoxical insofar as each skyscraper *is* treated by itself as a monument. The monumentality of the skyscraper, however, does not reside in the building itself, but rather in the process by which symbolic interrelationships are established between buildings and between these buildings and urban places. This totality, which is eclectic, does no more than reflect what architecture, with its emphasis on unity and its denial of context, tends to repress. The skyscraper reveals the necessarily eclectic nature of semi-planned urban growth and provides an explicit typology which by its nature allows for a complex combinatory and transformational game. The

36 Chicago Tribune competition, at the same time as it manifests this double effect of meaning in relation to the building and to the urban totality, reveals the symbolic aspect to be different from the stylistic one.

Manhattan itself may be seen as the combination of several typologies that intersect with each other in their original development and in their later evolution as fragments of a non-existent language. Manhattan functions as an explosion of meaning and design which puts architecture into crisis. Skyscrapers are scattered fragments of that explosion, their diffusion and their differing trajectories departing from a common origin. Explosion, puzzle, anagram—each of these metaphors makes us think of both fragmentation and unity since any recomposition implies a high degree of randomness. Each stage in the typological development of the skyscraper reverberates spatially in the urban whole. The crests as signifying elements—the small buildings, the setback, and the telescopic pinnacle—appear with variations in scale and proportion in nearly all buildings, not only in skyscrapers. The traditional styles persist even when new ones appear. The inertia of eclecticism has thus allowed Manhattan to become at record pace a city with a much longer history than that which it truly possesses—a miracle of instant history! But of course such instant history cannot be thought of in the same manner as the history of architecture has traditionally been understood, insofar as the superimposition of the diachronic (or temporal) and the synchronic (or instant) axes create a specific kind of signifying functioning. This juxtaposition of different meanings, operating simultaneously in a non-linear fashion, makes of the skyscraper a signifier within a discourse which is anagrammatic in both the literal and poetic sense.<sup>8</sup>

Skyscrapers manifest a process of symbolization that is almost independent of the architect himself; this process extends beyond the analysis of the building as a sign, beyond what is communicated by the depth of its meaning or content, and makes accessible the structures that account for the possible conditions of its symbolic functioning. The skyscraper is an empty signifier that can assume and attract different meanings.

### *The Tripartite Structure*

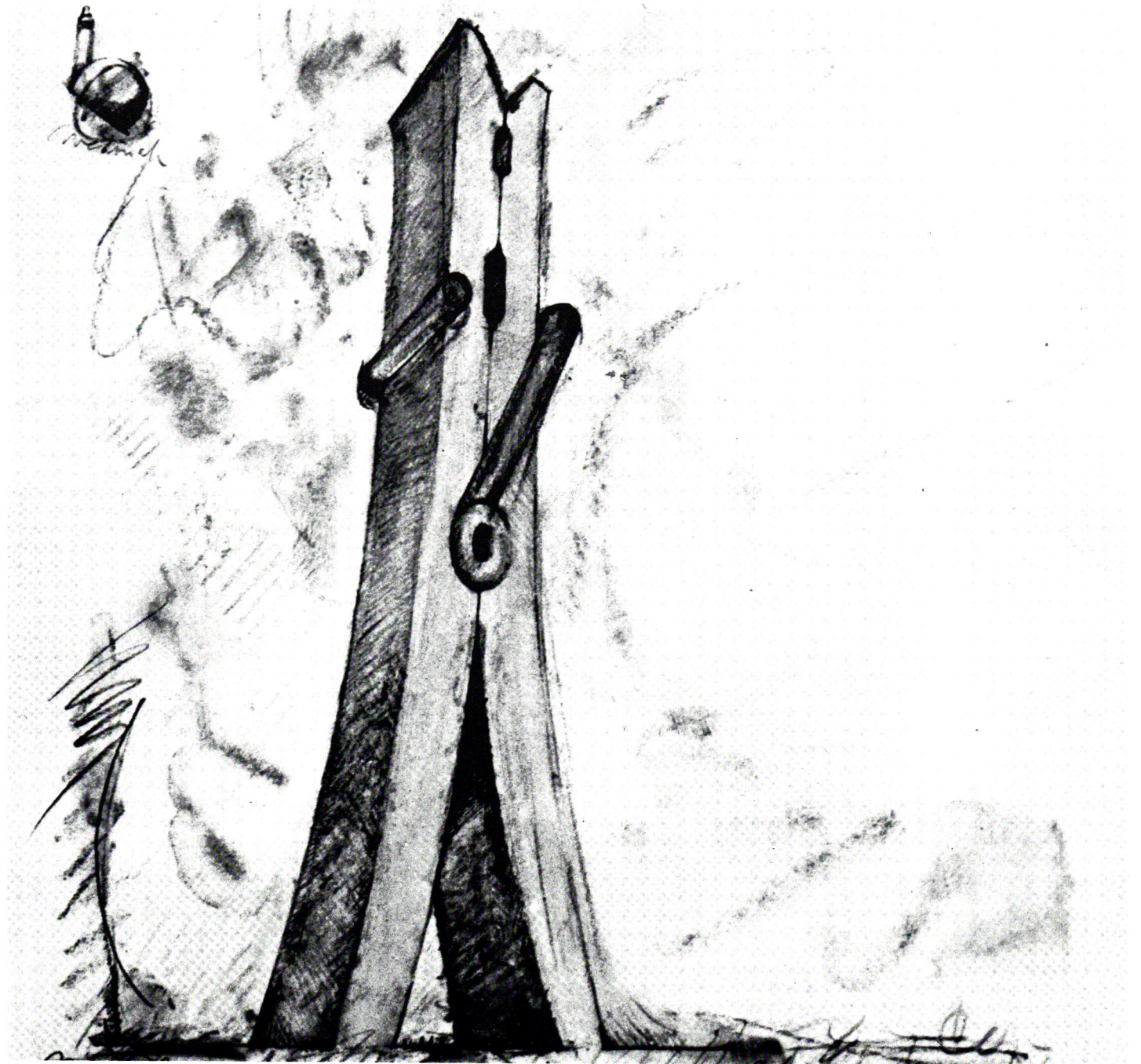
The analysis of the skyscraper as a tripartite structure informs its syntactic and semantic transformation in relation to the signifying functioning described above. The three elements of the column—the analogical origin of the skyscraper's form—are always present and undergo successive modification as a consequence of their interrelationship. The three phases of the skyscraper's evolution which according to Weisman follow the tripartite phase are marked by the development of specific relations existing between base and capital or between base and shaft—and the later evolution of both “base” and “capital” into buildings in their own right.<sup>9</sup>

### *Crests*

In the first decade of this century, the body of the skyscraper became transformed into a base for the crest. The body was increasingly regularized or simplified while the crest was increasingly articulated and assumed a symbolic dimension denoting the exchange value of the building. These crests with their scenic and panoramic nature were both a public and publicity element operating at the scale of the whole city. There was no limit set for the height of the skyscraper according to the zoning regulations; yet this question of height was to be a concern of architects for a long time. How should one mark such a limit symbolically? Was the upper transition equal to a completion or something entirely different? This relationship was expressed by Montgomery Schuyler in “The Towers of Manhattan”: “the practical requirements in every case issue, as to the body of the building, in an almost identical result, that is to say, a parallelepiped with the minimum of supports or ‘solids’ and the maximum of ‘voids’ or windows. It is only in the skyline, in the upper termination that he [the architect] has as an artist a real chance.” This is exemplified in a photograph in which architect and critic Alfred Bossom appears to be trying out alternative crests for the body of a skyscraper which he has already designed (fig. 15).<sup>10</sup>

In this type of selection, a play of architectonic codes can be seen to occur independently from the rest of the building, producing a parallel architecture in which each termination is a building in itself executed in a self-contained

14 Chicago Tribune Competition,  
1924. Late submission by Claes  
Oldenburg, 1965.







15

15 Alfred Bossom choosing a crest for the top of a skyscraper which has already been designed, 1934.

16 *The Chicago Tribune Competition, 1924. Project by Franklin James Hunt.*

17 *Project by Huestis and Huestis.*

18 *Project by Milnar Chapman Markes.*

19 *Project by Garber and Woodward.*

20 *Project by J. D. Leland & Co.*

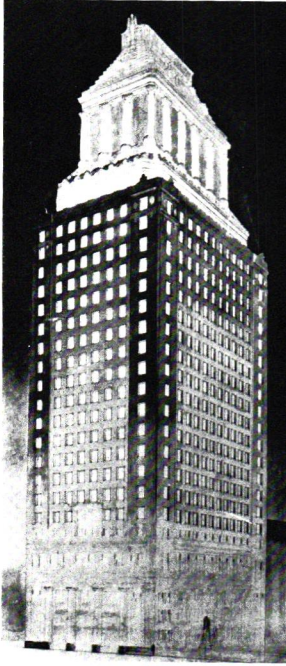
21 *Project by Benjamin Wistar Morris.*

22 *Project by Frank Fort.*

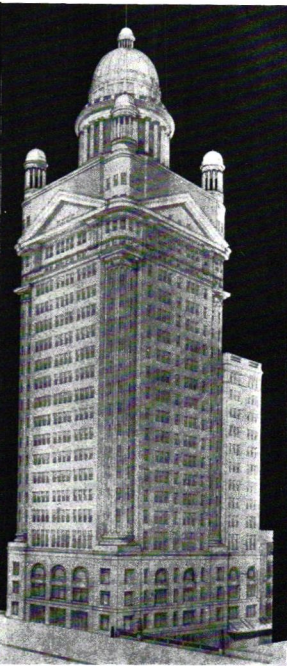
style. These parallel architectures set up a game in which the signifiers are liberated, united, opposed, repeated, and quoted, generating a metalinguistic discourse, which superimposes an invisible net on that of the city—marked by the grid of the streets to which the base relates. On first examination this relationship between the shaft or body and the crest or capital might be interpreted simplistically as a manifestation of a contradiction in which the *technical* aspect of the body may be regarded as being opposed to the *symbolic* aspect of the crest, the two apparently irreconcilable aspects tending, according to a functional hypothesis, to negate each other to such degree as to make the symbolic disappear. If the skyscraper is analyzed in its urban context, however, such a direct opposition dissolves.

The relationships between buildings are complex insofar as they are established not only in terms of entire buildings or of the building's body to its crest, but also in terms of relations between crest and crest, and between the body of one building to the crest of another, etc. The Chicago Tribune competition demonstrates clearly the importance of the crest in the imagery of the skyscraper, to such an extent that in many cases the crest becomes the building itself (figs. 16–22). The transformations by which the crest cedes its symbolic role first to the entire building and then to the base can be exemplified by three instances: the “spires” of the St. Mark's and Price towers by Frank Lloyd Wright; Hugh Ferriss's setback skyscraper where the whole building becomes a crest; and finally the case where the body or shaft becomes the whole building, thereby eliminating the symbolic crest entirely. The last case is really a mutation of the first, in which the building as crest is transformed into a base thereby foreclosing one transformation and opening the next.

The law that established the need for the setback—a requirement which Le Corbusier rightly regarded as romantic—unconsciously paid homage to one of the most characteristic aspects of the skyscraper, namely its upward transition toward a point of culmination (fig. 23). This characteristic can be observed beginning with the tripartite phase and continuing through all its successive manifestations. The Chrysler Building, unequalled in its elaboration



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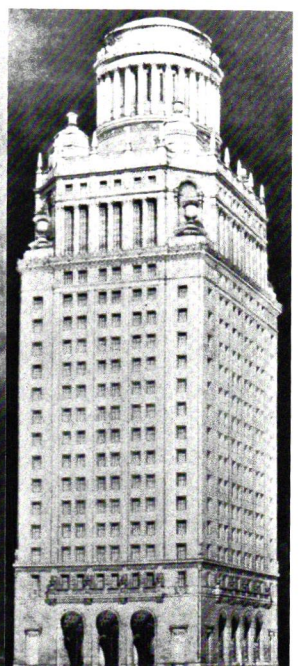
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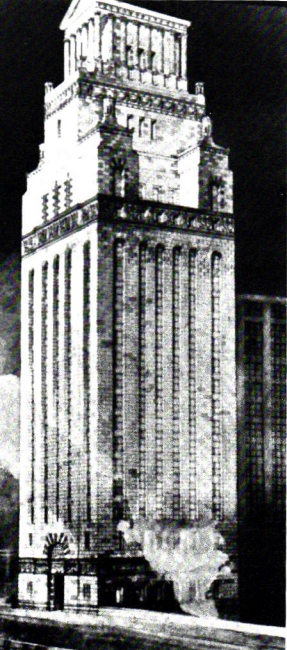
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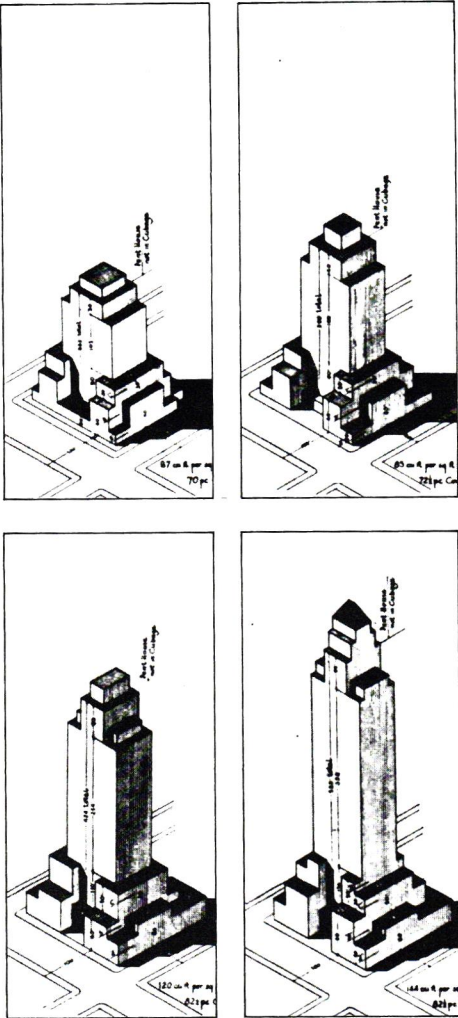
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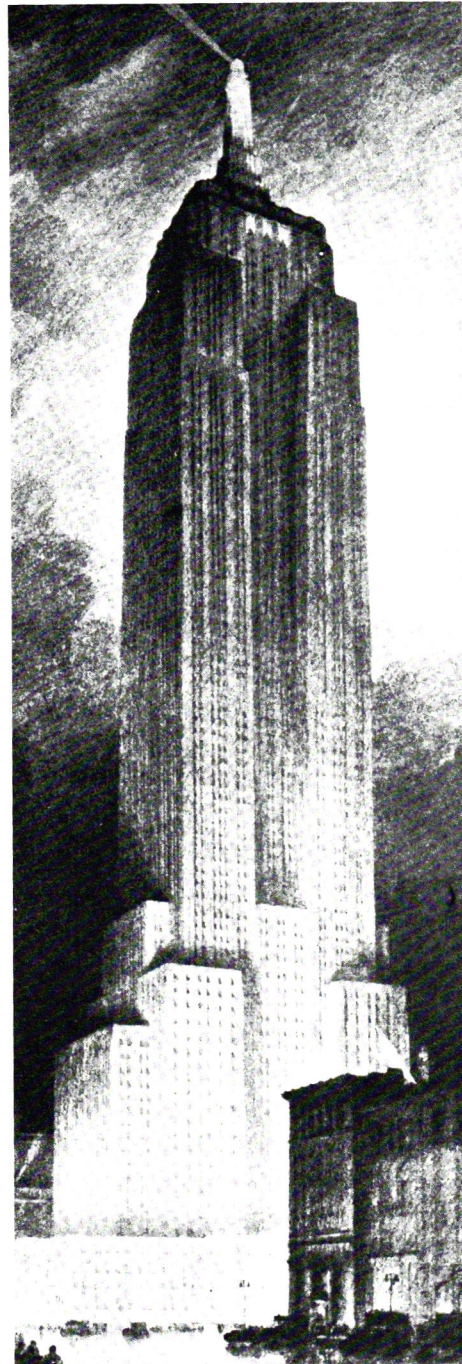
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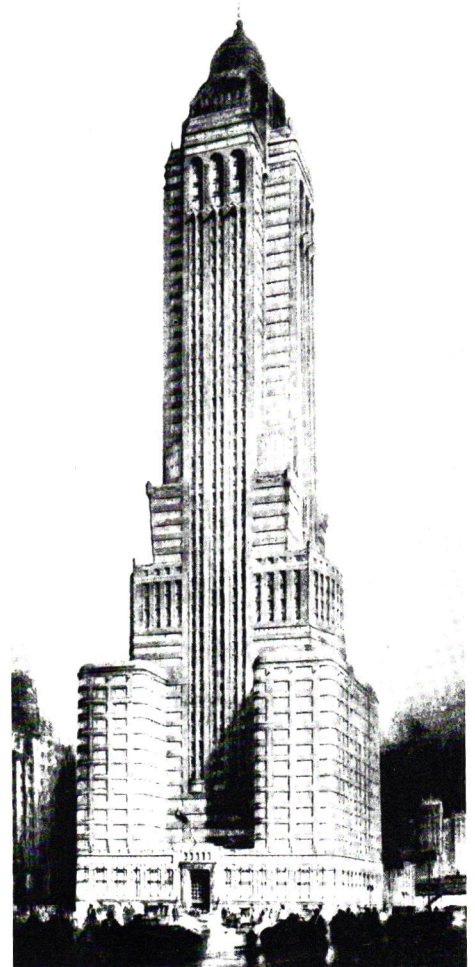
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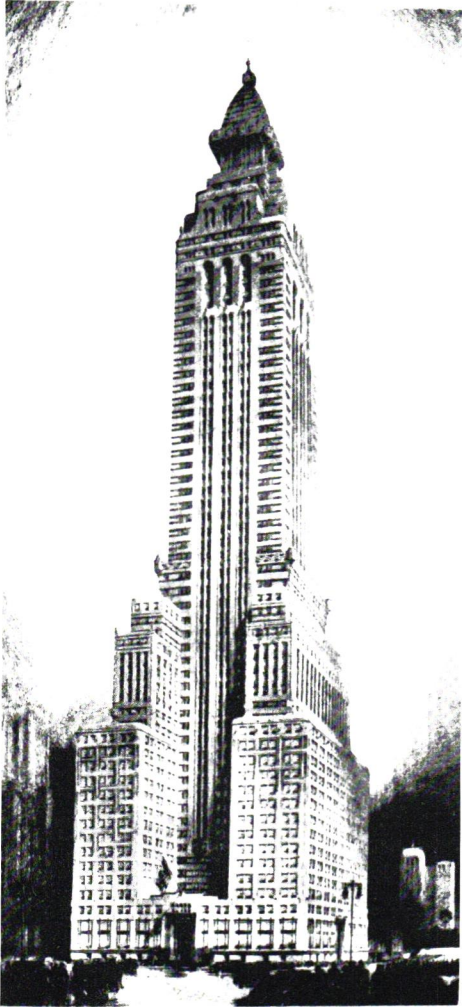


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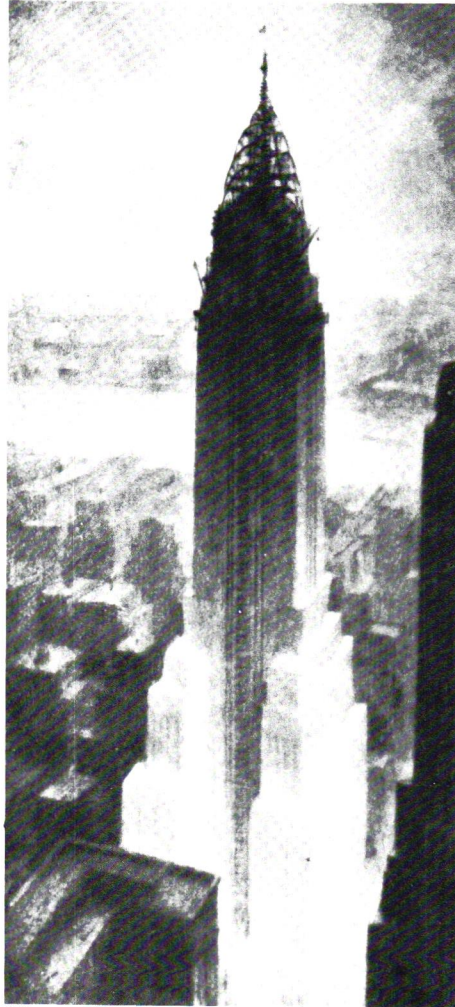
23 "Setback" building regulations, 1916.

24 Empire State Building. Drawing by Hugh Ferriss, 1929.

25 Chrysler Building, first scheme. William Van Alen, architect, 1927.

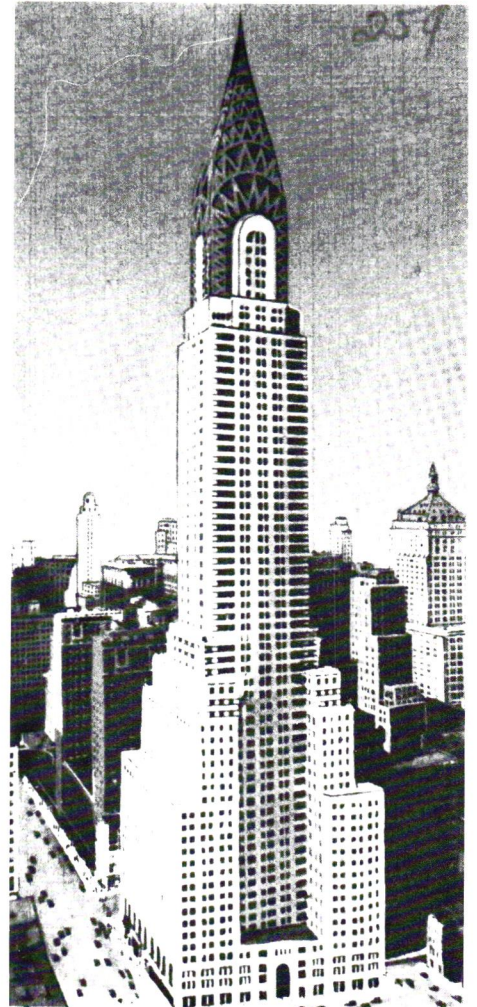


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26 Second scheme, sixty-seven stories.



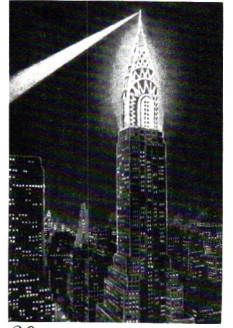
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27 Chrysler Building under construction. Drawing by Hugh Ferriss, 1929.

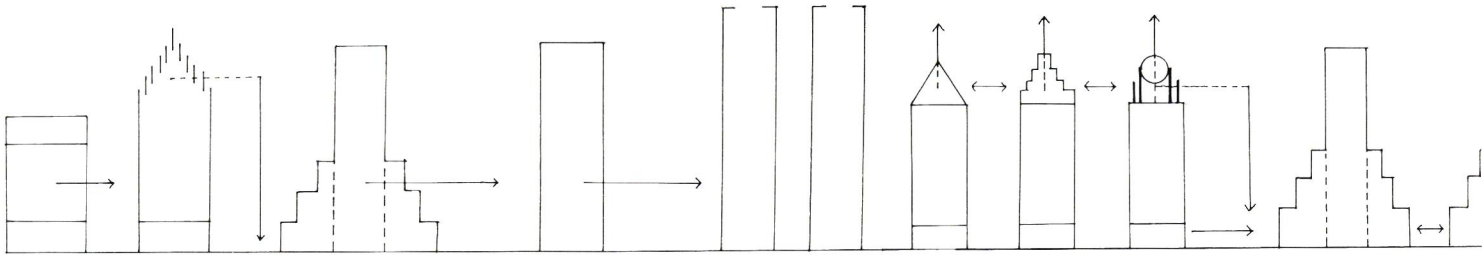


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28, 29 Chrysler Building, as built. William Van Alen, architect, 1929.



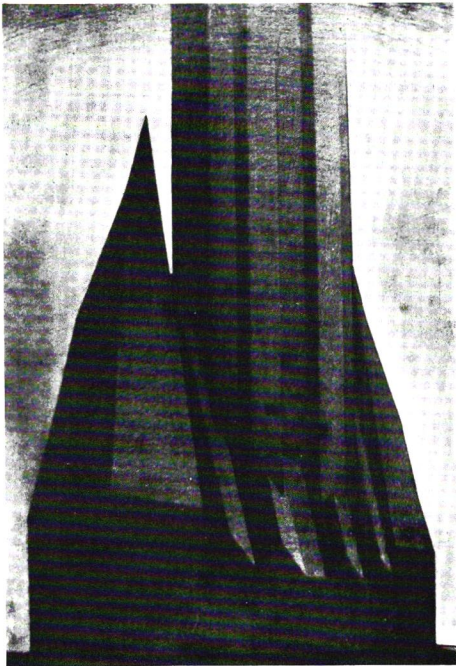
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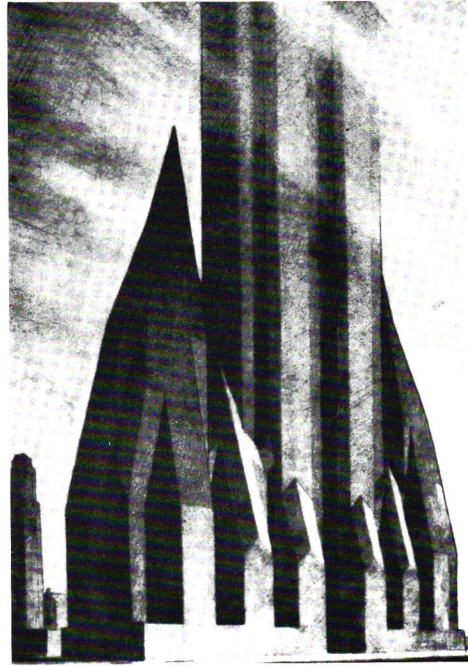
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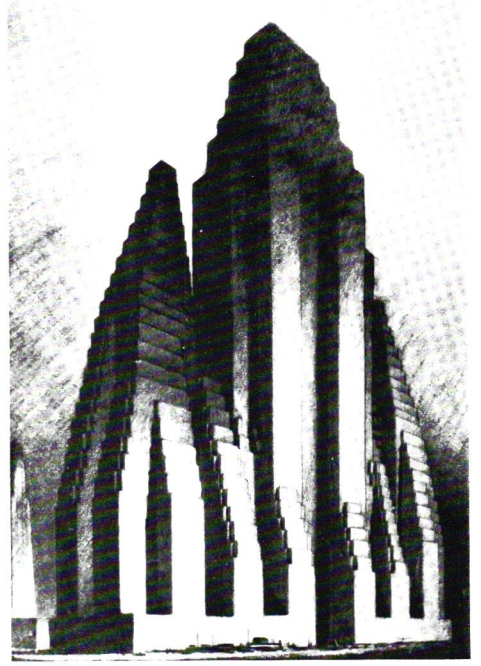
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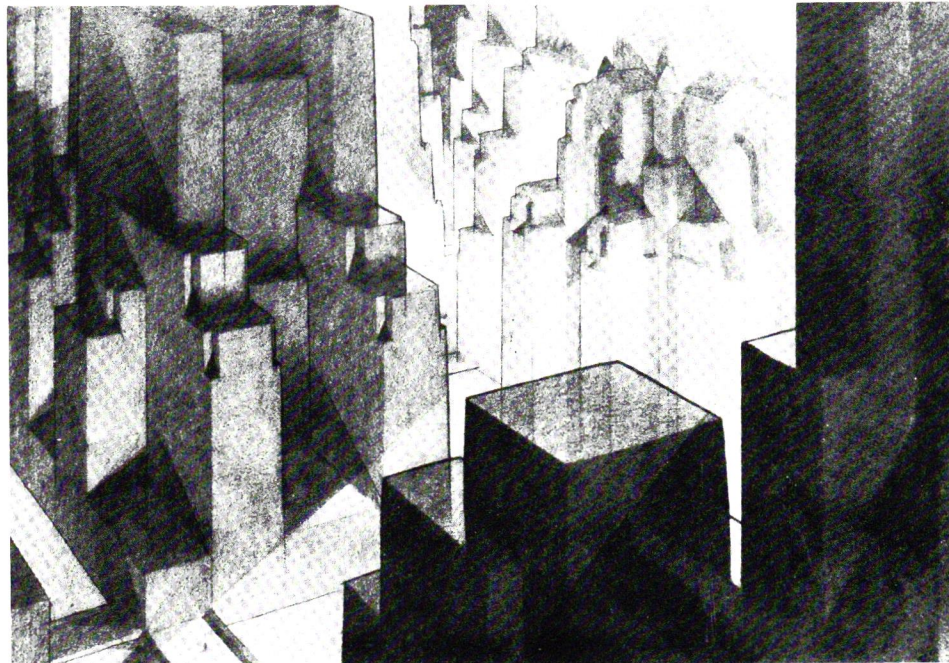
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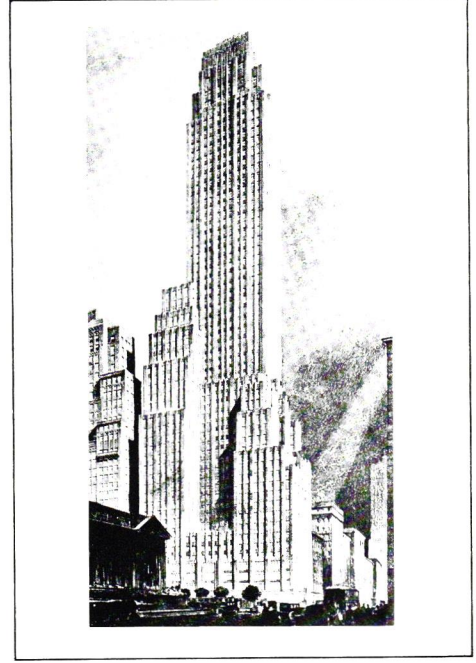
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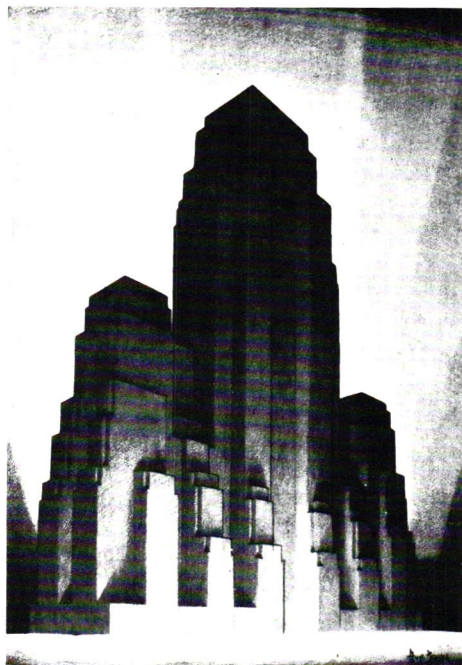
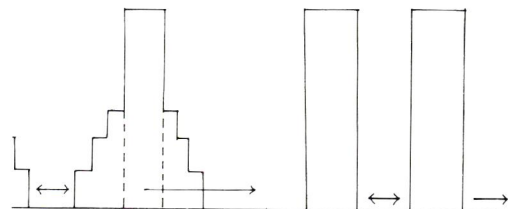
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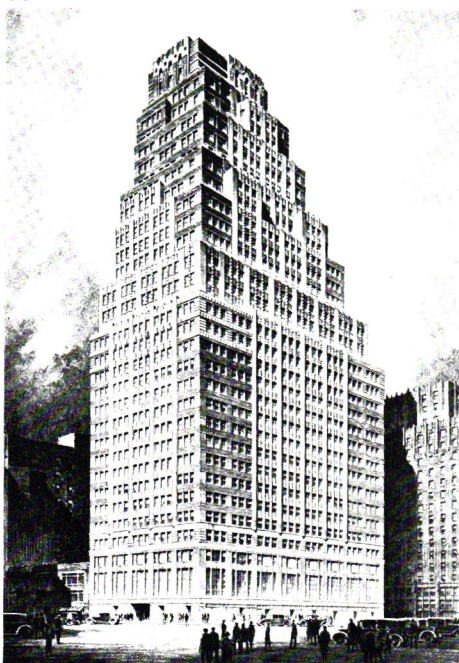
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30 *Zoning Envelopes, 1929. Evolution of the setback building. Drawings by Hugh Ferriss. First stage.*

31 *Second stage.*

32 *Third stage.*

33 *Fourth stage.*

34 *"Buildings in the Modeling." Drawing by Hugh Ferriss, 1929.*

35 *500 Fifth Avenue, New York City. Shreve, Lamb, & Harmon, architects, 1930.*

36 *Bricken Building, New York City. Ely Jacques Kahn, architect, c.1930.*

37, 38 *Diagrams showing formal transformations and circulation of meanings in the evolution of the type.*

and fantasy, touching the sky through its scintillating reflection, seems to be the apotheosis of this transition in which the whole building has become the symbol of the skyscraper itself (figs. 25–29). By contrast, its complement, the Empire State Building, is an empty signifier remaining always in transition, never completely coming to a point of culmination. The Empire State Building, like the Eiffel Tower, is looked at only in terms of its own gaze, as the prime vantage point from which, as its name would indicate, New York reveals itself (fig. 24).

Under the setback law, then, the building replicates the crest at another scale (a characteristic operation in designing crests). Hugh Ferriss's drawings of the "code envelopes"—just like the buildings on Park Avenue between Fifty-third and Forty-fifth Streets—are revealing in this sense (figs. 30–36 and frontispiece).

The relationships in this circulation of meanings can be considered as in the manner of figs. 37 and 38. By means of the circulation of meanings the shaft of the building emerges as the one element that engenders another form of symbolic functioning in the skyscraper. The meaningful relationship now becomes the space between the buildings, and their repetition now becomes the essential aspect of meaning. This is clear in the World Trade Center, where the "tallest building" is actually two buildings, and the crest as a symbol has been metonymically replaced by a double aspect: repetition and the space between considered as form in itself.<sup>11</sup> The relation of value is here manifested as basic in the determination of meaning in architecture.

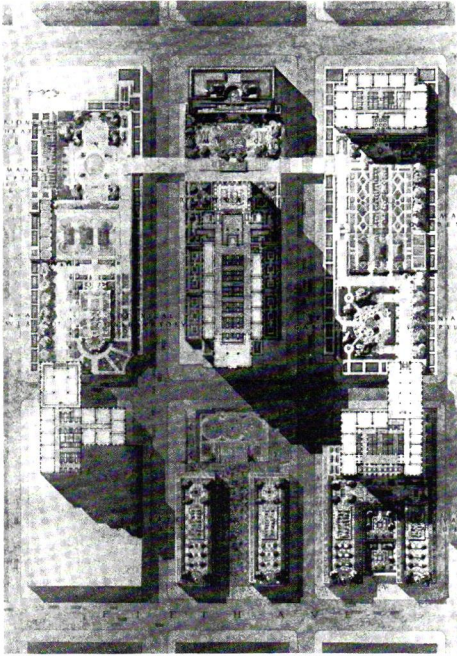
#### *The Base*

We have already noted how the signifying functioning of the skyscraper may be understood in terms of its underlying tripartite structure considered as the equivalent of the classical column. In the transformation of the relationships among the elements of the column a stage is reached in which the base takes on the symbolic role, thus marking a point in the evolution of a new typology of the skyscraper.

The base as a "door" establishes the relationship of the building to the street, thereby assuming the role of the

39 Rockefeller Center, New York City. Reinhard and Hofmeister, Corbett, Harrison and Wise, Murray, Hood, Godley and Fouilhoux, architects, 1932. Plan.

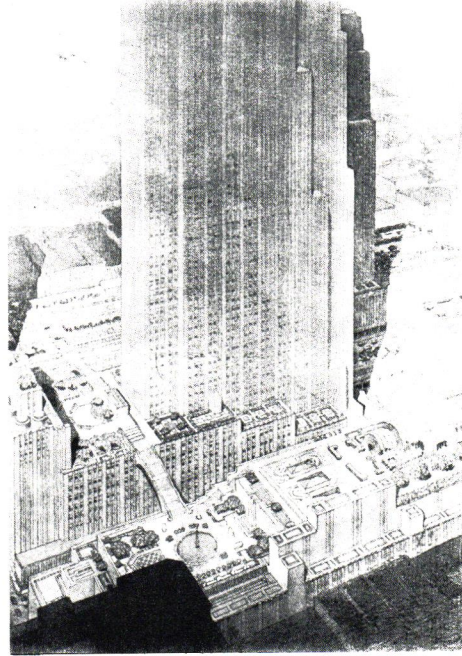
40 View from above. Drawing by Martin Wenrich, 1923.



41 General view. Drawing by Martin Wenrich, 1923.

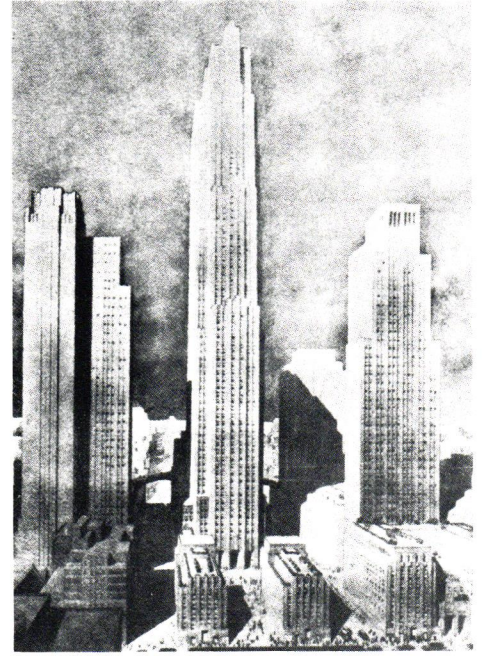
42 I.D.S. Building, Minneapolis. Philip Johnson and John Burgee, architects, 1972. First floor plan.

43 Pennzoil Place, Houston, Texas. Philip Johnson and John Burgee, architects, 1976.

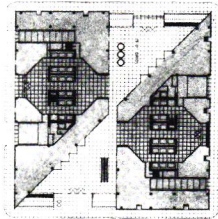
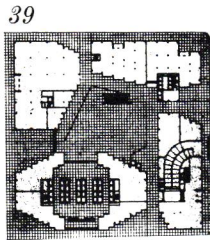


44 Ford Foundation Building, New York City. Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo, architects, 1976. The entry takes the full height of the building.

45 Hyatt Regency Hotel, San Francisco. John Portman and Associates, architects, 1973. Lobby.



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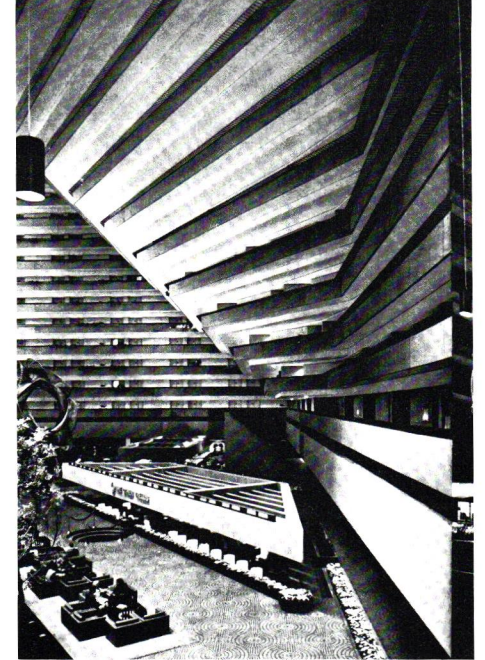
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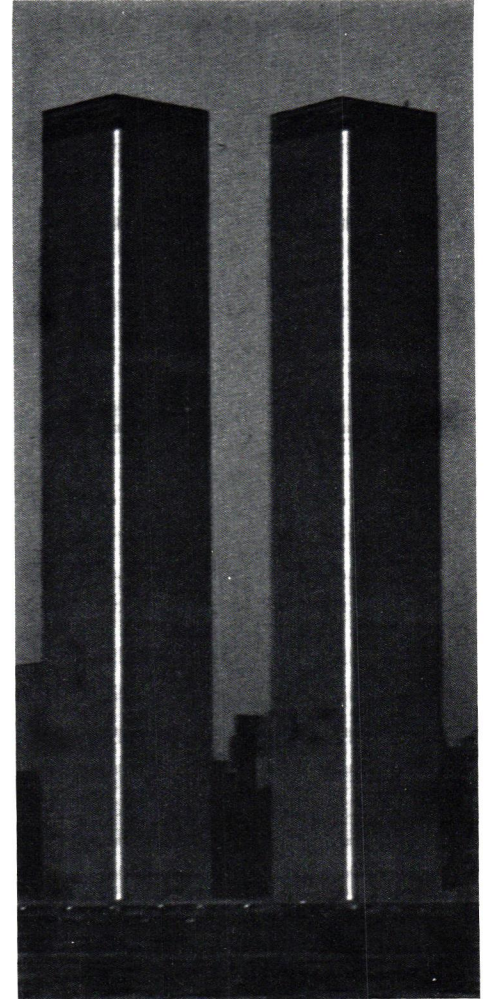
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46 *World Trade Center, New York City. K. Yamasaki, architect, 1976. The towers take the form of a door to the city.*

public realm of the skyscraper. Thus in the Chrysler Building the ground floor is treated in a monumental way both in scale and in detail. The door, that major signifier throughout the history of architecture, marks the entry as the mediator between public and private, but also between the architectonic public realm and that realm which is non-architectonic, between architecture and non-architecture. The base as a door in relation to the street activates a series of signifiers of public space. In this process, two tendencies have developed, one which displaces the public aspect of the building to its exterior by the use of plazas, which also amplify the perspective space, and a second which develops the base as an enlarged entrance where the building instead of expanding outward is perforated and opened up.

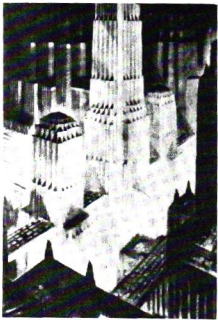
#### *The Displaced Base*

The development of the first tendency, the displacement of the public realm to the exterior, is pioneered by the Rockefeller Center (figs. 39–41) and culminates in the Seagram Building by Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson. The latter is the precedent for the relationships between building and plaza recently perpetuated in the new series of skyscrapers on Sixth Avenue.<sup>12</sup> In these the plazas have the function of providing a transition between the designed, public outside realm and the non-designed, public outside realm, thus preserving the hermetic character of the building. This space acts as a reference to the traditional space around monumental public buildings: a space provided for the public to meditate upon the power enclosed in the building. In Rockefeller Center this plaza-promenade acts as a doorway for the entire complex. The use of the giant door or gate as a fundamental signifying element reaches its extreme in the World Trade Center where the two towers themselves take the form of a “door,” thus transforming themselves into a gateway to the city which is clearly visible from both Staten Island and New Jersey; that is to say, from the principal access points to the great metropolis (fig. 46). A “doorway” as high as infinity, the point where the parallels intersect . . . it is hardly an accident that this metaphor should be developed in a time of invisible communication.

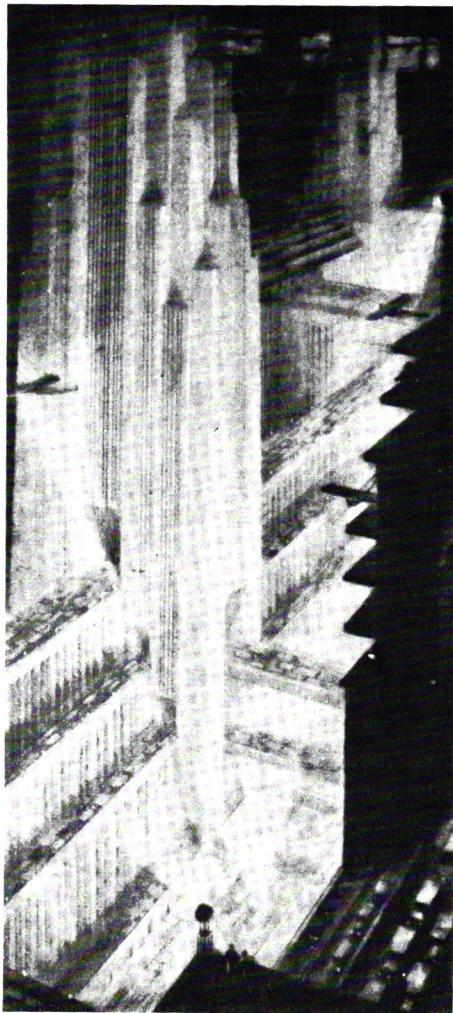


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Rockefeller Center was not only a pioneer in the treatment of the exterior space, but also initiated the change in emphasis in the functioning of the base, from the primacy of exterior public space to the volume of public space interpenetrating the building itself. This last is the megastructural character toward which today's skyscrapers increasingly tend.

*The Building as Base—A Mutant Species*

In this second kind of transformation, the base, formerly a secondary signifier, undergoes an unusual transformation in which the entrance hall gradually emerges as a principal element. This transformation marks the latest stage of the skyscraper's development, in which the skyscraper mutates toward a new typology of which partial examples already exist: the I.D.S. Center at Minneapolis by Philip Johnson, John Burgee, and Edward Baker, a "fifty-seven story tower higher and larger than seven tennis courts" (fig. 42);<sup>13</sup> the Pennzoil Place in Houston by the same architects (fig. 43); a series of Hyatt Hotels by John Portman and Associates (fig. 45); and the Ford Foundation Building in New York by Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo (fig. 44).

In these examples one can see the way in which the entry hall becomes a fundamental element. Its size is physically increased so that in the most extreme case of Portman's buildings, it becomes the medula of the building, producing a fundamental inversion by which the public aspect is incorporated into the private area. The base thus becomes the building itself from within. In Johnson's work the public space is closed off and incorporated into the building as a continuation of the street but the base is still differentiated from the body of the building. In the Ford Foundation, the entire building becomes a door, but the urban imagery evident in the work of Johnson and Portman is absent. This building seems to be transitional between the work of Portman and the plazas on Sixth Avenue. These examples contain the germs of a current problematic which is about to produce change in architecture at the typological and conceptual levels and anticipate the emergence of a totally new type of which utopistic versions have already appeared—the megastructure, a form that will resolve in itself as a type the contradiction between city and architecture, de-

47 Crowding towers. Drawing by Hugh Ferriss, 1929.

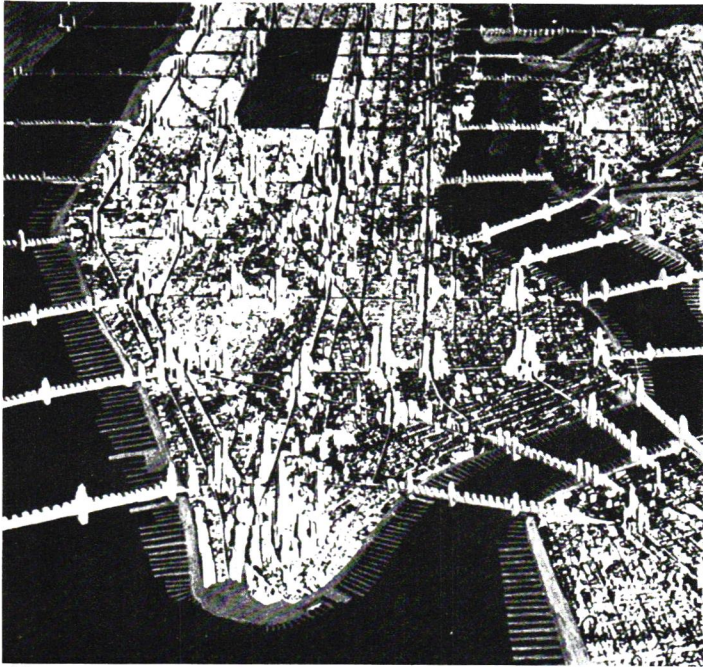
50 Apartments on bridges. Drawing by Hugh Ferriss, 1929.

48 Overhead traffic ways. Drawing by Hugh Ferriss, 1929.

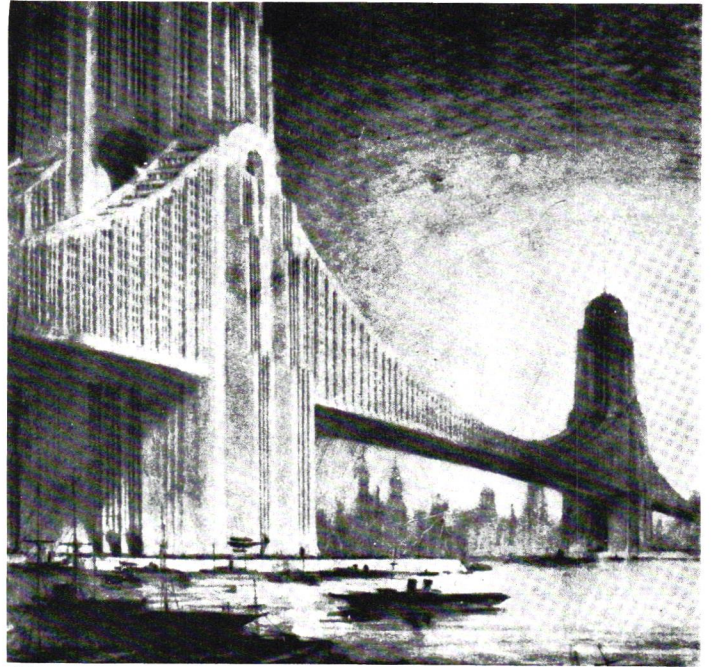
51 Project for lakefront for Chicago by Eliel Saarinen.

49 Manhattan 1950. Project by Raymond Hood.

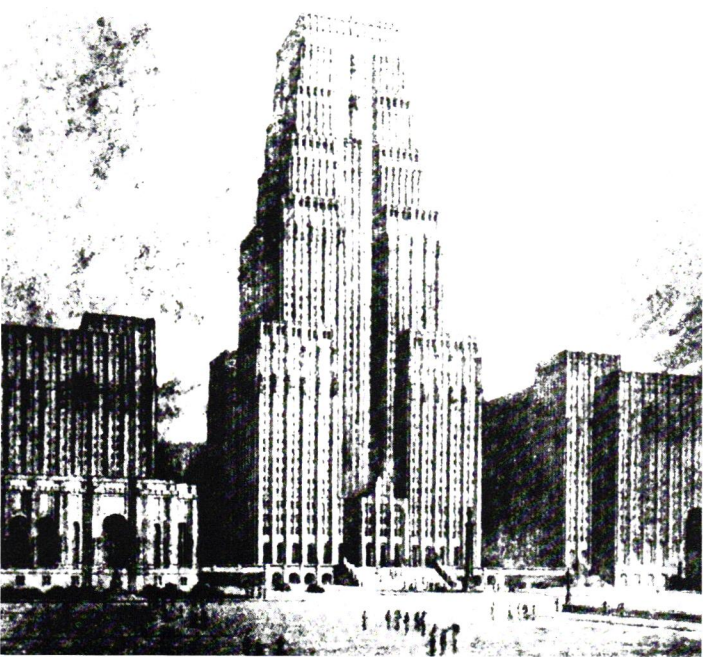
52 Manhattan 1950. Project by Raymond Hood. Detail.



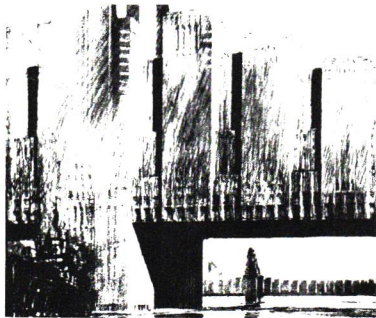
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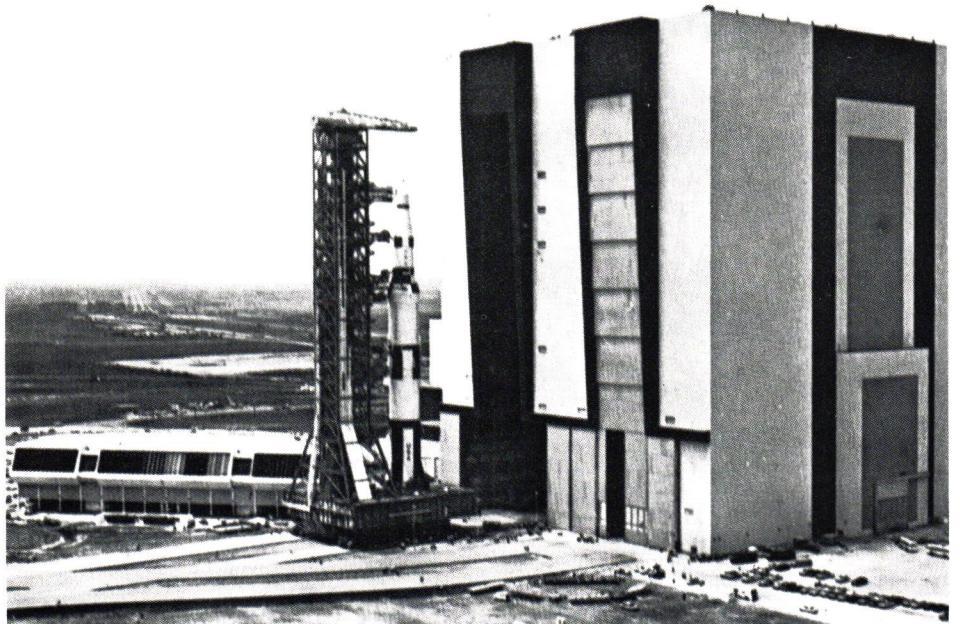
*53 I.D.S. Building, Minneapolis.  
Philip Johnson and John Burgee,  
architects, 1972.*



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*54 World Trade Center and  
Manhattan by night.*

*55 Vertical Assembly Building, John  
F. Kennedy Space Center, Cape  
Kennedy. Urbahn, Roberts, Seeley,  
& Moran, architects.*



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*56 Towers on Sixth Avenue. These towers, which are an extension of the Rockefeller Center, are from right to left: Time Life, Celanese, McGraw-Hill, and Exxon.*

sign and nondesign.<sup>14</sup> In this type, the building is infiltrated by the irresistible forces of the city and by signifiers that have hitherto only surrounded it.

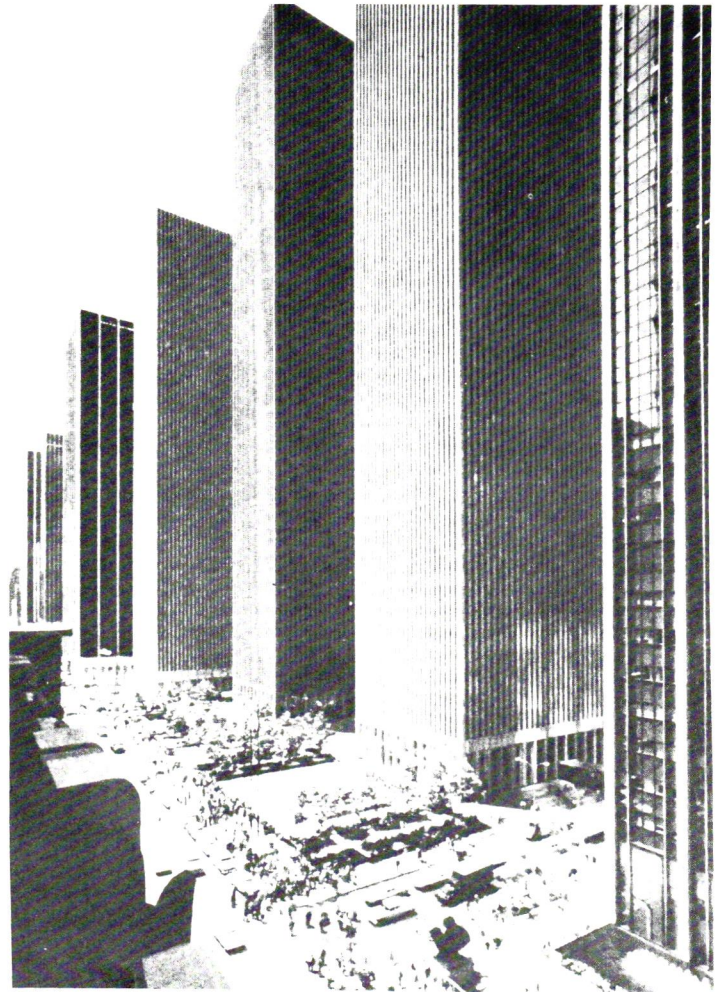
This city-skyscraper relationship may be compared with proposals which appeared first in Hugh Ferriss's *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (figs. 47, 48, 50) and then in Raymond Hood's *City of Skyscrapers* (figs. 49, 52), as well as in the work of Eliel Saarinen (fig. 51), Le Corbusier, and the Japanese Metabolists. All these proposals treat the city/skyscraper as a volumetric syntax in which volume and mass remain impenetrable, divisions are abrupt, and transitions absent. While the totality of the skyscraper/city is equipped with bridges that unite the individual skyscrapers, there are no true transitions. The passages between one building and the next are strictly linear and abrupt, as relationships shift from point to point. In the case of Saarinen's magnificent project for the Chicago lakefront, this same principle emerges as a series of more subtle transitions.

On the other hand, the relationship that is established between the skyscraper in the city and between the skyscrapers and the city is symbolic rather than volumetric, a complex play of transitions which generate signifying networks that interact with the rest of the city.

It is no accident that Portman, Johnson, and Roche all use mirrors in their buildings (fig. 53); in each instance the mirror not only reveals the nature of the building but also its role as a condenser, as a place where codes intersect codes, and as a fragment of a larger text, the city. The dematerialization of the building through reflections establishes the structure as both itself and the other. It is a signifier whose meanings are given to it by other signifiers. The traditional meaning, the content, has been dissolved.

### *The Shaft*

The shaft of the column having been transformed, fragmented, and stretched through a process of anamorphosis now becomes one with the base and the capital as in the case of the Seagram Building and the towers of Sixth Avenue, which are the purest expressions of that phenomenon



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50 (fig. 56). These buildings condense in different ways the role that was previously shared between each part. The building as a whole is the symbol of its own power and acquires its meaning in a contextual relationship, that is, as a result of the difference between the “marked” and the “unmarked” elements which constitute the city.<sup>15</sup> The claim that modern form has been desemanticized is thus invalidated; these buildings take their meanings in relation to their context. Their symbolic functioning arises out of relationships of substitution and from an exchange of meanings; for symbolization is after all no more than exchange itself. The skyscraper, like all objects in a capitalistic society, has the property of incorporating within itself two values, those of use and those of exchange or aggregated value, thus giving rise to fetishism. Architecture is no exception to this rule, and the possibility of desemanticization is, therefore, a fantasy. The competition between skyscrapers is based on their exchange rather than on their use value, that is to say, on their attributes as the highest, the biggest, the strangest, the most beautiful, and so on.

### *Openings*

If at first the termination of the skyscraper was necessary in order to transform the metaphor of “touching the clouds” into an apparent reality, in an age when this “touching” is literally possible by means of satellites and space voyages such symbolization is no longer required. Instead it is necessary to remember that it is from earth that space is approached and earth remains on center. The space between buildings, as it occurs in the World Trade Center, may be read as a metaphor for this “race” to outer space. Where the skyscraper used to race upward seeking its limit, this limit can now no longer be thought of in the same way. The opening itself between the buildings themselves appears as the signifier. The World Trade Center is only “detailed” for the level in which it emerges from the ground. The buildings themselves could be cut off at any point.

There is, however, a unique skyscraper, one which is “the biggest one in the world—four times the volume of the Empire State Building,” according to the official guide. This is a structure for the assembly of an object that will ma-

terialize its own metaphor; it is the Assembly Building at Cape Kennedy (fig. 55) whose lateral facade recalls the silhouette of the Empire State Building and whose double doors anticipate the World Trade Center (fig. 54). Here the skyscraper has unfolded and the metaphor of the skyscraper is realized in a building which as pure structure contains the “spire” that will literally reach to the sky. Here technology has been transformed by metonymy into pure symbol. The skyscraper is now a door, a door both to space and to the city, to the plurality of meaning.

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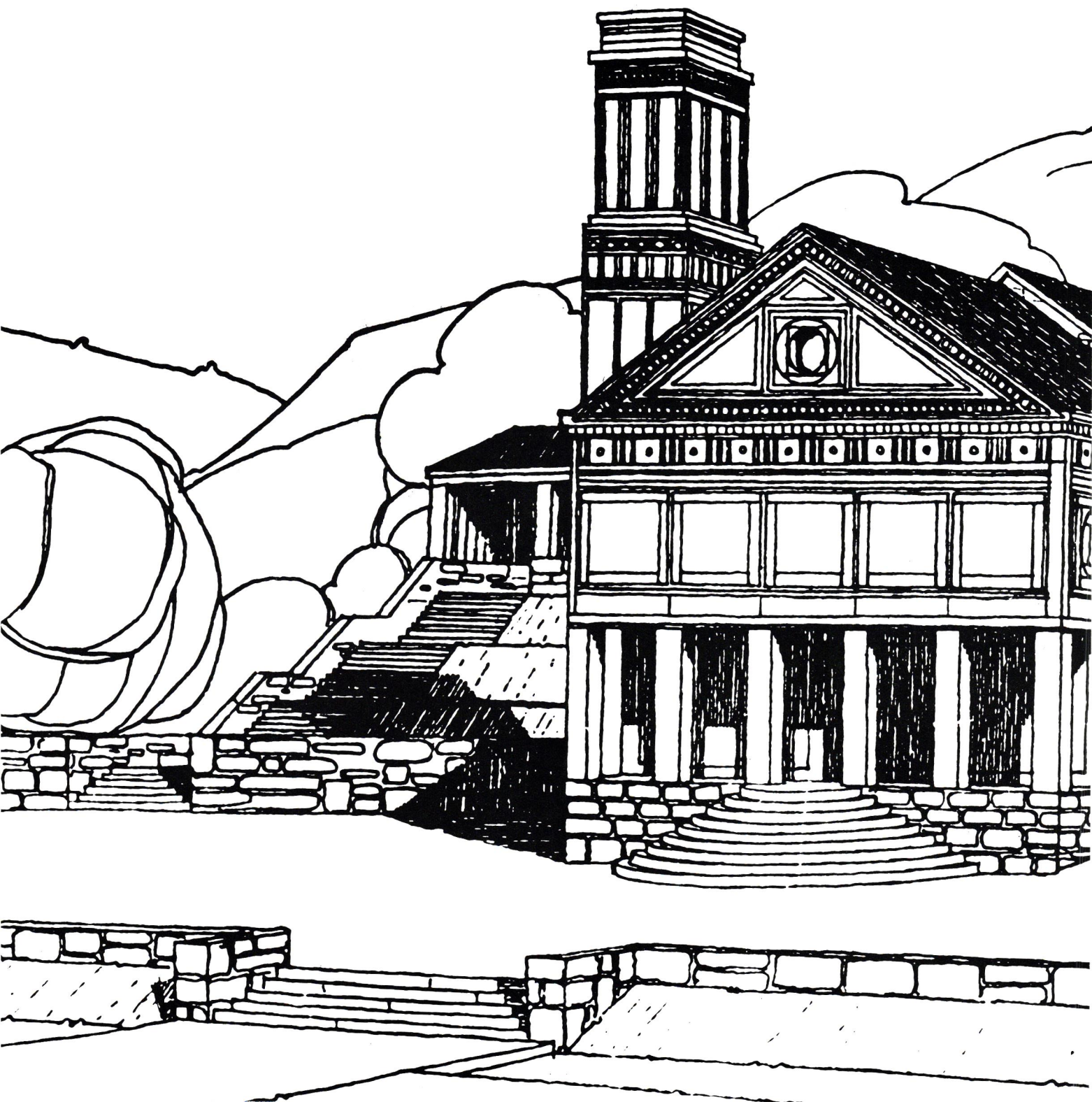
1. Francisco Mujica, *History of the Skyscraper* (New York: Archeology and Architecture Press, 1930); Winston Weisman, "New York and the Problem of the First Skyscraper," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 1953, vol. XII, No. 1, and "A New View of Skyscraper History," *The Rise of an American Architecture*, Edgar Kaufmann Jr. ed. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970); Carson Webster, "The Skyscraper, Logical and Historical Considerations," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 1959, Vol. XVIII, No. 4; Claude Bragdon, "The Skyscraper," *Architectural Record*, December 1909; Montgomery Schuyler, "Skyscraper up to Date" (1899), "The Evolution of the Skyscraper" (1909), "The Towers of Manhattan and Notes of the Woolworth Building" (1913), *American Architecture and Other Writings*, William Jordy and Ralph Coe, eds. (Harvard, 1961); Alfred Bossom, *Building to the Skies* (New York, 1934); William Jordy, *American Architecture and Urbanism*; Hugh Ferriss, *Metropolis of Tomorrow* (New York, 1929); Manfredo Tafuri, "La Montagna Disincantata. Il Grattacielo e la Città," *La città americana della guerra civile al "New Deal,"* Ciucci, Dal Co, Manieri, Elia, Tafuri, co-authors (Bari: Laterza, 1973); Walter Kilham, Jr., *Raymond Hood Architect, Form Through Function in the American Skyscraper* (New York: Architectural Book Publishers, 1973).
2. Weisman, "A New View of Skyscraper History," pp. 115–119. This study is interesting because it postulates a certain autonomy of the structure of meaning.
3. Mario Gandelonas, "The Architectural Signifier/Column," paper presented at the First Congress of the International Association of Semiotics, Milan, June 1974.
4. The International Competition for a New Administration Building for the *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago, 1923.
5. Joseph Rykwert, *Adam's House in Paradise* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972), p. 166.
6. Manfredo Tafuri, "La Montagna Disincantata. Il Grattacielo e la Città," *La città americana, della guerra civile al "New Deal,"* Ciucci, Dal Co, Manieri, Elia, Tafuri, co-authors (Bari: Laterza, 1973).
7. Ibid.
8. The skyscraper in this way places architecture in a crisis insofar as it indicates a direction whose signifying complexity is unequalled in the history of architecture.
9. In the development of the tower-type, there are cases wherein the column-scheme is reproduced such that the elements relate to each other in different ways: either the body is developed, as happens in Leroy Buffington's design of 1888 for a twenty-story building, or the base develops, taking the form of setbacks, as illustrated in Adler and Sullivan's scheme for the Odd Fellows Temple in 1891. The crest may develop as it does in the Spreckles Building, San Francisco, designed by J. W. and M. J. Reid in 1897; or the whole building may become a true column in its proportions as occurs in Magney and Tusler's Foshay Tower of 1927–1928. Although we are developing here the argument by speaking about crests either as capital or as fundamental element, there are other skyscrapers that do not possess them which, on the other hand, are complete parallelepipeds; for the most part,

these cases enter that category just after the tripartite phase or else represent transformations of it.

10. Alfred Bossom, *Building to the Skies, the Romance of the Skyscraper* (New York, 1934), p. 17.
11. Mario Gandelonas, "World Trade Center" (unpublished essay, 1973).
12. The buildings on Sixth Avenue belong to such different corporations as Exxon, McGraw Hill, and Celanese.
13. Walter McQuade, "A Daring New Generation of Skyscrapers," *Fortune*, Feb. 1973.
14. D. Agrest, "Design vs. Non-Designed Public Places," paper presented at the First Congress of the International Association of Semiotics, Milan, June 1974. Published as "Design vs. Non-Design," *Oppositions*, 6, 1976.
15. Roland Barthes, "Semiologie et Urbanisme," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 153.

#### Figure Credits

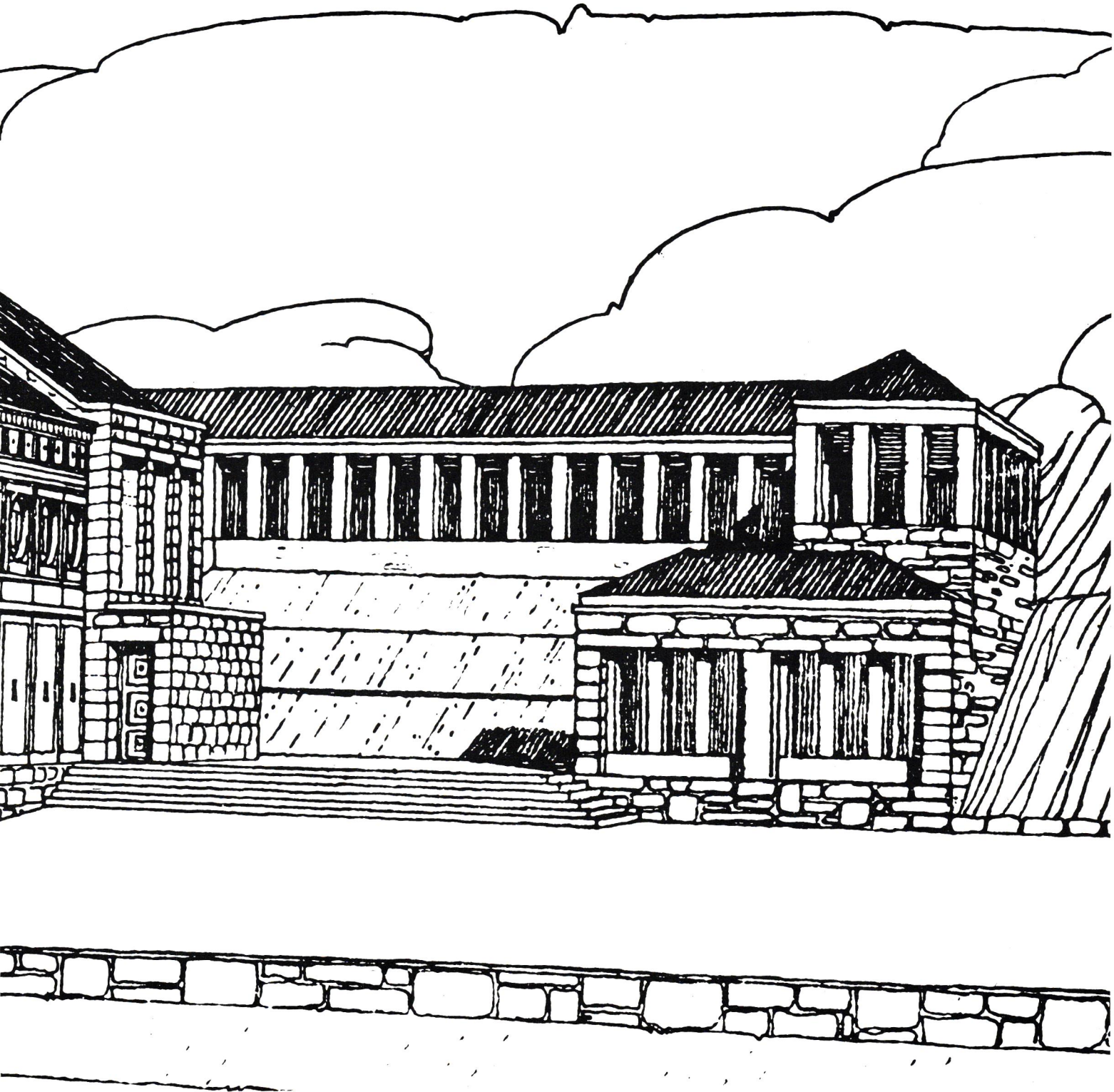
- 1, 27, 30–34, 47, 48, 50 Reprinted from Hugh Ferriss, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (New York, 1929).
- 2 Reprinted from W. Weisman, "A New View of Skyscraper History," *The Rise of an American Architecture*, ed. E. Kaufmann, Jr. (New York, Praeger Publishers).
- 3, 25, 26 Reprinted from Francisco Mujica, *The History of the Skyscraper* (New York: Archeology and Architecture Press, 1930).
- 4–13, 16–22 Reprinted from the *Chicago Tribune Competition* publication of all submitted projects.
- 14 Reprinted from Claes Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings* (Chicago: ABIG Table Book, 1969).
- 15 Reprinted from Alfred Bossom, *Building to the Skies* (New York, 1934).
- 23 Reprinted from M. Tafuri, "La Montagna Disincantata," *La città americana dalla guerra civile al "New Deal,"* Ciucci, Dal Co, Manieri, Elia, Tafuri, co-authors (Bari: Laterza, 1973).
- 24, 28, 29, 37, 38, 46, 49, 52–55 Courtesy the author.
- 35, 36 Reprinted from *Architectural Forum*, June 1930.
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- 44 Reprinted from *Global Architecture* (Tokyo: A.D.A. Edita, 1971), photograph by Yukio Futagawa.
- 45 Reprinted from *Global Architecture* (Tokyo: A.D.A. Edita, 1974), photograph by Yukio Futagawa.
- 51 Reprinted from "The American Architect and The Architectural Review," *Architectural Review*, Vol. CXXIC, 1923.



History

Modern Architecture and Industry:  
Peter Behrens and the Cultural Policy of Historical Determinism

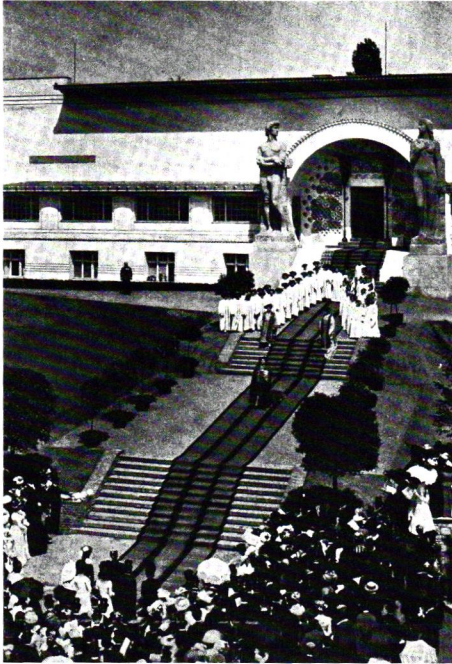
Stanford Anderson



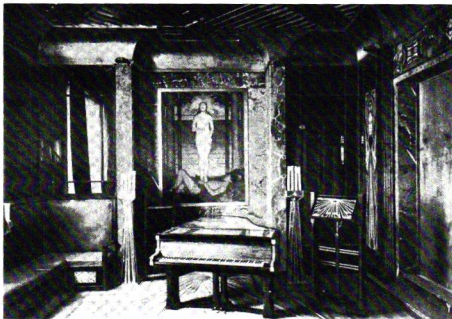


1 (frontispiece) *Crematorium, Hagen in Westfalia*. Design and presentation drawing by Peter Behrens (1906); only the central building was built.

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2 *Künstler-Kolonie, Darmstadt*. Opening ceremony (1901); Peter Behrens's production of Georg Fuchs's "Das Zeichen" ("The Sign"—a symbolic crystal), performed for the Grossherzog Ernst Ludwig and his guests before the *Ernst-Ludwig-Haus* (the studio building for the artists of the colony) designed by Joseph Olbrich.

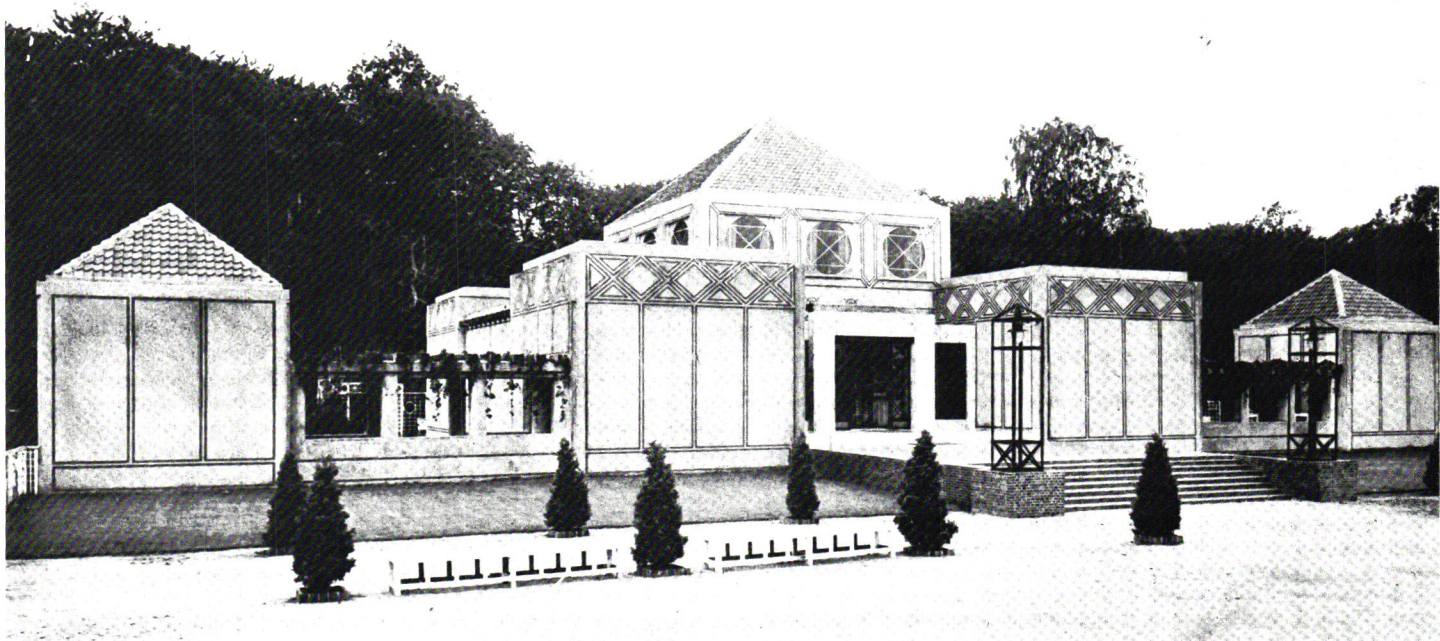
Modern industry ruptured ancient relationships among makers, products, and users—disjunctures, owing to the division of labor, between workers and the objects produced; a correlative standardization of the products; and an increasing emphasis on fashion and obsolescence as stimulants to consumption. The Great Exhibition of 1851 in the Crystal Palace in London assembled the machines and products of modern industry in a prefabricated iron and glass building before a popular audience—building and audience themselves being representatives of the same change in productive means.<sup>1</sup> 1851 occasioned major reassessments of the condition of culture and society in relation to the new productive system and the environment it produced. Although such evaluations need not have hinged on a rejection or even a radical critique of mass production, the immediate consequences of industrialization were sufficiently open to criticism as to lend strong support to the Arts and Crafts movement which, under the leadership of William Morris, attempted to reintroduce craftsmanship as the primary means of cultural production.

It has often been noted that Morris himself was finally forced to realize the inherent impossibility of relying on craft production, with its assumption of integrating work, production, and society, as the basis for achieving a healthy and equitable social order. It also became clear that the course of industrial production could not be reversed without drastic consequences for a population that had been reorganized to suit the processes of industrialization. In the end, Morris and his associates were only able to produce high quality craft objects, for the most part at luxury prices, within a world dominated by the processes of mass production. At best their work could be valued for achieving an appropriate relation between the character of a product and the process that had produced it. While this relation might serve as an ideal to be achieved under other modes of production, the Arts and Crafts program did not provide the key to an alternative organization of production and society.

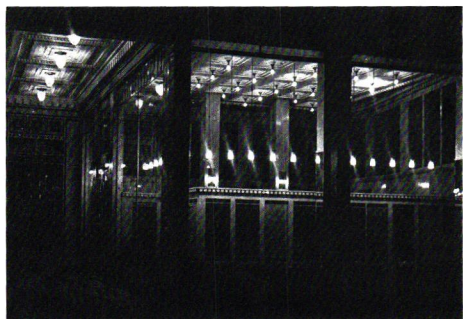
Where the mid-century Arts and Crafts movement pitted handicraft production and the myth of a pre-industrial, organic social harmony against modern technique and the

3 *Künstler-Kolonie, Darmstadt. The music room of Peter Behrens's own house, the setting for the domestic and everyday counterpart of the ceremony of Fig. 2, by Peter Behrens (1900–1901).*

4 *Northwest German Art Exhibition, Oldenburg (1905). Exhibition pavilions by Peter Behrens.*

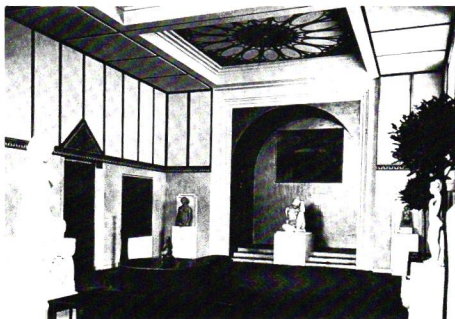


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5 *Wallpaper shop of Josef Klein, Hagen. Peter Behrens (1906–1907). An effective use of artificial light as a complement to Behrens's "art of space" near the end of his Düsseldorf period and as he had already begun associations with the AEG.*

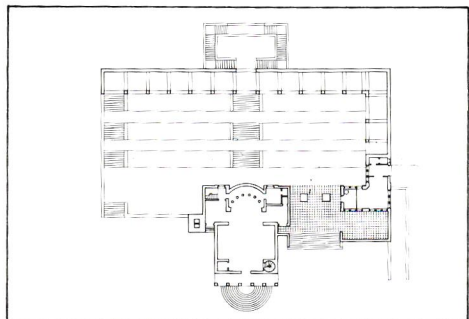


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6 *International Art Exhibit, Mannheim (1907). Exhibition room*

*and its choice of works and installation by Peter Behrens. The axial piece is a plaster cast of Maillol's Méditerranée then in the collection of Harry Graf Kessler.*

7 *Crematorium, Hagen in Westfalia. Plan of the main level based on a drawing in the Bauordnungsamt, Hagen, dated May 1912.*



7

*8 Machine house for water turbines and the AEG transformer building for long-distance power transmission to Frankfurt, Lauffen (1891).*

*9 Electrotechnical Exhibition, Frankfurt am Main (1891). Artificial waterfall activated by AEG pumps driven by electricity transmitted from Lauffen.*

56 consequent social crises of the Industrial Revolution, the artistic movements of the late nineteenth century, soon to be known as Art Nouveau, proposed the ideal of a holistic, Nietzschean artistic culture to be set against the advance of a positivist scientific civilization (fig. 2). The new controversial position stemmed from the critique of art and culture rather than from craft production. It confronted not the productive basis of modern civilization but certain characteristics of that civilization and the extension of those characteristics to intellectual, cultural, and spiritual realms. While the formation of the Art Nouveau took place outside the realm of industry, the Art Nouveau artists themselves were not programmatically opposed to the use of industrial methods. Henry van de Velde, one of the chief spokesmen of the movement, often argued for the mutual support of art and industry. However, the resistance of these artists to a fragmented, analytic, positivist science (“*Wissenschaft*”) and their difficulty in imagining either science or technology without these characteristics, exposed the Art Nouveau to rapid dissolution as a result of its divorce from any productive base.

Similarly Peter Behrens, as a member of the Darmstadt Artists’ Colony, established around 1900 a typically Art Nouveau and explicitly Nietzschean program for a holistic culture that would be generated by the will of an elite (figs. 2, 3). Yet Behrens’s late emergence within Art Nouveau facilitated his shift toward other positions—both theoretical and formal. From 1903 to 1907 Behrens was director of the School of Arts and Crafts at Düsseldorf, a position which he used to establish his first coherent concept of architecture. Relying on the insights of the art historian August Schmarsow, Behrens argued that architecture was the art of defining space, which he proposed to achieve with sparse geometrical forms, while allowing sculpture, the art of volume or spatial occupation, to provide its plastic counterpart (figs. 1, 4–7).

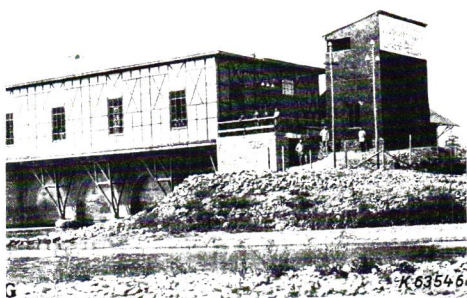
In 1907, Peter Behrens left his academic post in Düsseldorf to become the artistic consultant to a large corporation in the electrical industry, the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG) in Berlin. Behrens came to control almost every visual manifestation of this corporation, including its

product design, graphics, exhibition design, and architecture.<sup>2</sup>

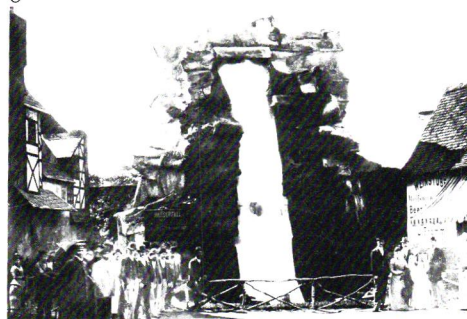
Established in 1883 as the Deutsche Edison Gesellschaft für angewandte Elektrizität, the founder of the AEG Emil Rathenau was a shrewd engineer-businessman who learned of Edison’s work at the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876 and later procured the German rights for the Edison patents. The success of the AEG, the related changes in its political and cultural self-awareness, and the emergence of Peter Behrens in this development can all be gauged by comparing AEG participation in three exhibitions.

As a pioneer in power transmission, the AEG arranged an impressive demonstration of this important modern service for the Elektrotechnische Ausstellung in Frankfurt am Main in 1891. Water power drove a turbine of three hundred horsepower at Lauffen am Neckar, which, in turn, drove an electric generator (fig. 8). Fifteen thousand volts from this generator were transmitted a record 175 kilometers to Frankfurt where transformers converted it for use into one thousand incandescent lamps and a one hundred horsepower electric motor. However, neither the lights nor the motor were the culminative attraction for in accordance with a charming and naive naturalism, the motor drove a pump which lifted water to the top of an artificial hill where a theatrical waterfall spent the electrical energy that had been generated by the water power (fig. 9).<sup>3</sup> A quite extraordinary capability for the generation and distribution of large amounts of energy was expended in a poor imitation of nature and with a naive sense of functional symmetry. Almost equally naive architecturally, the building that housed the equipment at Lauffen was derived from medieval, half-timbered prototypes. At this point the AEG was preoccupied with a popular demonstration of what it could achieve. The firm was little concerned with the expression of its capabilities through artistic form—whether in terms of its equipment, the housing of this equipment, or the image of the corporation. The AEG was interested in the machines for what they could do, not as ends in themselves.

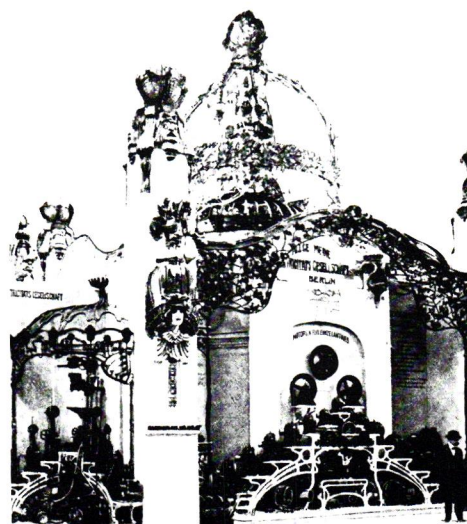
However, for the Exposition Universelle of 1900 in Paris the AEG employed a designer to create an artistic setting



8



9



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for its products. While it is clear that by this time the corporation was becoming self-conscious about its production and its relation to art, the pavilion itself was little more than a vulgar combination of Art Nouveau ornament and pseudo-classical forms (fig. 10). Such a work was as incapable of emulating the dramatic operation of the Frankfurt waterfall as it was of establishing a correspondence between the technical modernism of the AEG combine and the presumed modernism of its artistic style. 57

Peter Behrens's first building for the AEG was an exhibition pavilion for the Berliner Schiffbauausstellung of 1908 (fig. 12). The machines were exhibited like sculptures within an austere centralized building form modeled after such prototypes as the Baptistery of Florence and the Imperial Chapel of Aachen (fig. 13). The AEG no longer sought merely to emphasize the utility of its products (certainly not in the form of artificial waterfalls), but rather to exhibit the product itself as an impressive object, indicative of modern industrial potential. Beyond the reification of this utilitarian potential, there were cultural and political implications which the AEG increasingly saw to be the opportunity and responsibility of the corporation. The 1908 pavilion by Behrens implicitly assumed the necessity of representing industry as a forceful agent within society. The machines were presented as the regalia of power; the increasingly studied forms adopted by both the machines and the pavilion asserted their political and cultural roles. It is significant that the Kaiser himself opened this pavilion of power and good form (fig. 11).

A similar formal development occurred in the field of graphics, the AEG passing from elaborate late nineteenth century job printing<sup>4</sup> to the commissioning of a noted artist as the designer of its graphic image. In 1900 Otto Eckmann adapted his floral and lyrical Jugendstil manner to the design of a corporation signet and decorative borders for changing advertisements. Although Eckmann's designs were representative of their genre, their immediate juxtaposition with the image of machine production was again only indicative of the aspiration for, rather than the result of, a successful collaboration between art and industry (fig. 20). The AEG pavilion at Paris and Eckmann's graphics for



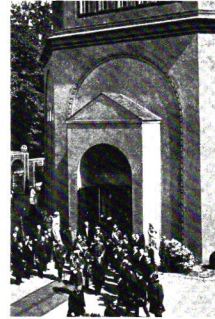
11 *Shipbuilding Exhibition, Berlin. The Kaiser opening the AEG pavilion (2 June 1908).*

12 *Shipbuilding Exhibition, Berlin. AEG pavilion by Peter Behrens.*

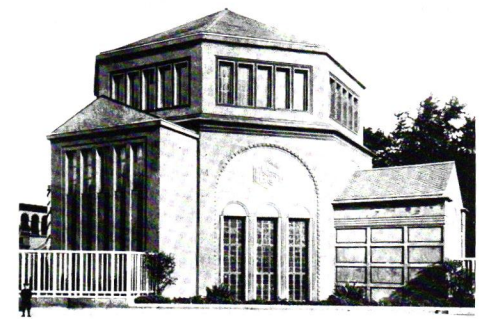
13 *Palace complex of Charlemagne, Aachen. Model of the state c.800.*

58 the AEG may seem to be an exception to the Jugendstil artists' general lack of sympathy for a modern civilization dominated by science and technology, but in fact the contrast between pavilion and machine and between decorative frame and photographic image of the machine product was so great in these examples that it simply confirmed the exclusion of art from the system of production—it confirmed the disjunction of art and industry rather than their union. Beginning in 1907, Behrens created a unified graphic style for the AEG by means of a precise, overt geometrical organization of the surface and the use of antique type faces (fig. 15). On occasion, Behrens also reduced the image of the product to two-dimensional graphic terms (fig. 19).

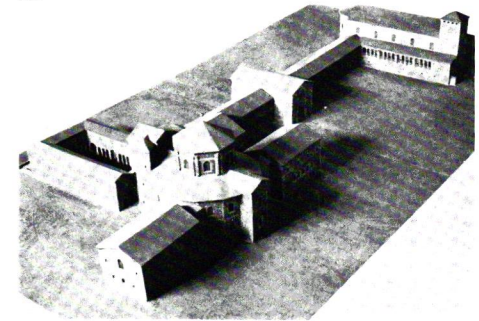
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Post-Art Nouveau work, such as that produced by Behrens in Düsseldorf, reflected more of a change in formal convention than an alternation in the overall attitude toward industry. To the extent that this formal change did have implications for the union of art and industrial production, these implications had an inherent ambiguity. Certain conventions, such as the use of the T-square and triangle, the form of a brick, and the geometry of a simple structural bay, were used to suggest that straight linear compositions were more anonymous and comprehensive than curvilinear arrangements. Nevertheless while Behrens and other artists thought of these straight lines in ideal rather than practical terms, figures such as Van de Velde argued for the practical function of what he called “wavy lines.”<sup>5</sup>

The new convention of the straight line could adapt quite well to certain limited problems, as in the case of Behrens's graphics for the AEG. But the same conventions did not go very far in resolving the problem of product design and the structure of material things—objects of use and building. Thus Behrens's past experience and the logic of his new position with the AEG posed problems on several levels. First and foremost, if the relationship of design and product form were to be worked out in terms of industrial production (for the poverty of the handicraft approach had become increasingly clear), then a reassessment of such basic attitudes as the artist's anti-positivism and his mistrust of technology and industry was necessary. At a more strategic level, Behrens was called upon to construct the



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14 *Port Sunlight, the Lever company town, founded 1887. An illustration to Rathenau's dismissal of the garden city—though this precedent setting example was built by and for a major industry.*



15 AEG, development of the corporate signet: (a) and (b), late nineteenth century signets by unidentified designers; (c) and (d), successive signets designed by Peter Behrens (1907ff.).

15b

15c

15d

practice and the implicit theory for how a person with artistic talent and interest could contribute to an organizational system whose operational concerns extended from natural resources to the mass marketing of industrial products.<sup>6</sup> Finally, he had the problem of relating design to the productive processes, that is to say, of discovering a viable relationship between the abstractions of the artist and the material conditions of production. At a more general level, Behrens's employment with the AEG marked a renewal of his search for a functional relationship between art and society—but no longer, as at Darmstadt, through the artists' dictation of a holistic culture. The new search, although equally utopian, entered into a discourse with the existing economic, political, and social conditions.

It is more than incidental that one of the directors of the AEG, Walther Rathenau, the son of its founder and president, shared Behrens's interest in a culture composed of functionally related parts.<sup>7</sup> Both men believed that certain periods of history had manifested high levels of culture, that one must work to achieve such a level again, and that modern technology was *not* an inevitable contribution to this goal. Rathenau was one of the last great utopists, composing his positive image from both an evolutionary and a critical understanding of man's development. Rathenau, concerned with the reconstruction of man and culture in an industrial society,<sup>8</sup> had first to offer a criticism of his own epoch, his *Zur Kritik der Zeit* ("On the Criticism of Our Times") of 1912. Despite his renown as an industrialist in the newly developed fields of electricity, automobiles, and electrochemistry, Rathenau proceeded to analyze the distress and misery of modern man which had arisen as the result of unchecked capitalism and which had inevitably led to the mechanization of work, of man, and of culture. In 1913 he wrote his book *Zur Mechanik des Geistes* ("On the Mechanics of the Spirit"). However, despite his concern about the mechanization that had resulted from industrialism, Rathenau was emphatic in his belief that such ills could not be removed by doing away with industry. Nineteenth century dreams of the return to an agrarian and handicraft society, the "garden city idylls of the average architect and art-craftsman" (fig. 14), were not only impossible in Rathenau's opinion but would condemn great parts

of the increased population to death through inefficient production and distribution. While Rathenau did not believe in an inevitable evolutionary progress toward a better world, he argued that the effects of knowledge, technology, and industry could not be rescinded. Human will would have to be used to enter into the historical process, to guide the way to a better world through the use of technology: "only mechanization itself can lead us beyond mechanization,"<sup>9</sup> to a Kingdom of the Soul characterized by social consciousness and solidarity, love and creative responsibility. Upon entering into the historical process, it would become clear that it was the spiritual world which needed to be restructured. Rathenau said that the purpose of his book *Von kommenden Dingen* ("In Days to Come") was "to show that the spiritual guidance of life and the permeation of the mechanistic order with spirit will transform the blind play of force into a fully conscious and free cosmos, into a cosmos worthy of mankind."<sup>10</sup>

But Rathenau did not mean his call for spiritualization to be a retreat from life:

"every genuine earthly experience must be taken seriously. Faithfulness in sensuous perception and devotion of the spirit lead to the inner comprehension even of everyday occurrences and to the contemptuous rejection of any sipping at the cup of life. If the world be an order, a cosmos, it behooves man to study its interconnections, its laws, and its phenomena; it behooves him to build them up within himself. Plato's, Leonardo's, and Goethe's irruption into the robust world of things was not a mundane aberration but a divine necessity. The poet who, lacking spiritual grasp, despises the present and the future of his world for the sake of artificially selected interests, is not as he fancies a seer, but a purveyor of aesthetic amusement.

"What is romance in history? It is sterility. It is incapacity to imagine, still less to shape the yet unknown. . . . Fearing the ugly present and the anxious future, the romantic takes refuge with the dear, good, dead people, and spins out further what it has learned from them. But every big man was a shaper of his own time, a respecter of antiquity and conscious of his inheritance as a grown and capable man may be; not a youth in sheltered tutelage, but a master of the living world, and a herald of the future. 'Modernity' is

16 AEG sales room in the  
Königgrätzerstrasse, Berlin (1910).  
The shop and all visible household  
objects by Peter Behrens.



16

foolish, but antiquarianism is rubbish; life in its vigor is neither new nor antique, but young.”<sup>11</sup>

Even before Rathenau wrote of the “big man” engaging the world in order to achieve a true and young culture, Peter Behrens and others were working out this challenge in the arts.

In an article of 1908 about Behrens’s work for the AEG,<sup>12</sup> the close relationship between the means of production and artistic form was recognized. The attempt of William Morris and his followers to restore an earlier cultural balance through a return to an earlier productive system was specifically criticized on the grounds that such an endeavor could not cope with the basis of modern production—which still remained the machine. Behrens repeated this argument and specifically disagreed with a claim that had been made by Muthesius that Morris should be recognized as the founder of the modern movement in arts and crafts. On the contrary, Behrens thought that priority should be given to those who were seeking a new classical art while working in sympathy with modern conditions rather than to the English Romantics and their German followers.<sup>13</sup>

Despite Rathenau’s and Behrens’s acceptance of the modern situation, there remained a traditional, even conservative, aspect to the modern society which they envisioned. Both men believed there had been a healthy relationship between the methods of production and the social and cultural conditions of certain earlier times—especially classical antiquity, selected periods of the Middle Ages, and the Germany of around 1800. The cultural solidarity of those times provided a lesson. It seemed obvious that it was necessary to recreate the orderly, not to say monolithic, organization imagined for the earlier admired epochs.

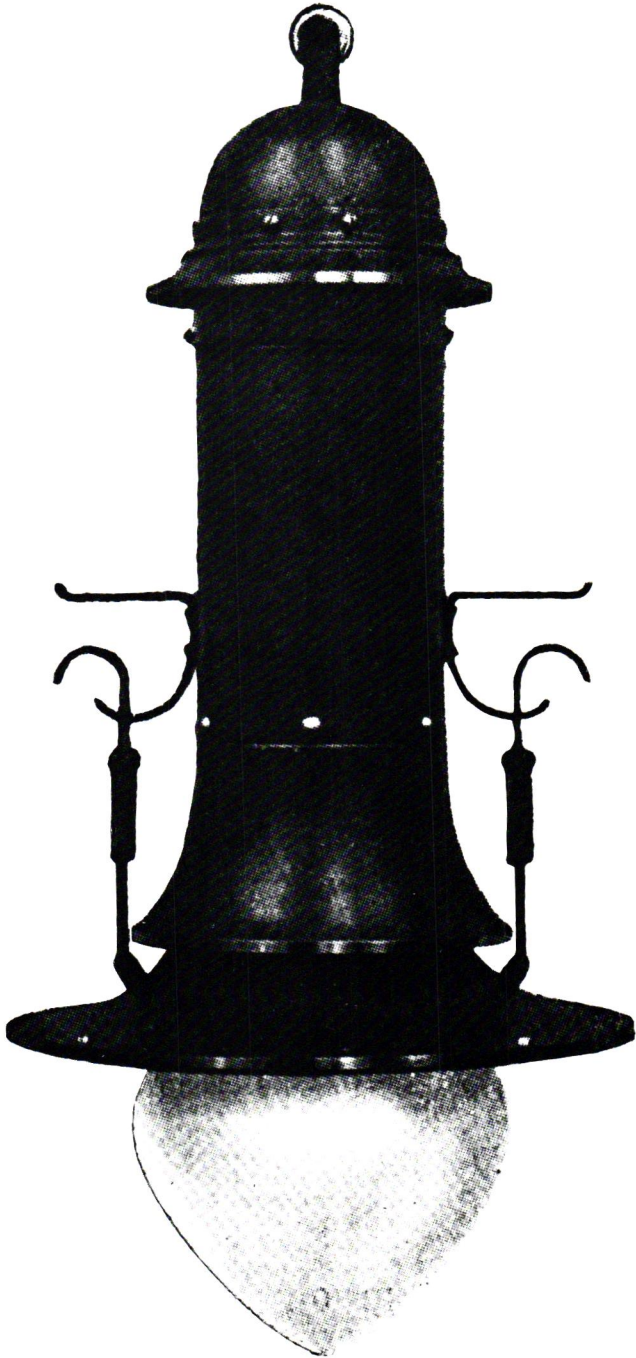
Rathenau had spoken of the big man as being not only a shaper of his own time, but also “a respecter of antiquity and conscious of his inheritance as a grown and capable man may be.” Such a historical consciousness is clearly revealed in Behrens’s publications of the Berlin years, which repeatedly dealt with the themes of “monumental art” and “art and technology.”<sup>14</sup> He saw monumental art,

17 Design of housing and globe for AEG arc lamp by Peter Behrens (1907).

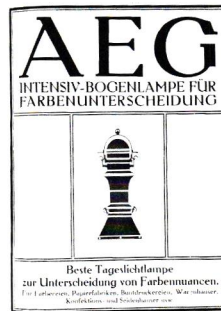
18 AEG Turbine Factory, Berlin-Moabit (now the Kraftwerk Union AG). The two street facades, Peter Behrens with Karl Bernhard (1908-1909).

19 Peter Behrens's advertising design including type face. Dated by the AEG as 1914, but probably nearer 1910 (the type face is, in any case, from 1908).

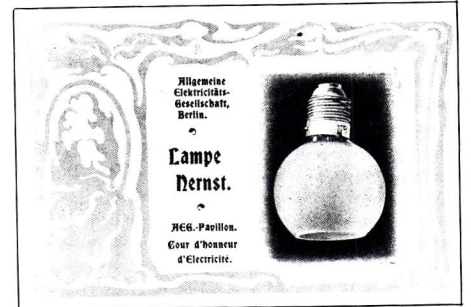
20 Graphic frame for AEG advertisements at the Paris Exposition (1900) by Otto Eckmann.



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62 which had become his passion with his projects for the crematorium in Hagen and the Mannheim exhibition hall, as just the opposite from lyrical art. Just as he had dissociated himself from the Morris tradition, he now made specific his break with the lyrical in art. What had been so important at Darmstadt and in his relationship with Richard Dehmel and other poets was now relegated to the intimate realms where such art could work its charm on initiated amateurs. Monumental art did not necessarily have to be large (lamps and vases could be monumental while statues as high as houses could be merely decorative); it was distinguished rather by the fact that it was the expression of what was most important to a people—the source of a people’s power or that which a people honors. For example, even in a time when the church had ceased to have the power and honor that it once had, death still had its mystery, and consequently a crematorium was capable of sustaining a monumental art. Furthermore, since monumental art, according to Behrens, was representative of what was most important to a people, it was also the highest expression of the culture of its time (fig. 18); indeed all other art forms (figs. 16, 17), including those of everyday life, should rely on the touchstones provided by monumental art.<sup>15</sup> But if all art was dependent on monumental art, which was in turn the highest expression of a culture, Behrens needed to ascertain what distinguished or at least what should distinguish the monumental art of twentieth century Western culture.

In 1909, Behrens adopted Houston Stuart Chamberlain’s distinction of knowledge, civilization, and culture.<sup>16</sup> Relying on Chamberlain, Behrens built up his own relationships among these concepts. He viewed civilization as applied knowledge (science and technology). In modern times, knowledge had become essentially analytical and inductive, he felt. In contrast, such dominant aspects of culture as the *Weltanschauung* and art were synthetic and deductive.

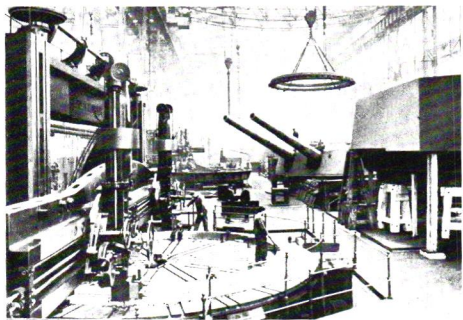
Chamberlain had played these contrasting characteristics into an opposition between civilization and culture. Interestingly, Behrens did not fully agree. Accepting the terminology, the problem, and even the general description of the characteristics of knowledge and art in contemporary

society, he pointed out that knowledge had not always been analytical despite the fact that it was markedly so in his day. He also felt that art in contemporary society was less synthetic than ever before. For Behrens then, the outcome of this exercise was not that civilization and culture were necessarily opposed, but that the early twentieth century happened to be strongly marked by an analytic, scientific, “civilizational”—that is, non-cultural—character.

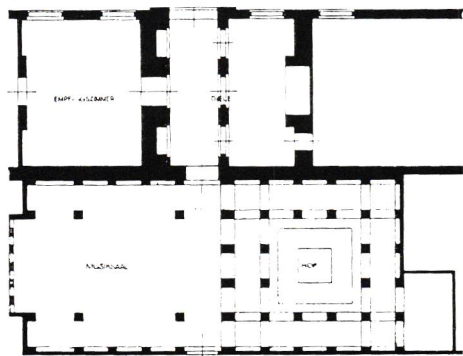
This analytic character was contrary to the Goethean synthetic spirit that Behrens admired. However, there were, he claimed, clear signs of a return to constructive synthesis in science as well as art. Behrens’s instances of synthesis in science were rather literal; for example, he cited the laboratory synthesis of water from hydrogen and oxygen. In art, there was, he felt, a turn from the materialistic, intellectual analysis of Gottfried Semper and his times<sup>17</sup> to the synthetic, intuitional understanding provided by Alois Riegl and his concept of the *Kunstwollen*.<sup>18</sup> This shift freed the artist from the implicit determinism of a materialist theory of art. In the terms with which Behrens began, there was in progress a shift from a scientific civilization to a culture in which the will of the artist and the people was dominant.

In 1910, Behrens meshed these abstract thoughts on the development of culture with his involvement in a technological industry.<sup>19</sup> Behrens had earlier claimed that monumental art must be expressive of that which truly moves and grasps a society. He then acknowledged that in his time, technology and the material progress brought about by technology had claimed that position. The engineer had become the hero of modern times. Nevertheless, Behrens said, technology was still only a material concern—intellectual, and a matter of civilization. The challenge was to bring about the synthesis of technology and art in order that modern civilization might be elevated to a true culture.

Unfortunately, no one, according to Behrens, had been making that synthesis—least of all in industry where the greatest opportunity lay. The character of the objects produced was determined by a few calculations and the taste of the shop foreman. The architects, charged with the de-



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21 *Krupp Ninth Mechanical Workshop, Essen (c.1900). An illustration to the rationale, and, according to Behrens, the “pseudo-aesthetic” of the engineer as exemplified in the industrial building, machine tools, and products.*

22 *Exhibition space by Peter Behrens at the Third German Arts and Crafts Exhibition, Dresden (1906).*

sign of an industrial building, reacted romantically and drew upon a treasury of historical forms—never exploring the formal implications of modern construction. Engineers, on the other hand, gave form to their buildings according to calculations and the conditions of construction. Often there was a beauty to great works of engineering (fig. 21), but according to Behrens this was a pseudo-aesthetic based on the lawfulness of mechanical construction. Such lawfulness was related to that of organic growth in Nature, and Nature, Behrens maintained, was not culture. Nor could the mere fulfillment of purpose be culture. In contrast, Behrens cited Riegl’s theory that the artistic will of an epoch had to be accomplished even if it ran counter to material criteria.

Behrens concluded this 1910 statement by outlining the service which men of his persuasion had to provide. As different as art and technology might be, they nevertheless belonged together. Art should no longer be considered a private matter. He wanted no aesthetic that sought its own rules in romantic dreams, but rather an aesthetic “rooted in the laws of surging life.” He also did not want a technology that pursued its own ends, but one that was sensible to the artistic will of the time. “Thus German art and technology will work toward a single goal: to the strength (“Macht”) of the German land, which will be recognized by the fact that a rich material life has been ennobled by a spiritually refined form.”<sup>20</sup>

As far as relating artistic form to new modes of production, the AEG had created an unusual opportunity and had placed this opportunity in the hands of Behrens. However, on the general level of ideas and policy, Behrens and the AEG were not alone.

Already in the nineteenth century a recurrent theme<sup>21</sup> was the claim that excellence of design and production in the crafts—and still more in industry—would be particularly important for Germany. This idea found an especially enthusiastic supporter in the nationalist and social-democratic politician Friedrich Naumann. The argument ran something like this: Germany is not rich in natural resources and has no great navy or empire (although Naumann was



23 Richard Riemerschmid's dining room furniture designed for and fabricated by the *Deutsche Werkstätte für Handwerkskunst*, Hellerau near Dresden, exhibited at the *Third German Exhibition of Arts and Crafts, Dresden (1906)*.

also an enthusiast for achieving both a navy and an empire); consequently it has no cheap source of materials and no ready market for cheap goods. To compete in world commerce, Germany must acknowledge and turn to advantage the fact that it buys material and sells labor and *Kultur*. For volume and economical production, there must be reliance on machine production; but to overcome the high cost of imported materials and quality labor, it must be machine production of high quality, based on good design. The *Kultur* which Germany sells should be the German vernacular of the Machine Age, but this in turn must derive from a machine-oriented people who have been reared in a thoroughly artistic culture. To succeed in satisfying all these conditions would be to assure a high standard of art, an advantageous commercial position, high employment, and elevated working and living conditions.<sup>22</sup>

In 1907, Naumann was instrumental in the founding of an organization, the *Deutscher Werkbund*, dedicated to the implementation of these ideas. The *Werkbund* had as its immediate source the men and the activities of *Die III. deutsche Kunstgewerbeausstellung* which opened in Dresden on May 12, 1906 (fig. 22).<sup>23</sup> The greatest part of the exhibition, under the direction of Fritz Schumacher, was devoted to what was termed “*Raumkunst*” (that is to say, “spatial art” or “interior architecture”). Complete rooms, for many different functions, were designed and fabricated in order “to solve each problem not according to an existing formula, but rather in accordance with a formula composed of three concerns: the character of the function which the room serves, the character of the materials which are used in the room, and the character of the person who created the room.”<sup>24</sup> Great stress was placed on the “character of the person who created the room.” Space in the exhibition was, for the first time, allotted only to the artists who would both conceive the designs and see them through to execution. Producers and contractors could come to be represented in the exhibition only at the request of the artist, rather than vice versa. As a further assurance of artistic excellence, the organizers appointed an *Arbeitskommissar* in each of the principal regions of Germany, whose job it was to see that the general principles of the exhibition were fulfilled in the various sectors. The names of Muthesius,

who represented Berlin; F. A. O. Kruger from the Münchener Werkstätten, who represented Munich; Bernhard Pankok for Württemberg; Behrens for the Rhineland; Josef Olbrich for Hessen; and Graf Kessler for Thüringen indicate the caliber of the administrators who sought to make Dresden in 1906 a celebration of a ten year effort to renew German crafts and architecture. One hundred and thirty-one rooms were created, most of them of a rather elegant character. While these rooms relied upon individual production to the designer's specifications, the organizers of the exhibition wanted to display high quality "machine-made" furniture as well. In 1906 the distinction between machine-assisted handwork and very simple industrial production was sufficiently obscure that any attempt to differentiate precisely between craft and industry was difficult—nor is the situation very different today. However, the handsome and simple factory-produced furniture of Karl Schmidt's Dresdener Werkstätten, which had been fabricated to the designs of Richard Riemerschmid (fig. 23), Bruno Paul, Heinrich Tessenow, and others, was a prominent feature of the exhibition. Naumann visited the Dresden exhibition, discovering in both the person and the production ideas of Karl Schmidt a complement to his own conception of the union of German crafts, industry, and art. In a speech delivered at Dresden, Naumann had the opportunity to put forward his ideas. One idea from this speech is of particular significance because of its relation to the later program of the Werkbund: "Many people do not have the money to hire artists, and consequently many wares are going to be mass-produced; for this great problem, the only solution is to infuse mass production with meaning and spirit (*"Künstlerisch zu durchgeistigen"*) by artistic means."<sup>25</sup>

It is difficult to determine who was the prime mover of the Deutsche Werkbund. Theodor Heuss, who served as the business manager of the Werkbund after World War I and who was the President of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1959, gave principal credit for the founding of the Werkbund to Friedrich Naumann in cooperation with the Dresden furniture manufacturer Karl Schmidt. Heuss also asserted that it was these men who sought out Dr. Wolf Dohrn to be the first manager of the Werkbund.<sup>26</sup>

These assertions are something of an oversimplification since many men were involved in the creation of the institution, and some credence certainly should be given to those who credited Hermann Muthesius with "fathering" the Werkbund.<sup>27</sup> Muthesius's criticism of the low standard of the craft objects produced by established German artisans,<sup>28</sup> his international interests, and his advocacy of new technology while holding the position of Advisor on Applied Arts to the Prussian government brought him under fire from the protective Alliance for German Applied Arts. At a meeting of the Alliance in Düsseldorf in June, 1907, Peter Bruckmann, a silverware producer from Heilbronn;<sup>29</sup> Dohrn, an associate of Schmidt at the Dresdener Werkstätten; and the Viennese essayist J. A. Lux sided with Muthesius and withdrew from the meeting and from the Alliance.<sup>30</sup> Fritz Schumacher also came under attack for having used public funds while organizing the Dresden Kunstgewerbe exhibition in such a way as to favor ideological and artistic issues as opposed to immediate economic concerns. The defenders of Muthesius and Schumacher now represented a position which was under attack and lacked an organization. They claimed that artistic, social, and economic conditions would be improved if there were a considered, artistically conceived relationship between any product and the conditions of its production. This relationship would be different, but no less important, if machine production were involved.

The Dresden exhibition of 1906 was the focus for many energetic men who shared common ideas and who, after the Muthesius affair, found themselves in need of an official body. It was Muthesius apparently who took the initiative in bringing together twelve artists and twelve firms involved in the applied arts.<sup>31</sup> The artists were Peter Behrens (Berlin), Theodor Fischer (Stuttgart), Josef Hoffman (Vienna), Wilhelm Kreis (Düsseldorf), Max Läger (Karlsruhe), Adelbert Niemeyer (Munich), Josef Olbrich (Darmstadt), Bruno Paul (Berlin), Richard Riemerschmid (Munich), J. J. Scharvogel (Darmstadt), Paul Schultze-Naumburg (Saaleck), and Fritz Schumacher (Dresden). The producers were Peter Bruckmann und Söhne, silverware fabricators, Heilbronn; Deutsche (formerly Dresdener) Werkstätten für Handwerkskunst, Schmidt's furniture fac-

66 tory in Dresden and later in Hellerau; Eugen Diederichs, a publisher operating out of Jena and Leipzig; Gebrüder Klingspor, type foundry from Offenbach am Main; Kunst-druckerei Künstlerbund Karlsruhe, printers from Karlsruhe; Poeschel und Trepte, printers from Leipzig; Saalecker Werkstätten, a firm which dealt mostly in interior furnishings, from Saaleck near Bad Kösen; Vereinigte Werkstätten für Kunst und Handwerk München, interior furnishings and crafts; Theophil Müller's Werkstätten für deutschen Hausrat, household furnishings, Dresden; Wiener Werkstätten, Vienna; Wilhelm und Co., workshop for lighting fixtures and iron and bronze work, Munich; and Gottlob Wunderlich, weavers, Waldkirchen i. S.

All of the above received invitations in August 1907 for the founding convention to be held in Munich on October 5-6, 1907. At the celebration of the founding, in the hall of the Vier Jahreszeiten ("Four Seasons"), Muthesius was to have delivered the principal exhortatory speech, but found it inadvisable because of his political position. The duty fell to Schumacher, who was elated and deeply moved when his speech found "a natural echo" in this assembly of "all the German artists allied with the new constructive and decorative endeavors." His speech had as its main theme the need for the drawing together of the inventive and the executive powers:

"The time has come when Germany should cease to look upon the artist as a man who more or less harmlessly follows his inclination, and rather see in him one of the important powers for the ennobling of work, and thereby to ennoble the entire inner life of the Land and to make the Land victorious in the competition among peoples. For in this competition only those values that cannot be imitated will prove decisive in the turn of events. Everything that can be imitated soon loses its value on the international market; only the qualitative values which spring from the inexpressible inner powers of a harmonious culture are inimitable. And consequently there exists in aesthetic power also the highest economic value.

"After a century devoted to technique and thought, we see the next project which Germany has to fulfill is that of the reconquest of a harmonious culture.

"In this pioneer work we unite ourselves, not as men who

are proud of what they have already achieved, but rather as men who are proud of what they attempt."<sup>32</sup>

At the end of this meeting, at the suggestion of Richard Riemerschmid, the entire assembly, carrying roses, went in procession through the streets of Munich to pay homage to Adolf Hildebrand whose sixtieth birthday it happened to be.<sup>33</sup> While this event is anecdotal, it seems to have sealed an occasion which had been experienced as the triumphant conclusion of years of endeavor and as a rededication to a new pursuit of the elevated cultural goals which these men had previously sought under a now discredited program.

The new program, as expressed in the articles adopted by the Werkbund, was the following:

- 1) the encouragement of the fruitful cooperation among art, industry and craft for the enhancement of the quality of work;
- 2) a common position of craftsmen and artists in all the questions which concern their relationship to the State;
- 3) the establishment of a center for professional development and the literary advocacy of the goals of the Werkbund;
- 4) the obligation of each member to participate in the achievement of excellent work;
- 5) the initiation of action for the increased understanding of quality work;
- 6) a greater influence on the education of the young and above all on training in the crafts;
- 7) a greater influence on trade, on the conditions of bidding, and on the conditions of expertise.<sup>34</sup>

At Munich, and regularly thereafter, Naumann offered inspiring speeches and documents, including the first programmatic booklet of the Werkbund, *Deutsche Gewerkekunst*. Under the managership of Dohrn and then Alfons Paquet and Ernst Jäckh, the Werkbund enjoyed notable growth and success in its programs of "Quality Work," "Infusion of Meaning and Spirit into Work," and "Thorough Forming of All Things."<sup>35</sup>

However, the conditions of 1907 were even more propitious for the personal contribution of Peter Behrens. Only a few

24 AEG Turbine Factory, the side toward the factory grounds. Karl Bernhard with Peter Behrens (1908-1909).

25 Mannesmannwerke main office building, Düsseldorf. Peter Behrens (1911-1912).



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68 days before Behrens participated in the founding of the Deutscher Werkbund in Munich, he and his family had moved from Düsseldorf to Berlin, where his new duties as artistic advisor to the AEG began on the first of October.

Behrens's most renowned work, the AEG Turbine Factory (see fig. 18) was in fact a composite effort with the engineer, Karl Bernhard. Holding to his premise that the engineer's rational problem-solving is a naturalistic and pseudo-aesthetic discipline, Behrens participated in the design of the building through a division of responsibilities rather than through a true collaboration. Behrens designed the public, street facades of the building, incorporating modern engineering construction into forms which he conceived through the adaptation of established architectural conventions to the new problem of representing modern industrial enterprise. In these facades, engineering and modern techniques were brought together in the service of a traditional representational art that now was addressing itself to a new problem. In the long side elevation facing the factory grounds (fig. 24) and in the interior of the factory, the engineer was given virtually free reign—achieving a quite different result.<sup>36</sup>

In the Turbine Factory as in other work for the AEG, Behrens learned to work successfully in industry without surrendering his anti-positivist position. Even his changing attitude toward technology was not one of acceptance but of accommodation. For Behrens, art and science were still distinct, and art was foremost culturally. But the writings of Alois Riegl had persuaded Behrens to accept the lawfulness of art as related not only to certain “constructive (geometric, arithmetic, formal)<sup>37</sup> ideals (as exemplified in the conventions of the buildings of his Düsseldorf period), but also to the epoch in which the art was created, to ‘the rhythm of the time’.”<sup>38</sup> It was this concept of a rhythm of the time, of a *Zeitgeist*, that allowed Behrens to submit to science and technology on the level of historical experience without fully accepting them in his ideal understanding of culture. Behrens might have said, the client's cosmology (in this case, the devotion of modern society to science and technology) is both significant and unavoidable, but it is not central to the creative process. Whereas theorists whom

Behrens deprecated as “materialists” (especially Gottfried Semper) accepted material and technical factors as inherent in problems of production and human environment, Riegl's *Kunstwollen* and the concept of *Zeitgeist* acted as filters by means of which an autocratic will could successfully modify material and technical circumstances.

Thus Behrens acknowledged that the most imposing manifestations of his time, those phenomena that established the “rhythm of the time,” were the works of modern engineering.<sup>39</sup> The artist, according to Behrens, could not ignore the technological heart of the *Zeitgeist*. At the same time, art could not simply submit to technology, whose currently prevalent role was time-bound. The role of monumental art, upon which all other art forms depended, was to give timeless, lawful, and ideal form to such general but time-bound characteristics of a particular age.<sup>40</sup> Finally, in view of this contemporary need to give artistic form to the accomplishments of technology, modern industry had the opportunity to serve as both the patron and the medium for the establishment of new values of national significance.<sup>41</sup>

Behrens's speech at the dedication of his office building for the Mannesmann industry in Düsseldorf (fig. 25) in 1912<sup>42</sup> makes explicit his understanding of architecture in the service of historically determined power. The architect's greatest responsibility was to design the building type forms for those individuals or institutions that provided or represented the political and economic power of their time. For Behrens, it was modern industry in alliance with central government that was the prime agency of that power at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its factories and office buildings therefore had to be the architectural touchstones of their age—receiving adequate representational form through the imaginative intersection of architectural convention and new conditions.

In summary, a common theme runs through Behrens's work and writing of these years. While he maintains his mistrust of an analytic, positivistic science and technology and the kind of civilization that he conceived such a base would yield, he nevertheless accommodates himself and his

work to modern industry, partially through his intimations of a new synthesis but much more through his notion of artistic will as an agent of forces shaped by historical determinism. Industrial production and its intricate fusing with political power were the realities that had to be served in the face of material and social constraints.

Though often highly diluted, Behrens's historical determinism and the consequent character of his practice dominated the main thrust of the Modern Movement and even its attenuations in conventional practice today. For all that Behrens' limited position stemmed from the idea of a will to art ("*Kunstwollen*") fulfilling its historical destiny, it has to be acknowledged that the position defined by Behrens and the AEG and the Deutscher Werkbund was the first extensive and well regarded union of art and modern industry. In retrospect, what seems strongest in this position was the mistrust of a narrow, positivistic science and technology. However, the subsequent German assimilation of the object of this mistrust, by asserting and incorporating it as part of the course of historical necessity, defused both its critical and creative potential. The inherent critique became complicit resignation. The alternative to conceiving a non-positivistic science ("*Wissenschaft*," in the inclusive sense of this German word), one which would have permitted a critical and mutually contributive discourse among art, industry, and society, runs as an aspirational vein throughout this post-Nietzschean epoch, occasionally achieving tentative formulation, as in the writings of Behrens's Belgian colleague Henry van de Velde. A sound construction of that position and the writing of its history are on-going but unrealized projects.

*This essay is adapted from chapter five of my doctoral dissertation, "Peter Behrens and the New Architecture of Germany: 1900–1917" (Columbia University, 1968). A summary of Behrens's early career, chapter two of the dissertation, was published as "Peter Behrens's Changing Concept of Life as Art," Architectural Design, XXXIX, February 1969, pp. 72–78.*

*It is a special pleasure to record my gratitude to Prof. Arnold Schürer for his many academic and personal kindnesses during my stay in Germany.*

*In addition to the important aid from Prof. Schürer, who was then in the employ of the AEG in Frankfurt, I also gratefully acknowledge the excellent, often warmly personal cooperation which I received from AEG-Telefunken, in the persons of Hermann Lanzke, Paul Borchardt, Herr Stärke, and Fräulein Ursula Aldag in Berlin; Peter Sieber in Frankfurt; and, more recently, Dr. Walter Feill, Miroslav Šula, Peter Obst, Herr Toepfer, and Herr Raddatz in Berlin.*

1. The first section of this essay is adapted from a fuller discussion in my dissertation and will not be documented here. See dissertation references in note at head of these notes.

2. The exact circumstances of Behrens's employment by the AEG are not clear; most of the AEG archive was lost in the war. One often sees the president of the AEG, Emil Rathenau, credited with hiring Behrens; but equally often the credit goes to Baurat Paul Jordan, the manager of the huge Humboldtthain factory complex of the AEG and a member of the board of directors of the corporation. P. J. Cremers asserts that the credit goes to Jordan, not Rathenau; *Peter Behrens* (Essen: Baedeker, 1928), p. 6.

The industrial designer Arnold Schürer, who worked for the AEG for some years and who studied Behrens, was not able to discover the exact conditions of Behrens's employment. In personal exchange, Schürer suggested the following: It would appear that the friendship of Jordan and Behrens begins sufficiently early that it probably was Jordan who initiated the matter by introducing Behrens to Rathenau. Since Rathenau was known as an open person, and since Behrens came to have the AEG position, the two men must have entered into a good relationship. This is indicated all the more by the fact that only Rathenau could have given Behrens so much power and enabled him to work in divisions of the AEG which were outside Jordan's jurisdiction.

One should note, however, that as early as the 1890's Emil Rathenau's son Walther (1867–1922) and Behrens shared a number of common friends in the arts—especially in the *Pan* circle. Walther, himself a highly influential director of the AEG, may have introduced Behrens to his father, though Walther Rathenau's published letters and essays seem to give no clarification of the matter. The city of Berlin, W. Rathenau and Behrens's future had already been juxtaposed by J. Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* (Stuttgart: J. Hoffmann, 1904), p. 725. There is a very sizable literature on the AEG, but see especially: Karl Wilhelm, *Die AEG* (Berlin: Widder, 1931); a 1933 manuscript published as *50 Jahre AEG* (Berlin: AEG, 1956); and *75 Jahre AEG* (Berlin and Frankfurt a.M.: AEG, 1958).

On Emil Rathenau, see the biography by Felix Pinner (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft m.b.H., 1918).

On Behrens's move from Düsseldorf to Berlin, see: F. H. Ehmcke, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Aug. 23, 1907 (republished in his *Persön-*



- 70 *liches und Sachliches* [Berlin: Reckendorf, 1928], pp. 5ff.); E. Schur, *Dekorative Kunst*, Jg. XI (Oct. 1907), p. 48; and R. Breuer, *Werkkunst*, III (Feb. 9, 1908), pp. 145-49.
- The best recent discussion, with extensive illustrations, is Tillmann Buddensieg and Henning Rogge's "Peter Behrens and the AEG Architecture," *Lotus*, 12 (Sept. 1976), pp. 90-127.
3. Photos from the AEG Archiv, Berlin. Data from Berlin, AEG, *50 Jahre AEG*, pp. 263-64. Such artificial waterfalls were already established as exhibits of power transmission, having been first used by Hippolyte Fontaine for the Gramme exhibit at the Vienna Exhibition of 1873 (three-quarter mile transmission) and again by Marcel Deprez at the Munich Exposition of 1882 (57 km). See W. James King, "The Development of Electrical Technology in the 19th Century: 3. The Early Arc Light and Generator," *United States National Museum Bulletin 228* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1962), pp. 385-390.
4. Such printing relied heavily on historical precedent (fig. 15a); an example at a large scale is provided by the stained glass window installed behind the pump at the 1891 Frankfurt exhibition discussed above. The window spelled out the name of the AEG in an ornamental nineteenth century antique type face enclosed in a band and strapwork frame based on German Renaissance models; illustrated *Dr. Felix Deutsch zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin: AEG, 1928), p. 23.
5. Krefeld, Kaiser-Wilhelm Museum, *Linie und Form* (Krefeld: Kramer und Baum, 1904).
6. This and the following topic are the subjects of other chapters in my dissertation; they are only briefly treated in this essay.
7. See note 2.
8. Major works by Walther Rathenau: *Reflexionen* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1908); *Zur Kritik der Zeit* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1912); *Zur Mechanik des Geistes* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1913); *Von kommenden Dingen* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1917; translated as *In Days to Come*, New York: Knopf, 1921); *Die neue Gesellschaft* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1921; translated as *The New Society*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921).
- On Walther Rathenau, see the biography by Graf Harry Kessler (Berlin: H. Klemm, 1928; New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930); James Joll, *Three Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: Pantheon, 1961); Fred L. Polak, *The Image of the Future*, 2 vols. (New York: Oceana, 1961), I, pp. 341ff.
- It seems clear that Arnheim in Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* (originally published in 1930) is modeled on Walther Rathenau. It is at least a pleasurable and enlightening way to critically observe the issues raised by the protagonists of the present essay.
9. Quoted in Kessler, *Walther Rathenau*, p. 107. This same idea appears at the beginning of Frank Lloyd Wright's remarkable lecture given in Chicago in 1901, "The Art and Craft of the Machine" (reprinted in full for the first time by Edgar Kaufmann and Ben Raeburn, eds., *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings* [New York: Meridian, 1960], pp. 55-73). Many of Wright's proposals, for example the necessity for artists to work with manufacturers, are highly suggestive of the concerns of Behrens, Rathenau, and members of the Deutscher Werkbund around 1907; but I know of no evidence for their awareness of Wright's lecture.
10. *In Days to Come*, p. 44.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
12. Carl Widmer, "Handwerk und Maschinenarbeit," *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, N.F. XX (Dec. 1908), pp. 49-51.
13. Behrens, in *Volkswirtschaftliche Blätter*, IX (Aug. 27, 1910), pp. 265-66.
14. In addition to the article in the preceding note, Behrens also wrote: "Was ist monumentale Kunst," *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, N.F. XX (Dec. 1908), pp. 46, 48; a contribution to "Die Zukunft unserer Kultur," *Frankfurter Zeitung* (April 14, 1909), pp. 1-2; "Professor Peter Behrens über Ästhetik in der Industrie," *AEG-Zeitung*, XI (June 1909), pp. 5-7; "Kunst und Technik," *Elektrotechnische Zeitschrift*, XXXI (June 2, 1910), pp. 552-55, also published in *Der Industriebau*, I (Aug. 15, 1910), pp. 176-180, and (Sept. 15, 1910), supplement pp. LXXXI-LXXXV; *Werkkunst*, VI (1910-11), pp. 124-25, 131-33; "The Aesthetics of Industrial Buildings," *Scientific American Supplement*, LXXXVI (Aug. 23, 1913), pp. 120-21; and especially "Über den Zusammenhang des Baukünstlerischen Schaffens mit der Technik," in Berlin, Kongress für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft, 1913, *Bericht* (Stuttgart: 1914), pp. 251-265.
15. Behrens' concept of monumental art is reconstructed from Lindner, *Neue Hamburger Zeitung* (April 9, 1908), and Behrens, *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, N.F. XX.
16. This discussion is based on Behrens, *Frankfurter Zeitung* (April 14, 1909).
17. G. Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder Praktische Aesthetik* (2 vols., 2nd ed., Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1878-79; first published 1860, 1863).
18. A. Riegl, *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (Vienna: Oesterr. archäologischen Institut, 1901).
19. This discussion is based on a lecture given by Behrens at the eighteenth annual convention of the Verband Deutscher Elektrotechniker in Braunschweig, May 26-27, 1910. See Behrens, *Elektrotechnische Zeitschrift*, XXXI.
20. Behrens, *Elektrotechnische Zeitschrift*, XXXI, p. 555. The original text is as follows:  
Wenn wir nun zugeben müssen, dass Kunst und Technik ihrem Wesen nach wohl etwas Verschiedenes sind, so ist die Ansicht nicht minder berechtigt, dass sie beide dennoch zusammengehören. Die Kunst soll nicht mehr als Privatsache aufgefasst werden, der man sich nach Belieben bedient. Wir wollen keine Ästhetik, die sich in romantischer Träumerei ihre Regeln selbst sucht, sondern die in der vollen Gesetzmäßigkeit des rauschenden Lebens steht. Aber wir wollen auch keine Technik, die ihren Weg für sich geht, sondern die für das Kunstwollen der Zeit offenen Sinn hat. Deutsche Kunst und Technik werden so zu einem Ziele Wirken: zur Macht des deutschen Landes, die sich dadurch zu erkennen gibt, dass ein reiches materielles Leben durch geistig verfeinerte Form geadelt ist.
21. E.g., J. Lessing, "Neue Wege," *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, N.F. VI (Oct. 1894), pp. 1-5; *idem.*, "Das Kunstgewerbe als Beruf," *Volkswirtschaftliche Zeitfragen*, No. 97 (Berlin: L. Simion, 1891).
22. F. Naumann, "Kunst im Zeitalter der Maschine," *Kunstwart*, XVII (July 1904), pp. 317-[327].
23. The two earlier exhibitions had been in Munich in 1876 and 1888 and thus had been part of that understanding of handicraft against which the artists of the late 1890's had rebelled. The

decision to sponsor a third national crafts exhibition was made by the Dresdener Kunstgewerbeverein in the spring of 1904. See Anon., *Die Raumkunst in Dresden 1906* (Berlin: E. Wasmuth, n.d.).

24. A statement from the catalogue of the exhibition, quoted in: H. Rodewald, "Die III. deutsche Kunstgewerbeausstellung Dresden 1906 und ihre soziale Bedeutung," *Monatsschrift für christliche Sozialreform*, XXIX (1907), pp. 22-23, 156-170.

25. F. Naumann, *Kunst und Industrie* (Berlin, n.d.); also published in *Kunstwart*, XX (Oct. 1906). The first yearbook of the Deutscher Werkbund bore the title *Die Durchgeistigung der deutschen Arbeit* (Jena: Diederichs, 1912).

On Dresden 1906, see the previous footnotes and: *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, N.F. XVII (June-Sept. 1906), *passim*.; F. Schumacher, *Stufen des Lebens* (3rd ed., Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1949), pp. 312ff.; *idem.*, *Kunstwart*, XIX (July-Aug. 1906), pp. 347-49, 396-400, 458-462; E. Kalkschmidt, *Deutschland*, V (Oct. 1906), pp. 50-63.

26. T. Heuss, *Friedrich Naumann* (Stuttgart and Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1937), pp. 296-300; *idem.*, "Notizen und Exkurse zur Geschichte des Deutschen Werkbundes," in H. Eckstein, *50 Jahre Deutscher Werkbund* (Berlin and Frankfurt a. M.: Metzner, 1958), pp. 19ff., where Heuss also notes that the archive of the Werkbund was lost in a bombing raid on Berlin in World War II. (Since this note was originally written, the Werkbund-Archiv has been founded in Berlin. To its first *Jahrbuch* of 1972, Sebastian Müller contributed "Zur Vorgeschichte und Gründungsgeschichte des Deutschen Werkbundes," pp. 23-53.)

27. R. Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London: Architectural Press, 1960), p. 68; K. Scheffler, *Die fetten und die mageren Jahre* (Leipzig and Munich: P. List, 1946), p. 42.

As early as 1902, Scheffler himself had suggested that the prostituted industries be opposed by the unification of craftsmen into their own industries, a proposal that bore some resemblance to the approximately contemporary "workshops" of Vienna, Munich, Dresden, etc. See *Dekorative Kunst*, X (July 1902), p. 381. F. Schumacher, *Stufen des Lebens*, pp. 329-330, would seem to share the credit for the Werkbund idea with Schmidt, Dohrn and Muthesius.

28. Muthesius, "Die Bedeutung des Kunstgewerbes," *Dekorative Kunst*, X (Feb. 1907), pp. 177-192.

29. Friedrich Nauman was elected to the Reichstag from the city of Heilbronn from 1907 to 1918.

30. Heuss, *Friedrich Naumann*, p. 297; Eckstein, *50 Jahre Deutscher Werkbund*, p. 8.

31. F. Schumacher, *Stufen des Lebens*, p. 330.

32. Schumacher's speech is published in part in *Die Form*, VII (Nov. 1932), pp. 329-331. See also Schumacher, *Stufen des Lebens*, pp. 329-331 and 523-24.

33. Schumacher, *Stufen des Lebens*, p. 331.

34. E. Frölicher, *Monatsschrift für christliche Sozialreform*, XXXVI (1914), p. 20.

35. "Qualitäts-Arbeit," "Durchgeistigung der Arbeit," and "Durchformung aller Dinge." On the Deutscher Werkbund, see: H. Eckstein, *50 Jahre Deutscher Werkbund* (Berlin and Frankfurt a. M.: Metzner, 1958); T. Heuss, *Was ist Qualität?* (Tübingen and Stuttgart: R. Wunderlich, 1951); P. Bruckmann et al., special

number on founding of the Werkbund, *Die Form*, VII (Oct. 1932), pp. 297ff.; W. Riezler, *Die Kulturarbeit des Deutschen Werkbundes* (E. Jäckh, ed., *Weltkultur und Weltpolitik*, German Series No. 7; Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1916); H. Muthesius, "Der Werkbundgedanke. Seine Grundlagen," *Deutsche Politik*, I (Mar. 3, 1916), pp. 459-467.

See also the *Jahrbücher* of the Werkbund, published 1912ff., and of the Werkbund-Archiv, 1972ff.

For a critical assessment of the Werkbund from an interesting source, see A. Loos, "Die Überflussigen," *März*, II (Aug. 1908), pp. 185-87. Loos's basic point is that artists should be free of applied work and, perhaps even more important, practical objects should be free of the artist's "cultural" intrusion.

36. Karl Bernhard, "Die neue Halle für die Turbinenfabrik der AEG in Berlin," *Zeitschrift des Vereines deutscher Ingenieure*, LV (Sept. 30, 1911), pp. 1625-1631, and (Oct. 7, 1911), pp. 1673-1682; *idem.*, "Die neue Halle der Turbinenfabrik der AEG in Berlin," *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung*, XXX (Jan. 15, 1910), pp. 25-29.

37. Behrens, as quoted in A. Lindner, "Peter Behrens in Hamburg," *Neue Hamburger Zeitung* (April 9, 1908), p. 2.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Behrens, *Scientific American Supplement*, LXXVI, p. 120, a brief version of Behrens's thoughts on "art and technology," poorly translated. See note 14 above.

40. Lindner, *Neue Hamburger Zeitung* (April 9, 1908), p. 1.

41. Behrens, *Scientific American Supplement*, LXXVI, p. 121.

42. Düsseldorf, Mannesmannröhren-Werke, *Zur Erinnerung an die Einweihung des Verwaltungsgebäudes der Mannesmannröhren-Werke in Düsseldorf, 10 December 1912* (Düsseldorf: Mannesmann, 1912); Behrens address also as "Administration Buildings for Industrial Plants," *American Architect*, CXXVIII (Aug. 26, 1925), pp. 167-174.

#### Figure Credits

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7 Courtesy the author. Plan redrawn by Cynthia Howard.

8, 9, 11, 15, 17-20, 24 Courtesy AEG-Telefunken, Berlin, Braunschweig, and Frankfurt.

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22 Reprinted from Fritz Hoeber, *Peter Behrens* (Munich: G. Müller und E. Reutsch, 1913).



History

The Dialectics of the Avant-garde: Piranesi and Eisenstein

Mauro Tafuri

*Translation by Marlene Barsoum and Liviu Dimitriu*



74 In April 1939 Sergei Eisenstein wrote to Jay Leyda: "I expect to finish a most entertaining article, 'El Greco and Cinema'! . . . Imagine some twenty-six thousand words (!) solely to demonstrate how much cinematography there is in the art of that old Spanish master! . . . *c'est piquant!*" The completion of the article seemed to have been particularly laborious as, in August 1941, the director wrote again to Leyda: "I am bringing to an end, finally, the article on El Greco. I am also translating into English my long article on Griffith and the history of montage in the different arts. I will probably add an investigation of the idea of the foreground in the history of art."

Eisenstein's curiosity about the history of art, as he continuously explored it in the search of historical justifications for his cinematographic poetics, was certainly not new. It is especially significant, however, that he specifically insisted on including among the precursors of his new film language figures like El Greco and Piranesi.<sup>1</sup> This is not to deny that these two personalities have presented themes hitherto too easily assimilated into the theory of montage, but rather to stress the type of operation which Eisenstein carries out in analyzing a painting such as El Greco's *View and Plan of Toledo* (1604–1614, see frontispiece), or in breaking up and reassembling the Piranesian *Prisons*. Eisenstein's text on Piranesi, which was published in Italian with the first version of this essay, is, in fact, connected to a previous text—surely the one quoted in the letter of Leyda—which has also been published in the third volume of the Russian language version of the complete works of Eisenstein. These two texts are related by a unique technique of critical analysis based on what the director calls "explosion" or "ecstatic transfiguration."

El Greco's *View and Plan of Toledo* and Piranesi's *Dark Prison*—works to which Eisenstein applies his analyses—are, in other words, "put in motion": they are made to react dynamically as a result of an *ideal explosion* of the formal tensions embedded within them. We will briefly examine the articulations of such a singular example of a "critical operative method." First, however, it should be noted that both this method of analysis and Eisenstein's theory of montage deny any artistic solutions based on continuity.

Indeed, Eisenstein himself asserts that "the montage is the stage of the explosion of the movie frame"; moreover, in his "Lezioni di Regia," he adds that "when the tension within a movie frame reaches the climax and cannot increase any further, then the frame itself explodes, fragmenting itself into two pieces of montage."<sup>2</sup> Thus, as far as Eisenstein is concerned, the movie frame and the montage cannot be counterposed as two separate spheres of operation but are considered stages of one and the same process which manifests itself as a "dialectic jump from quantity to quality."<sup>3</sup>

One could, for example, point out the affinity between such a theory of montage and the theory of the unity of the literary work seen as the *dynamic integration* of its components, elaborated by Tynianov after 1924. But for our purposes it is more interesting for now to follow the way in which, on the basis of these prior considerations, Eisenstein forces the works of El Greco and especially those of Piranesi to lose their natural autonomy, to come out of their isolation, to enter into and become part of an ideal series deprived of continuity: to become, in other words, simple frames of a *cinematographic phrase*.

It is therefore of the utmost interest, in the specific case of Piranesi, to analyze the contributions which the critical method of the Soviet director is able to make given the singular relationship which connects that eighteenth century artist to Eisenstein, the heir of the historical avant-garde.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that Eisenstein reads the entire series of the *Prisons* as discontinuous fragments of a single sequence, based on the technique of "intellectual montage": based, that is, following his own definition, on a conflicting "juxtaposition of intellectual stimuli which accompany each other."<sup>5</sup> The explosion which he imposes on the architectural elements envisioned by Piranesi in the *Dark Prison* cruelly force the tendencies of the original etching. Eisenstein pretends that a telluric force, born of the reaction between the image and its critical contemplation, turns upside down all the pieces of the Piranesian *Prisons*, setting them in motion, agitating them convulsively, reducing

them to fragments which are awaiting an entirely new composition. It is difficult not to see, in such a mental operation, what the Soviet director calls “ecstatic transfiguration,” a technique of analysis evolving from the complex lessons of Russian Futurism: in this sense, the elements of the eighteenth century etching undergo a true and veritable reification; they are reduced, at least in the beginning, to an alphabet deprived of structure.

But there is something more. With the explosion literally provoked by Eisenstein, we find ourselves in the face of what the Russian formalists had called *priem*, a “semantic distortion”: that is, the “material elements” of the Piranesian composition undergo a change of meaning, due to the violent alteration of the mutual relations which originally connected them. And then one must recall that for Shklovsky, in particular, semantic distortion had as its own function the retrieval of the original function of language, the purity of communication. At this point, the violence imagined by Eisenstein to be inflicted on the *Prisons* of Piranesi can be interpreted as an attempt to make the etching itself speak, beyond the usual significations attributed to it. In other words, the entry of Eisenstein into the world of the eighteenth century seems to have had similar effects to those of Chaplin—“Lord Scompiglio”—for the Russian cinematographic avant-gardes on environments which seems to have been built precisely to be upset by the uproarious gags of the actor. But let us proceed in our analysis by enumerating the motifs which emerge from a reading of Eisenstein’s text.

First of all, it must be remarked that the *explosion* of the elements of the *Dark Prison* takes, in the words of Eisenstein himself, the form of a *dissolution*, which signifies that the elements themselves are read by Eisenstein as forms in a state of potential movement, even though they are artificially connected. The technique of “ecstatic transfiguration” therefore accelerates that potential movement, achieves it, and “frees it from the resistance of forms.”

This occurs because in the eighteenth century etching the forms have already reached a fluid state. Eisenstein remarks accurately that, in the *Dark Prison*, the persistence

of a rigorous structuration is accompanied by a fragmentation of the means of expression. It is precisely this fragmentation which attracts the attention of the Soviet director. It is precisely this collision between the laws relating to the structure of the organism and the disintegration of its formal elements which he precipitates by way of his imaginary “explosion.”

Finally, in the course of his analytical operation, Eisenstein utilizes another, final, model. Thus, it can be said that the idea of “setting in motion” the *Dark Prison*, of provoking in this work a “rebellion of the objects,” a “displacement of the sign”—according to Shklovsky’s metaphor<sup>6</sup>—originates precisely from the existence of such a final model. The confrontation between the *Dark Prison* and the first edition of the *Prisons* suggests to Eisenstein the direction in which the fragments and the residues freed by his imagined explosion tend to converge.

In other words, Eisenstein identifies in the youthful etchings of Piranesi nothing less than a hermetic enclosure of formal values in which are present the seeds of the later much more substantial innovations of the mature Piranesi. It is such an enclosure that he attempts to unravel. With the explosion of the *Dark Prison*, he does nothing less than apply, in a violent and totally intellectual manner, the same procedure adopted by Piranesi himself in the composition of the *Capricious Inventions of Prisons* and in the second edition of these very same *Prisons*. Does Eisenstein not also recognize with acute critical intelligence that in the *Capricious Inventions* Piranesi dissolves not only the singular forms but also their objecthood? (More precisely—adds Eisenstein—“the objects are dissolved like physical elements of representation.”)

Thus starting from an already defined result, Eisenstein extracts the static photogram represented for him by the *Dark Prison* from the *open sequence* of the Piranesian *Prisons*. Or, better, Eisenstein forces this ideal photogram to participate in the dynamic and thematic continuity that characterizes the *Prisons* themselves. The “ecstatic transfiguration” provoked by the explosion has thus this first meaning: to fill in the spatial void existing between the

76 etching of 1743 and the first series of *Capricious Inventions* is to multiply the potential significations of the *Dark Prison*. Eisenstein—in this case, just as in that of the El Greco painting—carries out a critical operation in every way related to that proposed by the *nouvelle critique* of Barthes and Doubrovsky. The Piranesian work appears to Eisenstein like a pure, many layered material, susceptible to an operation which dismembers and multiplies its formal components.

What Eisenstein calls the “inoffensiveness” of the *Dark Prison*, its static ambiguity, is read by him as a kind of challenge. The criticism that revolts against itself thus has to take the form of an act of violence. In this sense, the Russian director does not hesitate—to use the expression of Roland Barthes<sup>7</sup>—to “dissociate the meanings” of Piranesi’s etchings, to superimpose “on the initial language of the work a second language, that is to say, a coherent system of signs,” introduced as a “*controlled* transformation, submitted to optical conditions: it must transform *everything* that is the object of its reflection; it must transform everything in the same direction according to determined rules.”

It is of little importance that Barthes or Doubrovsky deny that his critical method is immediately related to the formalist tradition.<sup>8</sup> Neither Eisenstein nor Barthes undertakes any criticism which consists of a true and appropriate *multiplication* of the *ambiguity* of the text under consideration; or, principally, of the ambiguity embedded in the organization of the original linguistic material. What Eisenstein explodes in the *Dark Prison* is the false equilibrium imposed by Piranesi on the contrast between the structure of the form and the dilution of the objects. It is this *false equilibrium* that Eisenstein’s aesthetic explosion takes as a target. His criticism of Piranesi tends to expose, in the analyzed work, the dynamic valences hidden in it. Criticism bridges the neutral space that separates the *Dark Prison* from the two successive editions of the *Prisons of Invention*.

The “semantic distortion” achieved from reading Eisenstein assumes a climactic form. But one must go further. Eisen-

stein by straining to the point of paradox the tendency toward formal distortion inherent in the work of Piranesi causes the formal organization of the etching to react under the pressure of the “rebellion of forms.”

The critique on the work therefore becomes an operation on the work itself. But, it is evident that this is possible only if there exists an affinity between the context of the work and the language of the critic, in our case, a critic particularly interested in reading dynamically the organization of the Piranesian forms.

It will, therefore, not be difficult to recognize in Eisenstein’s critique of the *Dark Prison* something quite related to the critique Eisenstein addressed in the late 1920’s and early 1930’s, to the discontinuous montage of Dziga Vertov, to the epic montage of Pudovkin, to the technique of parallel action of Griffith, and to the concept of the frame as the invariable letter of the alphabet.<sup>9</sup> Eisenstein wrote in 1929: “The movie frame is far from being an *element* of montage. It is a *cell* of montage, like cells which, in dividing, generate a phenomenon of a different order—the organism or the embryo—such that at the other end of the dialectical leap of the movie frame, we find the montage. But what characterizes the montage and hence its role as a cell or movie frame? The collision—the conflict of two opposing pieces. The conflict. The collision. I have in front of my eyes a torn and yellowed sheet of paper. Here is a mysterious remark: this is the outline ‘Relationship-P’ ‘Collision-E’ of a dispute on the subject of montage between ‘P’ (Pudovkin) and ‘E’ (myself).”<sup>10</sup>

But this is not all. In the evolution of his theoretical research, Eisenstein eventually considers the form of the montage to be the structure of the image, and the same montage to be the “law of the structure of the object.”<sup>11</sup> The programmed discontinuity of the “montage of attractions” and the entire therapy of shock, on which the historical avant-gardes ranging from Futurism to FEKS<sup>12</sup> were based, are superseded in favor of a completely structural consideration of the work, where, principally, what is recuperated is precisely the concept and value of the *work*. To questions relative to the theory of the place of intellec-

tual work, and of the neopopulist and universalist ideology of the time, which was accompanied by the introduction of the first two Soviet five year plans, Eisenstein answers with his ambiguous synthesis of the avant-garde and realism (and it is hardly necessary to note that by “realism” one does not mean here the restoration of classical laws of structuring which restore to the work its organicity or a totalizing vision of history and of the world).

For our purposes, it is interesting to recognize which of the avant-garde experiences Eisenstein seeks to retain as the most adequate for his research of the years 1930–1940. The principle of montage had always been linked to the theme of activating the public.<sup>13</sup> But after 1928, the theme of the public in the USSR is shorn of all generalities and is related directly to the new functions that the urban proletariat and the peasantry in transformation are called upon to carry out within the regional, economic master plans. The crisis foreseen by Mayakovsky was certainly not unrelated to that material and concrete dimension assumed by ideology between 1924 and 1930. It became impossible to ignore that ideology once it was admitted that intellectual work under the conditions dictated by the October Revolution should be solely a response to a “social mandate.”<sup>14</sup> For Eisenstein, the ideology of the public has to pass through the filter of a new representationalism. As far back as 1934, he acknowledges his debt to the circus, to the variety theater, to foxtrot, to jazz, to Chaplin, confronting in this way materials already appropriated by Futurism and by the expressionist “left” as the foundations of a renewed relationship between aesthetic provocation and the public. But immediately afterward, the same Eisenstein cautions that below “the multi-colored harlequin costume,” stretched to the point that “it would include the whole structure of the program and become the very method of production itself,” there can be found even deeper roots in the tradition of the nineteenth century, for example, the method of cross-montage: the example he quotes is a scene in *Madame Bovary* in which Flaubert alternates between the speech of a public speaker in the piazza below and the dialogue of Emma and Rodolfo.<sup>15</sup>

In Flaubert’s passage, Eisenstein sees “the intersection of

two thematically identical lines, which are *equally pedestrian*. Matter is sublimated to a degree of monumental banality, which culminates in the intersection of sentences and the play of words that depend for their meaning on the juxtaposition of the two lines.”<sup>16</sup>

Precisely in the hidden concept of such an analysis lies the reason for Eisenstein’s interest in the *Prisons*. In Piranesi, in Flaubert, in Da Vinci’s *Deluge*, and in El Greco, the Soviet director reads the synthesis of two opposites: on the one hand, the experimentalism of the avant-garde and of formalism, which in these examples appears to be sanctioned historically; on the other hand, the confirmation of the character of the totality of the text and the salvation of its organicity, the permanence of the (dynamic) structuralism of the form.

But this would appear to negate one of the basic affirmations of the historical avant-garde: the dissolution of the form and the destruction of the very concept of the work of art in favor of a discontinuous montage of empty signs placed in opposition. The ambiguous autonomy of a similar linguistic system, after the first few years of the Five Year Plan, does not function anymore: it is not verified by the new Soviet public familiarized with the ideology of socialist work.

It is not by chance that before permanently abandoning the Constructivist heritage, architects such as Vesnin, Melnikov, and adherents of the Vopra group (Alabian and Mordvinov, primarily) attempted to filter through the proletarian epic various formal structures balanced between neofuturism and the metaphysics of the “novecento.”<sup>17</sup> It is basically the same attempt which was carried out in the Soviet Union in the period 1934–1937 by an architect like André Lurçat, and which finds its best expression in the theorizations of Lukács. For Lukács, just as for Lurçat and for Eisenstein, the problem is to push the bourgeois traditions of form to its extreme consequences. Thus, it is only in a socialist society, in which the individual and the community find the full realization of the organicism denied them by bourgeois society, that tradition can escape the drama in which it was confined by the nineteenth century



78 disagreement between the aspirations for totality and the shipwreck in the realm of cosmic alienation. One must say, therefore, that for Eisenstein the formula of “intellectual cinema” does not at all signify the negation of the internal dynamism of the filmic construction. The organic quality of dynamism: this tension is the point of departure for his demand that “intellectual montage” attract the spectator in order to make him participate in the dynamic process of constructing the image.

Thus emerges one specific reason that brings Eisenstein to analyze the oeuvre of Piranesi. While considering the structure of the *Capricious Inventions* he pauses to note a special contrast existing within it. To the “crisis of the object,” flamboyantly denounced by the eighteenth century engraver for its distortions and spatial interpenetrations, there corresponds a conservation of the figurative character of the single elements. “The stone is moved from the stone,” writes Eisenstein, “but it preserves its own figurative objecthood [“*predmetnost*”] in stone. The stone vault is transformed in the angular trusses, but the figurative nature of both remains unchanged. The objective reality of perspective, the figurative value of the objects themselves will never be compromised.”

Eisenstein acutely reveals in Piranesi the ambiguous dimension attributed to objects so much so that he recognizes in the *Prisons* an unanswered question about the destiny of organic form: “an initial leap beyond the limits of the exact configuration of objects toward the play of the geometric forms that compose them, and we are confronted with a Cézanne . . . one more step forward, and we have the Picasso of the Golden Age. The object-pretext [“*povod*”] has already disappeared.” From Piranesi to Picasso by way of Cézanne: the continuity of the avant-garde is thus securely affirmed. From the Piranesian crisis of the object to its disappearance: but Eisenstein goes further, for he is interested in mirroring in the origins of the avant-garde the crisis of the same avant-garde, its own ultimate “overcoming.” It is no accident that he inserts in his discourse a quick attack on the architecture of Constructivism, accusing it of having underestimated the specific role of the image. *Guernica* was thus to be the work in which, by way

of the recapturing of pathos, the avant-garde *made history*, in which Picasso transcended the entirely subjective moment, and in which “not knowing where to hit those who are responsible for the social disorder of this ‘order of things’, one would hit the ‘things’ and the ‘order’ before suddenly regaining sight and perceiving where and of what the harm and the first cause consisted.” This reading of *Guernica* is of interest for the light it sheds on Eisenstein’s evaluation of the “anticipatory” quality of Piranesi’s work. Piranesi too, just like the Cubist Picasso—read by the director in a questionably destructive and Dadaist light—upsets “the things” and “the order” because he is not capable of attacking directly “the order of things.” But precisely such a formal distortion, such a shattering of norms, such an “architecture as extremity of circumstance” recalls Eisenstein’s interest. For out of such pathos, Eisenstein is afterward constrained to distill the purely technical elements: it is obvious in the way in which he compares the “ascent to nowhere” of the Piranesian staircases to the reiterated motif of Karensky ascending in the movie *October*. But it can also be seen in his paralleling of the typical superimposition and infinite interpenetration of spaces in the *Prisons* to the construction of the frame in *Old And New* or in *Ivan The Terrible*, in which the space of “scenography as such” is set in contrast to the actor who reaches beyond the space of representation.

It is at this point that the dialectic of Eisenstein, in its continuous reshuffling of the cards of theoretical discourse, fails to hide the internal impasses in the political task he claims for the cinema.

Comparing Piranesi’s compositional method with that of the vertical landscapes in Chinese and Japanese painting, Eisenstein recognizes two different ways of achieving a synthesis of opposites. In the case of Oriental art we have, in his opinion, “a quietism which tries very hard to reconcile the opposites by *dissolving them one into the other*.” In the case of Piranesi, we find an “exasperation beyond all limit” of the opposites, so that they are forced “*to transfix one another*” and to carry to an extreme their destructive dynamism.

But once we have identified in the red thread which connects the *Prisons* to *Guernica* such a method of exaggerated contradictions, is the confrontation between formal pathos and ethico-political duty still really justifiable in a Picasso “who had suddenly reacquired his vision”? To what point can subjectivism, involved more than once in the study on Piranesi, be confronted with such a rigorous technique of formal construction as that of “intellectual montage” or “sonorous counterpoint”? Is the structuring through “exasperation” of formal oppositions, as we recognize it in Piranesian precedents, not a perfectly integral part of Russian Formalist theories? Can Piranesi—or El Greco or Flaubert—vouch for the alliance between realism and the avant-garde? Does not the whole proposition appear at this point extremely ambiguous?

These are precisely the questions which Eisenstein avoids. Moreover, one can say that his later essays—including those on the *Prisons*—were written precisely to escape these questions.

In fact, one discovers that the anxious search for historical antecedents capable of justifying the theoretical compromise between representation and autonomy of formal structure tends to be confirmed by the linguistic instruments of the avant-garde, even if Eisenstein is willing to recognize the anachronistic and utopian character of the avant-garde. But one must not be misled by his self-criticism with respect to the abstract character of “intellectual cinema.” In his writing on the *Prisons*, it is clear that his argument *From Piranesi to Guernica* is in reality a closed circle. From *Guernica* he returns to the *Prisons*, to their infinite figurative potential, to their exasperation of conflict, devastation, and fall. It is not simply that Eisenstein himself appears behind the *Prisons*, with all his linguistic baggage, conversing with himself. The avant-garde, deprived of its utopian potential and of its ideology, poised ready to reconquer the fullness of the world, can only fall back on itself; it can only explore the stages of its own development. At best, it may recognize the ambiguity of its own origins.

This is exactly what occurs at the moment in which Eisenstein “completes,” by bringing it up to the present, the

hermetic sequence of the Piranesian *Prisons*. The collision of forms, “forced to wound each other,” belongs both to Piranesi and to the Soviet director, who is searching for a historic continuity capable of giving non-ephemeral, institutional meaning to his own linguistic search. The return to the origins of the avant-garde involves, therefore, the discovery of the ambiguity of language. The formal distortions, the dialectic of order and chaos, the technique of estrangement all reveal themselves in the path from Piranesi to Eisenstein as none other than available “materials.”

It is difficult to escape, in reading the passages where Eisenstein likens his own filmic sequences to Piranesi’s compositional method, Shklovsky’s fundamental statement that art “is not a thing, not a material, but a relationship of materials; and, like any relationship, this one, too, is at degree zero. . . . Playful, tragic, universal, or particular works of art, *the oppositions of one world to another or of a cat to a stone, are all equal among themselves.*”<sup>18</sup> Eisenstein metaphorically declares his allegiance to formalist ideology, choosing as his comparative terms Piranesi’s “negative utopia”: the first accomplished expression, that is to say, of the “dialectic of the avant-garde.”

It is for this reason that the reference to Picasso’s anti-Fascist *engagement* in *Guernica* introduces, in the economy of Eisenstein’s essay, a clearly dissonant motif into his lucid reasoning. So much so that Eisenstein avoids answering an underlying question: how can the recourse to epos and pathos, outside strictly disciplinary considerations, be justified as specific elements of socialist realism?

Eisenstein’s entire essay is trying to answer this question in an elliptical manner. The resort to epos is always an expression of a nostalgia. Paralleling his own work to Piranesi’s and to the organic order of the great nineteenth century novel, Eisenstein reveals the object of his nostalgia: for him, realism—the heir of the avant-garde—looks back in regret on the heroic stage of bourgeois ambiguity.

1. In Eisenstein's writing, recourse to El Greco's and Piranesi's works is certainly not infrequent. See the detailed analysis of El Greco's *Veduta e pianta della città di Toledo* included in the essay "Vertikal'nyj montaz, stat'ja pervaja" ("Vertical montage, first article"), *Iskusstvo Kino*, 9, 1940 (Italian translation, "Sincronizzazione dei sensi," *Forma e tecnica del film e lezioni di regia* [Turin: Einaudi, 1964], pp. 267 ff.); or the hint to Piranesi's compositions, "Built on the Movement and Variation of 'Countervolumes'," in "Vertikal'nyj montaz, stat'ja trej'ja," ("Vertical montage, third article"), *Iskusstvo Kino*, 1, 1941 (Italian translation, "Forma e contenuto: Pratica," *Forma e tecnica del film e lezioni di regia* [Turin: Einaudi, 1964], pp. 331 ff.). See also "El Greco," "Piranesi," and "Piranesi, o la fluidità delle forme," *Eisenstein's Complete Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1964), pp. 145ff. and 156ff. Eisenstein's analysis of this painting appears in his essay "Synchronization of Senses," included in Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1970), pp. 103–105. Eisenstein writes: "El Greco provides an instance for us of an artist's viewpoint leaping furiously back and forth, fixing on the same canvas details of a city seen not only from various points outside the city, but even from various streets, alleys, and squares! All this is done with such a full consciousness of his right to work thus, that he had even recorded, on a map inserted into the landscape for this purpose, a description of this procedure. He probably took this step to avoid any misunderstanding on the part of people who knew the city of Toledo too well to see his work except as a form of capricious 'leftism'. The painting is his *View and Plan of Toledo*, finished some time between 1604 and 1614, and now in Toledo's Greco Museum. It contains a general view of Toledo from approximately the distance of a kilometer eastwards. At the right a young man displays the map of the city. On this map Greco instructed his son to write these words: 'It has been necessary to put the Hospital of Don Juan Tavera in the form of a model [that on the cloud] because it not only so happened as to conceal the Visagra gate, but thrust up its dome or cupola in such a manner that it overtopped the town; once put thus as a model, and removed from its place, I thought it would show the facade before any other part of it; how the rest of it is related to the town will be seen on the map. . . .' What difference has this made? *Realistic proportions* have been altered, and while part of the city is shown from one direction, one detail of it is shown from *exactly the opposite direction!* That is why I insist upon including El Greco among the forefathers of film montage. In this particular instance he appears as a forerunner of the newsreel, for his 're-editing' is rather more informational here than in his other *View of Toledo* (painted in the same period.) In this latter work he accomplished no less radical a *montage revolution* of realistic landscape, but here it has been done through an *emotional* tempest, which has immortalized this painting."—Ed.
2. S. M. Eisenstein, "Lezioni di Regia," *Eisenstein's Complete Works* (Moscow, 1964), p. 478. It should be noted that the quoted passage follows an earlier reference to the dynamic composition of the Piranesian *Prisons*.
3. *Ibid.*
4. It should be noted that Eisenstein's article on the Piranesian *Prisons* was written in 1946–1947, during his last years.
5. S. M. Eisenstein, "Metodi di Montaggio," *Film Form* (New York, 1949. Italian translation in *Forma e tecnica del film e lezioni di regia* [Turin: Einaudi, 1964], p. 75).
6. See V. Shklovsky, *O Teorii Prozy* ("On the Theory of Prose" [Moscow and Leningrad, 1921]). Italian translation (Turin: Einaudi, 1976).
7. Roland Barthes, *Critique et Verité* (Paris, 1965), p. 64.
8. In fact, the relationships which Doubrovsky rejects are those with the formalism of Anglo-Saxon criticism. Those which appear to be important to the objectives of our discourse relate to the affirmation of the *nouvelle critique* around the "primacy of the work": "each aesthetic object," Doubrovsky writes, "is the result of a human project." S. Doubrovsky, *Pourquoi la nouvelle critique. Critique et objectivité* (Paris, 1967. Italian translation, *Critica e oggettività* [Padua: Marsilio, 1967], p. 72).
9. S. M. Eisenstein, "Cinema in quattro dimensioni," *Kino* (Moscow, 27 August 1929); Italian translation, *Forma e tecnica del film e lezioni di regia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), p. 61. "The movie frame," he writes, "can never be an invariable letter of the alphabet, it should always remain an ideogram of plural meanings, and it can be read only next to something else, exactly the way an ideogram acquires its specific significant value and pronunciation . . . only when it is combined with an interpretation pointed out separately or with a tiny sign—which indicates the exact interpretation—placed near the fundamental hieroglyphic." See also, M. Levin, "S. Ejzenstejn i problemy struktural'nogo analiza," *Voprosy literatury*, 2, 1969 (Italian translation "Eisenstein e l'analisi strutturale," *Rassegna Sovietica*, 1969, pp. 102–110; "Ejzenstejn, Dickens, Griffith e Noi," *Rassegna Sovietica*, 1969, pp. 172 ff.).
10. S. M. Eisenstein, "Il Principio cinematografico e l'ideogramma" (1929), *Rassegna Sovietica*, 2, 1969, p. 36.
11. Cf. "Montaggio, 1938," *Iskusstvo Kino*, 1, 1939.
12. FEKS stands for *Fabbrica dell'attore eccentrico*, a group directed by Kozincev and Trauberg. Cf. G. Rapisarda, *Cinema e avanguardia nell'unione Sovietica: la FEKS* (Rome: 1975).
13. It is superfluous to emphasize the determining importance of the provocation of the public when compelled to enter into harmony with the dynamism and accelerated pace of the big city in all the historical avant-gardes, from Marinetti's theatrical manifestos to the Dadaist and Expressionist cabarets.
14. See A. Asor Rosa, "Rivoluzione e letteratura," *Contropiano*, 1, 1968, pp. 216–236; and "lavoro intellettuale e utopia della avanguardia nel paese del socialismo realizzato," *Socialismo, città, architettura. URSS 1917–1937* (Rome: Officina, 1971), pp. 217ff.
15. S. M. Eisenstein, "Dal teatro al cinema," *Sovetskoe Kino*, 11–12, 1934; Italian translation, *Rassegna Sovietica*, pp. 13–14.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
17. We refer to the projects of Melnikov and of Vesnin for the Commissariat of Heavy Industry in Moscow, and to those of Alabian, Karra, Mordvinov, and the other collaborators for the competition for the Palace of the Soviets, 1931–1932. See *Iz Istorii Sovetskoi Architektury 1926–1932. Dokumenty i Materialy* (Moscow: Izdatel'svo "Nauka," 1970), pp. 134–146.
18. V. Shklovsky, *Rozanov* (Petrograd, 1921), p. 4 (author's initials).

## Postscript

Mario Gandelsonas

The modernity of Sergei Eisenstein's sensibility allowed him to see in Piranesi's *Carceri* a subversive action against the basic principles of representational art and therefore of architectural language. This reading becomes instrumental in Tafuri's critical argument inasmuch as Tafuri claims the final enclosure of architectural language, despite Piranesi's desperate attempts to break it. Reading "Eisenstein reading Piranesi," Tafuri finds support both for his interpretation of the present situation in architecture as *sans issue*, and for his search for a new *pertinency* in the construction of a history of architecture, its articulation within the political instance, and its insertion within the economic structure. In fact, "Eisenstein reading Piranesi" allows Tafuri to articulate his own critical position in relation to the linguistic approaches to architecture, in isolation from its ideological and economic-political determinations.

If, however, the architectural work with and/or against language is not seen simply as a circular game of repetitions but as part of a critical ideological production, or as a production of knowledge (that is, not necessarily exclusively discursive), there is another very important implication in the chain of readings represented by Tafuri-Eisenstein-Piranesi.

Architectural practice is not only a slow and painful process culminating in the fabrication of rooms, buildings,

or urban spaces, it is also a particular way of *reading* them. It is the production of a discourse which takes them as a point of departure, sometimes closing these fabrications in themselves, so that they become material for combinations, permutations, or transferences, or in other instances *chaining them (temporarily) to other discourses in culture*, and thereby to new meanings. But not to any meaning at random: there has always existed a paradigm of cultural practices in the arts closely related to architecture, which represents, for architecture, a reservoir of potential vocabularies or grammatical procedures. In fact the particular mode by which architecture is read strongly depends upon and draws from its position within that paradigm. Such a relationship to paradigm is valid for any cultural practice. Thus, when he analyzes Goya, Gogol, and Piranesi, Eisenstein reveals his understanding of the need for such a paradigm for the new cinematographic art.

Tafuri's architectural analysis of Piranesi uses Eisenstein's cinematographic reading as a *mediation* that provides critical distance but also a political context in which the "revolutionary" aims of the aesthetic avant-garde confront the more general objectives of a social revolution.

But one could of course go much further than to use Eisenstein as a simple mediation; one could continue in his own revolutionary spirit.

Eisenstein's proposal, confirmed by Tafuri, involves the displacement of the architectural discourse; architecture is forced by Eisenstein to abandon its omnipotent place as the most important of the arts and to accept a secondary cultural role within a new paradigm, that developed for the movies. In this it gains perhaps a "modernity" materialized in the movies not only in terms of language, but also in terms of the modern economic apparatus and the inevitable ideological political weight of its discourse.

Confronted with the cinematographic discourse, the architectural discourse not only allows a critical discourse to be developed in architecture but also permits a critique of traditional linguistic theories in architecture, new modes of reading that question the idea of "a language" of architecture, in order to suggest a typology of different linguistic behaviors, as suggested by Diana Agrest in her article "Design versus Non-Design" (*Oppositions* 6, Fall 1976).

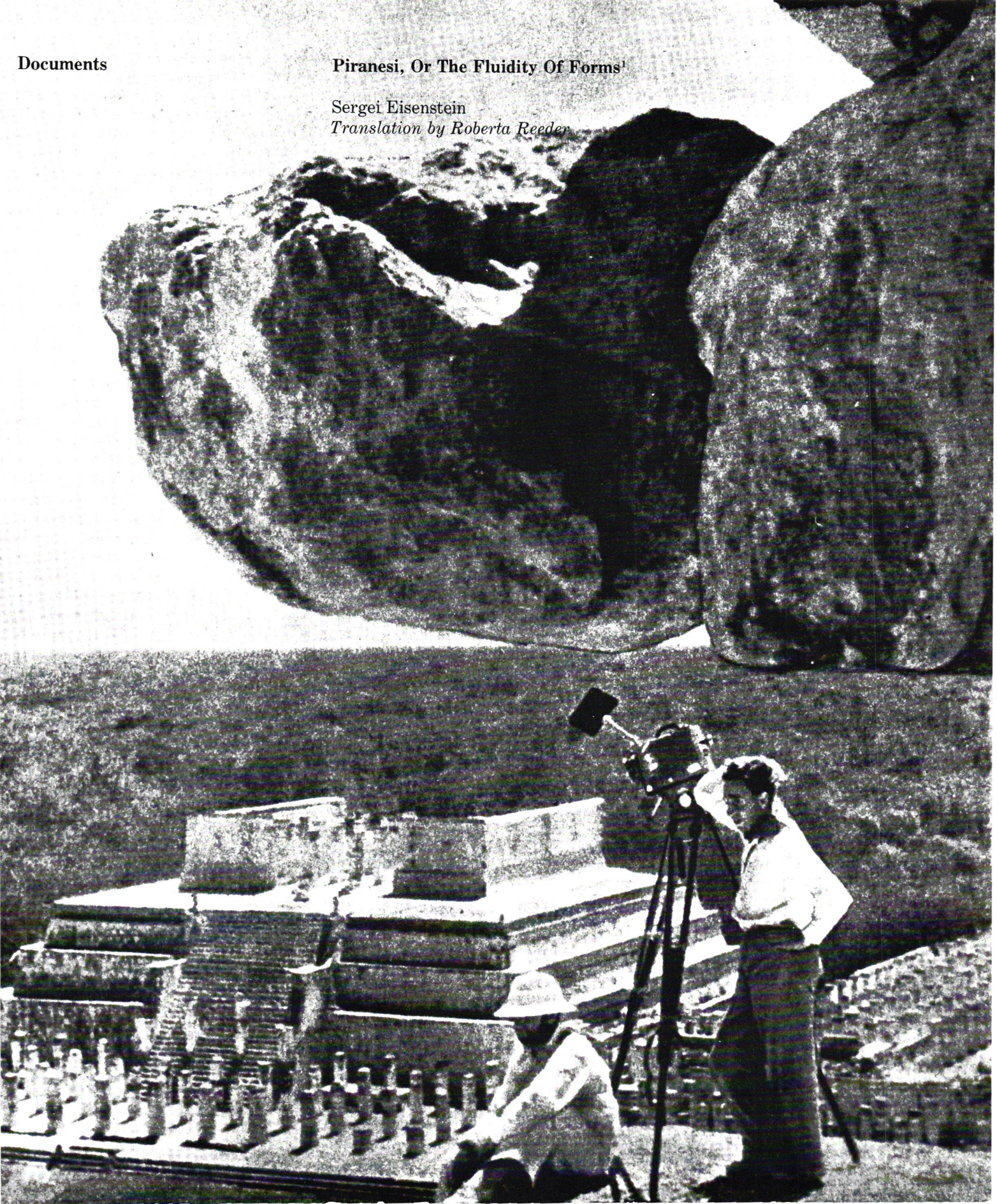
It also allows the discussion of architecture seen as an exclusively poetic practice dominated only by a subjective instance—a fashionable position these days—encouraged by its conservative co-existence with "the classical arts" to be displaced toward a situation where the violent contradiction between the Subjective and the Social is permitted a critical development rather than the repression of its intrinsic conditions.

Documents

Piranesi, Or The Fluidity Of Forms<sup>1</sup>

Sergei Eisenstein

*Translation by Roberta Reeder*



1 (frontispiece) Eisenstein filming  
Que Viva Mexico (1931) in the  
Yucatan.

2 The dog-knights of Eisenstein's  
Alexander Nevsky, 1938.

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2

I am sitting in a bright yellow room flooded with sunlight. It is the corner room of my apartment in Potylix<sup>2</sup> and one of its windows looks out on the village of Troitskoe-Golenishchevo. From here partisans, attacking the French “on the flank,” once pursued the army of Napoleon’s invaders from Moscow. (This provided the name for the whole region.)

Another window looks out on an empty field.

This field was once an apple orchard.

I dug up the apple orchard—

in 1938.

I cleared this square of orchard to make the battlefield for “The Battle on the Ice.”

Here, that summer, after transforming the square into the ice-covered surface of Lake Chud, I went on recreating for a month, earlier hordes of invaders of the Russian land, the dog-knights of *Alexander Nevsky* (fig. 2).

Only recently the contour of the city of Moscow ended just beyond these windows,

And the house where I live was the last house inside the boundaries of the city of Moscow.

If a cucumber had dropped inadvertently out of the kitchen window, it might have dropped into . . . Moscow’s suburbs.

Now the edges of the city have expanded, and the space between suburbs and city has moved far beyond my windows.

In 1941 the German invader was not permitted to come as far as this line and was detained somewhere without having rolled up to my yellow room above the village of Troitska and the field of “The Battle on the Ice” looking with its windows in the direction of Mozhaisk and Minsk.

Between the windows in the corner is a section of wall.

On the wall—is it.

It is the object of an aggressive hunt that went on for years.

I first saw it in the form of a reproduction in a small book (thicker than it was wide) on the history of theater design: Giulio Ferrari, *La Scenografia* (Milan, 1902) from the library of the former theater of S. I, Zimin.

It is a Piranesi etching.

It is part of the series *Opere varie di Architettura*,

And it is called *Carcere oscura* (“The Dark Prison,” fig. 3).

It is thought to have been created under the influence of the etching “Prison d’Amadis” of Daniel Marot.<sup>3</sup> It far surpasses the prototype. And it is dated 1743.

Quite recently—only just now—I was able to acquire it.

As always—by means both strange and inscrutable.

By barter.

An exchange with a provincial museum.

The base of the museum’s collection was an extravagant and unsystematic assortment of rare pieces gathered by some merchant who had often traveled abroad.

In his private residence a stuffed bear got along peacefully with a serving dish, terrible carved “Moors” with candlesticks and pretty objects of very high quality: for example, several etchings by Piranesi.

In exchange went one Edelinck,<sup>4</sup> one Hogarth,<sup>5</sup> one Nanteuil<sup>6</sup> and a charming Claude Méllane . . .<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps it was too much.

But finally in return this and one other etching by Piranesi are now my property.

Neatly mounted, this property is separated from the canary-yellow walls by its expressive burnt sienna colored coffee stains.

I am a long-standing admirer of the architectural frenzies of Piranesi’s *Prisons*.

But more of an enthusiast than a connoisseur.

Therefore I always assigned this etching which I like so much to the series *Invenzioni capricciosi di carceri* (“Fancies on the Theme of Prisons”) known in two variants, 1745 and 1761–1765, and not to the earlier series *Opere varie*.<sup>8</sup>

I am now looking at this etching on my wall,

And for the first time I am struck, despite its amazing perfection, by the degree of its balanced . . . gentleness. Probably because the impressions produced by the originals of the later *Carceri*, as I viewed them for the first time, are still fresh, it seems unexpectedly harmless, with little feeling.

Unecstatic . . .

And now, while looking at the etching and mentally analyzing the methods of producing “an ecstatic effect,” I involuntarily begin to apply them to this etching.

I ponder over what would happen to this etching if it were brought to a state of ecstasy, if it were brought out of itself.

As a whole. With all its elements . . .

I admit that this experiment on Piranesi preceded what was similarly described above and performed on El Greco,<sup>9</sup>

And both experiments were presented here in “historical”

3 Giovanni Batista Piranesi, *Carcere Oscuro* ("The Dark Prison"), ca.1745.

4 Diagram by Eisenstein of Piranesi's *Carcere Oscuro*.

5 "The etching . . . leaps out of the vertical format—into the horizontal." Diagram by Eisenstein.

86 sequence of their origin not merely with the aim of maintaining the progressive sequence (actor-painter-architect) according to the motives stated above.

In order to make a clearer exposition of what I worked out in my mind, let me introduce here a reproduction of the etching and put a diagram of it right next to it. I will number the basic elements and distinctive features of the etching in the diagram (figs. 3, 4).

Now—step by step, element by element—we will explode them one after another.

We have already done this once with El Greco's painting.

Therefore this operation is now simpler, more familiar and demands less time and space.

Ten explosions will be enough to "transform" ecstatically this diagram which has been drawn in front of our eyes.

However, it would be unfair to reject any type of emotional feeling in this initial etching.

Otherwise—what is the source of the great fascination this etching holds for me, an etching which I got to know before coming upon the savage exuberance of the *Prisons* of the principal series?

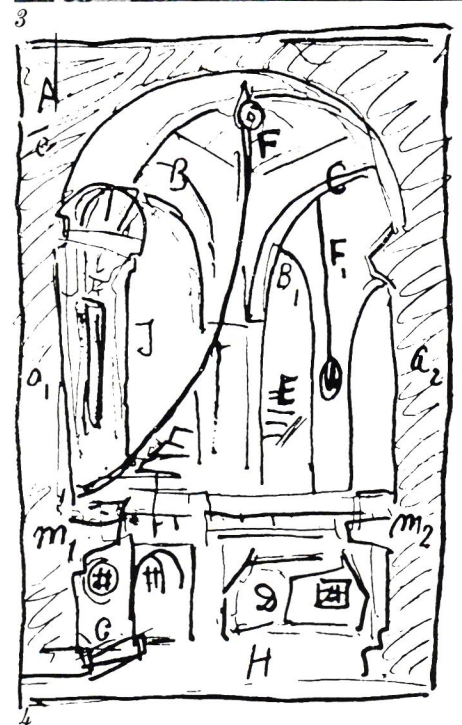
But if there is any "going out of oneself"<sup>10</sup> here in this etching, it is realized not as an explosion, but as . . . dissolution,

And—not of forms, but only of the system of the expressive means,

And therefore instead of frenzy and a strong impression of fury, there is a flowing lyrical "mood."

It is in just this spirit, for example, that Giesecke writes about this etching in his work on Piranesi:<sup>11</sup>

"The etching *Carcere oscura* is daring and yet restrained





6 "A leap from a semicircular arch—  
into an arrow-shaped arch."

Diagram by Eisenstein.

7 "There is already the image of an  
arrow-shaped upper arch N which  
seems to have burst out of the bay  
with the flat overhead M and the two-  
cornered outline p-q which was  
hurled into the triangle x—y—z. . . .

(*befangen im Vortrag*) in its presentation of the material. . . .  
The luminous and airy perspectives go even farther here  
. . . (compared to the other etchings of the series) a soft,  
silvery light, so much loved by the Venetians, streams  
down from above into this airy chamber and is lost in the  
gloomy distance; the forms are softened and are quite in-  
distinct, as if they were in the process of self-dissolution  
(*Auflösung*), and the picture itself spills over tenderly in  
rivulets of separate strokes. . . ."

I would add to this that the vaults extend and stretch  
upward to the degree that the dark mass at the bottom,  
gradually becoming illuminated, flows into the vaulted  
heights flooded with light . . .

But let us return to the technique of the explosion.

In order to do this let us enumerate the basic elements of  
the etching:

A—the general arch enclosing the whole design.

a<sub>1</sub> and a<sub>2</sub>—its side walls.

B and C—the arches that serve as the principal supports  
of the architectural composition as a whole.

D—a system of angular arches which thrust into the  
depths, a system which at its farthest point abuts the wall  
with the barred window.

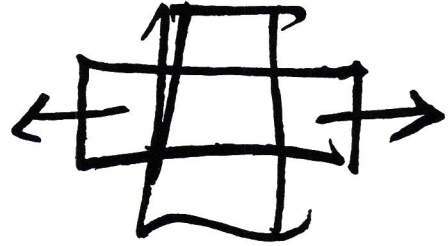
E—a staircase ascending into the depths of the columns.

F, F<sub>1</sub>—ropes marking the center of the composition (F) and  
emphasizing the composition's movement into the depths  
(F<sub>1</sub>).

G—the round window over the "zaválinka."<sup>12</sup>

H—the firmly placed stone tiles of the floor.

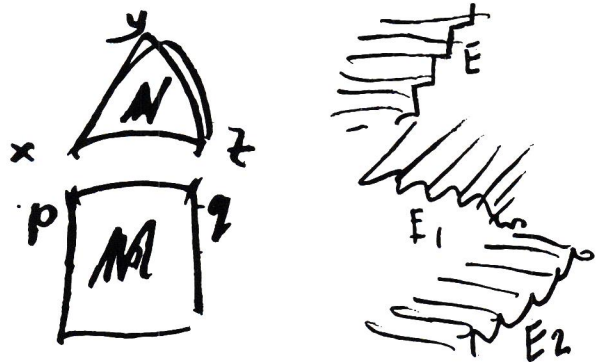
J—the heavy rise of stone blocks in the severe vertical  
columns.



5



6

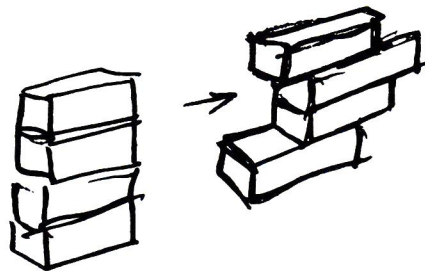


7

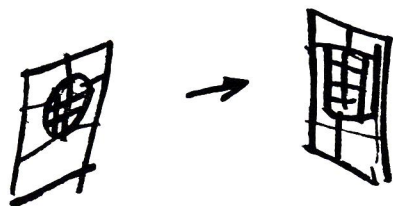
8 "The severe shape of the piled stones breaks apart." Diagram by Eisenstein.

9 "The round window c is transformed into a square and turns into a flat plane perpendicular to it." Diagram by Eisenstein.

88



8



9

$m_1$ — $m_2$ —little balconies to the right and left near the columns in the foreground.

Now let us attempt to give free reign to the ecstatic violence of the whole, and we will then see that what must occur—and would occur—for this to happen to all elements of the composition.

In the first place, of course, the arch A, enclosing the engraving, explodes.

Its upper semicircle of stone flies out beyond the borders of the etching.

If you like—from a semicircle it becomes . . . polygonal.

From stone—to wood.

The intersection of wooden rafters—replacing the stone arch—allows the arch to "leap" simultaneously out of material and form.

Under the pressure of temperament, the space of the etching included between the columns  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  "is hurled" beyond these limits.

Columns  $a_1$  and  $a_2$ , abandoning their framing role, "exploding" inside the etching, and the etching, after expanding beyond their limits, "leaps" out of the vertical format—into the horizontal (we can remember a similar leap of format into the opposite—but from the horizontal to the vertical—in the example of El Greco!) (fig. 5).

The arches B and  $B_1$  are also not lacking in this tendency to explode. From the arches A and C which flew completely into bits, these arches can undergo an "explosion" *within their own form*; that is, having retained the "idea" of an arch, they can be modified into something opposite in character.

Under these conditions what will such a qualitative leap within the form of the arch be like?

A leap from a semicircular arch—into an arrow-shaped arch (fig. 6).

Moreover—this can be a leap from a single-bay arch into a two-bay arch of the vertical type.

Such a form would have been particularly appropriate, since in his actual design there is already the image of an arrow-shaped upper arch N which seems to have burst out of the bay with the flat overhead M and the two-cornered outline p-q which was hurled into the triangle x—y—z, as if in this drawing a trace of the process which occurred in the case of the entire arch A was retained (fig. 7).

Rushing down forward and moving off into the depths from column  $a_1$  on downward, the staircase, in its increasing explosion, displaces column  $a_1$  standing in its path, hurls forward, but now no longer by only the one flight of stairs E, but like a stroke of lightning in zigzag fashion—E,  $E_1$ ,  $E_2$ —hurls *forward* to the maximum possible extent. And this maximum extent turns out to be a thrust beyond the limits of the contours of the etching. In exactly the same way, the system of arches D, while increasing its tendency to plunge *into the depths*, in the course of having changed the angular contour into a semi-circular one breaks with its thrust through this enclosing wall with the barred window and whirls off somewhere in the direction of a general point of descent, which in turn, in contrast to the way it appeared in the initial etching, turns out to be somewhere not between the upper and lower edge of the etching, but beyond its limits not only on the right, but also *downward*; and following this example the solid foundation of the floor (so clearly visible in the first state and which in the second disappears somewhere in the depths outside the frame in its new ecstatic form) vanishes with a roar.

The broken balconies  $m_1$  and  $m_2$  on the foreground columns  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  throw themselves toward each other, become a single bridge, and this bridge remains not as balconies in front of the arch encircling D, but undoubtedly rushes beyond it—into the depths and perhaps upward.

The severe shape of the piled stone breaks apart (fig. 8).

The round window  $c$  is transformed into a square and turns into a flat plane perpendicular to it (fig. 9),

And finally, breaking loose from the central line (which is drawn so distinctly), the ropes and blocks explode into those parts of the etching which in its vertical state were not even in the first version of the plate!

And as though picking up their signal, all the other elements are caught up by the whirlwind;

And “all swept up by the powerful hurricane” as though they resound from the etching which has lost its self-enclosed quality and “calm” in the name of a frenzied uproar . . .

And now in our imagination we have before us, in place of the modest, lyrically meek engraving *Carcere oscura*, a whirlwind, as in a hurricane, dashing in all directions: ropes, runaway staircases, exploding arches, stone blocks breaking away from each other . . .

The scheme of this new ecstatic form of the etching slips into your imagination before your very eyes. Our eyes now slide along the yellow wall.

Now they slip out beyond the limits of the margins of the first sheet.

Now they slip past the other example of uproar hanging between the window and the door—*The Temptation of St. Anthony* by Callot . . .<sup>13</sup>

And now they stop unexpectedly on the second etching of Piranesi which has come to me from that same remote source, the canopy formed from those carved figures of Moors with candlesticks, a bear with a tray, and the second-rate Japanese bronze bric-à-brac.

To where did the scheme which had just been before our eyes suddenly disappear?

I cannot understand it.

10 Giovanni Batista Piranesi,  
Carcere, with a staircase ascending  
to the left. *Second state, XIV,*  
*ca.1760.*

11 *First state, XIV, ca.1745.*

90



10



11

Apparently the scheme . . . has now crept into this second etching of the incomparable Giovanni Batista,

And so it has!

The “miracle” of El Greco—has been repeated!

The scheme which we devised—turns out to actually exist.

Namely it lies at the basis of Piranesi’s second etching (figs. 10, 11).

It was thus actually necessary that among everything else in the bundle, besides the *Carcere oscura*, of all the possible etchings by Piranesi the late merchant Maecenas brought this very one from Italy.

So that in the form of an exchange it would fall into my hands as the second etching.

So that framed, they would both hang on the yellow wall of my room,

And so that, having torn myself away from the first etching, my eyes, with the imagined scheme before me, would stop on this very one after having cast, like an invisible net, this imaginary scheme of the transformed first etching onto the second.

In any case, Piranesi’s second etching is actually the first one exploding in ecstatic flight.

Here it is.

Try to dispute it!

Let us quickly review its devices.

They coincide down to the last detail with what we hypothetically sketched above.

After this we find we have little in common with the general remarks by Benois on the ecstasy of Piranesi.

(Moreover, we discovered Benois’ words only many years after the spontaneous “illumination” which resulted from the comparison of the two etchings).

The dates of the etchings interest us.

The biographical continuity which links them.

The place of the *Prisons* in the general biography of Piranesi’s work.

The stages of their creation.

The chorus of enthusiasm accompanying them.

The personality of the enthusiasts.

The nature of architectural fantasies in which one system of visions is transformed into others; where some planes, opening up to infinity behind each other, carry the eye into unknown depths, and the staircases, ledge by ledge, extend to the heavens, or in a reverse cascade of these same ledges, rush downward.

Actually the ecstatic image of a staircase hurling across from one world to the next, from heaven to earth, is already familiar to us from the Biblical legend of Jacob’s dream, and the emotional image of the elemental headlong descent of human masses down the Odessa staircase, stretching to the sky, is familiar to us from our own *opus*.<sup>14</sup>

The *Carcere oscura* is known as the restrained forerunner of the most celebrated *Carceri* [ . . . ].

The *Carcere oscura* is only a distant peal of thunder, out of the entrails of the 1743 series, which have quite a different resonance.

Two years later this distant peal explodes with a real thunderbolt.

During those years there occurs in Piranesi’s mind and feelings one of those explosions, one of those inner “cata-

92 clysms” which can transfigure man, shaking his spiritual structure, his world outlook and his attitude toward reality. One of those psychic leaps which “suddenly” “instantly,” unexpected and unforeseen, raises man above his equals to the heights of a true creator capable of extracting from his soul images of unprecedented power, which with unremitting strength burn the hearts of men.

Some interpret the *Carceri* as visions of the delirium of an archaeologist who had imbibed too deeply the terrible romanticism of the gigantic ruins of Rome’s former grandeur. Others have attempted to see in them the image of a persecution mania from which the artist began to suffer at this time.

But I think that during the interval transpiring during these several years, what happened to Piranesi is that same instantaneous illumination of “genius” which we noted above in Balzac and about which P. I. [Tchaikovsky] has written so clearly concerning another musical genius—Glinka.<sup>15</sup>

On June 27, 1888, Tchaikovsky notes in his diary: “An unprecedented, extraordinary phenomenon in the field of art.

“A dilettante who played now on the violin, now on the piano; having composed totally colorless quadrilles, fantasies on fashionable Italian themes, having tested himself both in serious forms (the quartet, sextet) and in romances, not having written anything except in the banal taste of the thirties, suddenly in his thirty-fourth year composes an opera which in genius, range, novelty, and irreproachable technique stands alongside the greatest and most profound that can only exist in art? . . . Sometimes I am alarmed simply to the point of a nightmare by the question of how such a colossal artistic force could coexist with such banality and in such a manner, that after having been a colorless dilettante for so long, Glinka suddenly in one step arrives at the level (yes! at the level!) of Mozart, Beethoven or whomever you please . . .<sup>16</sup>

“And indeed there was no model of any kind; there were no precedents in Mozart or Gluck or in any of the masters. It is striking, amazing! . . .

“Yes! *Glinka* is a real creative genius . . .”<sup>17</sup>

One must realize, of course, that in this “sudden moment,” everything immediately and instantaneously “burst out,” everything which in bits and pieces had been accumulated and assembled grain by grain in the “banal,” the insignificant, and the “dilettantish” so that in *Ruslan* it all burst out as a complete, organic unity of individual genius.

But what is particularly striking is its total correspondence with what happened to Piranesi between the series *Vedute varie* and the *Carceri*.

Actually the *Carceri* stand almost at the beginning of Piranesi’s creative path.

Everything that had been done until then has almost no real independent value. (With the exception of two or three of the *Capricci*.)

And even those different groups of etchings which were created by Piranesi before *The Prisons* did not compose independent series; but later the majority of them became part of the series of architectural panoramas of 1750.

As we can see, the “divine word” of ecstasy touches Piranesi at a relatively early stage of his creative work,

And the blinding flash of the *Prisons* seems to retain its own reflection and transmit its beams, filling with poetic inspiration not only the picturesqueness of the ruins of former Rome, which in such inspired abundance emerge from under his stylus, but also the more prosaic *vedute* of the public constructions of his contemporary city.

Out of this flame which burns without extinction through all his work, fifteen or twenty years later there comes from his hand a new, more profound, even more perfect state of these same etchings, whose amplified redrawing reinforces their unrestrained, elemental grandeur. (We should recall how many times El Greco repainted one and the same theme in different variants, while continuing to perfect their inner spirituality!)

Even here there is a correspondence to El Greco!

But in El Greco it is more than that.

The year 1745, after the first rough draft of 1743, brings forth the series of *Carceri* in their first state.

Giesecke calls them, and correctly so, imitating Goethe's *Ur-Faust*—the “Ur-Carceri.” (The earliest and original *Faust* is the first state of *Faust*; the earliest and original *Prisons* is the first state of the *Prisons* series.)

Correct and apropos because in the case of Goethe, at the same time as the *Ur-Faust* (1770–1775), comes the *Faust* proper (1770–1806) in its place,

And in its place, the second state of *Faust* (1773–1832).

In the same way, in place of the first state of the *Prisons*, fifteen to twenty years later there appears the second state, which is unchanged in composition but redrawn and re-touched and, from the technical point of view of “etchings,” is unimproved; but from the point of view of figurative ecstatic revelation is even more profound and graphic. And this is followed by the third state of the *Prisons*, the inner self-explosion.

True . . . no longer the work of Piranesi himself.

Beyond the limits of his biography.

Even beyond the limits of his country and epoch.

One hundred years later.

And not on the soil of Italy, but of Spain.

But nevertheless along the same line.

And by a step which begins from the point to which Piranesi's raging spirit propelled the volume and space of his conceptions.



12 El Greco, Purification of the Temple, ca.1570–1575.

94 These three phases, continuously raising the intensity of their plastic conceptions, seem to repeat the development of the conception of Goethe's *Faust* by sudden jolts, from a sketchy beginning to its apocalyptic conclusion.

The *Carcere oscura* has here played a role similar to that of the medieval *Faust* (which also served Christopher Marlowe in 1588) as a purely thematic vehicle for Goethe's future philosophical conceptions.

They also repeat "literally" the same path taken by El Greco's *Purification of the Temple* (fig. 12) from the stage of depicting "an everyday Biblical scene"—which is the level of *Carcere oscura*—to the emotional dramatic effect of the intermediate variants of the composition—the "Ur-Carceri" (1745)—to the ecstatic last variant—the *Carceri* (1760–1766).

Is it possible to go even further?

And is it possible, after a relatively short first stage with its dissolution of forms, to foresee and discover through the second stage—which is already exploding the very objects of depiction, and this occurring in two jolts, increasing the disintegration of forms and thrust of elements both back into the depths as well as forward (by a method of extensions of the foreground)—one more "leap," one more "explosion," one more "spurt" beyond the limits and dimensions and thus, apparently, the "norm" which in the last variant of *Prisons* exploded completely?

Is this last leap possible?

And where, in what area of representation should one look for it?

In the *Carcere oscura* the concreteness is retained while the means of representation "fly apart": the line disintegrates into a cascade of tiny strokes;<sup>18</sup> the flatness of form, softened by light, flows into space, the preciseness of facets is absorbed in the fluid contours of form.

In the *Invenzioni capricciosi* given these same means of

expression (true, at a somewhat higher level of intensity) the concreteness has also by this time "flown apart."

To put it more precisely—the objects as physical elements of the representation itself have flown apart.

But the represented concreteness of the elements has not been modified by this.

One stone may have "moved off" another stone, but it has retained its represented "stony" concreteness.

A stone vault has hurled itself across into angular wooden rafters, but the represented "concreteness" of both has been preserved untouched.

These were "in themselves" real stone arches, wooden beams realistic "in themselves."

The accumulation of perspective moves into the distance, borders on the madness of narcotic visions (about this, see below), but each link of these totally dizzy perspectives is "in itself" quite naturalistic.

The concrete reality of perspective, the real representational quality of the objects themselves, is not destroyed anywhere.

The madness consists only in the piling up, in the juxtapositions which explode the very foundation of the objects' customary "possibility," a madness which groups objects into a system of arches which "go out of themselves" in sequence, ejecting new arches from their bowels; a system of staircases exploding in a flight of new passages of staircases; a system of vaults which continue their leaps from each other into eternity.

Now it is clear what the next stage will (or should) be.

What is left to explode—is the concreteness. A stone is no longer a stone, but a system of intersecting angles and planes in whose play the geometrical basis of its forms explodes.



Out of the semicircular outlines of vaults and arches explode the semicircles of their structural design.

Complex columns disintegrate into primary cubes and cylinders, out of whose interdependence arises the concrete semblance of elements of architecture and nature.

The play of chiaroscuro—the collision of luminescent projections with the ruins of gaping darkness between them—changes into independent spots no longer of light and dark, but of corporeally applied dark and light colors (precise colors, and not a range of “tones”).

Can this all really be in Piranesi’s etchings?

No, not within the limits of the etchings.

But beyond them.

Not in the work of Piranesi.

But beyond their limits.

A leap beyond the limits of this *opus*.

And in the category of cannonades of directions and schools bursting out of each other.

And in the first place, beyond the canon of Realism in the form in which it is popularly interpreted.

A first leap—beyond the limits of the precise outline of objects engaged in the play of the geometrical forms composing them—and we have Cézanne.

A connection with the object is still perceptible.

Next—the young Picasso, Gleizes, Metzinger.<sup>19</sup>

A step further—and the blossoming of Picasso.

The object—“the pretext”—has now disappeared.

It has already dissolved and disappeared.

It exploded into lines and elements, which by fragments and “stage wings” (the legacy of Piranesi) construct a world of new spaces, volumes, and their interrelationships.

Leftists of the arts and . . . ecstasy?

Picasso and ecstasy?

Picasso and . . . pathos?

Whoever has seen *Guernica* would be less surprised at such an assertion.

The Germans, while looking at *Guernica*, asked its author: “You did this?”

And proudly the painter replied: “No—you did!”

And it would probably be difficult to find—with the exception of Goya’s *Horrors of War*—a more complete and more heartrending expression of the inner tragic dynamics of human destruction.

But it is interesting that even along the paths to what appear here as a burst of social indignation by the militant Spaniard—the connection between Picasso and ecstasy has been noted in relation to his actual method in even earlier stages of his work.

There the ecstatic explosion did not yet coincide with the revolutionary essence of the theme.

And it was not from the theme that the explosion was born.

There, like a single elephant in a china shop, Picasso trampled and smashed completely only the “cosmically established order of things so hateful to him” as such.

Not knowing where to strike out, who was guilty of the social disorder of the “order of things,” he struck at “the

96 things” and “the order” before “gaining sight” momentarily in *Guernica* and seeing where and in what lay the disharmony and the “initial cause.”

Thus, curiously enough, even before *Guernica* Picasso was included in the category of “mystics” by, for example, Burger (*Cézanne and Hodler*).

And this was because of signs . . . of ecstasy.<sup>20</sup>

But in Picasso’s *Guernica* the leap is accomplished from an unconcretized, ecstatic “protest” into the emotion of a revolutionary challenge to the Fascism crushing Spain.

And Picasso himself—was in the ranks of the Communist Party.<sup>21</sup>

The fate of the majority of others—is different.

Their insides are not familiar with ecstatic explosions. For their insides have not been burned by passion.

Their insides were not scorched by the flame of an overwhelming idea.

And by the very loftiest of all possible ideas—the idea of social protest.

By the fire of battle.

By the flame of the re-creation of the world.

They are not shaken by inner thunderous peals of indignation.

In their souls there do not gleam serpentine thunderbolts of wrath.

They do not blaze with a white fire in which the service to an idea flares up in action.

And few are those who know ecstasy within their own creations.

An ideological impulse is lacking.

And there is no passion of creation.

And in the scheme of ecstasy they are like separate links of a single historical chain of the leaping movement of art as a whole, and there is lacking in their personal biographies those very grand leaps and bursts beyond the frame of the newer and newer limits which overflow in the life paths of El Greco and Piranesi, Zola and Whitman, Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

Even if they no longer burn with a mere nuance of a flame.

Even if the fires of their burning do not reach the degree of the flame of social protest.

But they all are devoured by ideas more valuable for them than life itself.

And only such ideas.

Only the obsession of such ideas.

Only self-dissolution and self-immolation in the service of what is capable of engendering passion.

Only in such a degree of incandescent obsession is ecstasy possible through uninterrupted leaps, of the expressive means of the artist; who is embraced by ideas like flames, who erupts with images like lava, who with the blood of his own heart nourishes his own creations . . .

However, after this flight of one’s own feelings, which is somewhat unexpected on the pages of research, let us return once again and look at the various aspects of the phenomenon which interests us—in the work of the very same Piranesi.

Perhaps this would be a most appropriate moment to pause briefly at a strange appearance of ecstasy which for some reason is very often connected with visions of architectural images.

One of the greatest merits of architectural constructions and ensembles is considered to be the harmonic transition of some of their forms into others, as if some “overflowed” into others.

This is immediately perceptible in the most perfect specimens of architecture.

And the dynamics of these elements of construction overflowing into each other arouse that feeling of emotional captivity, that “non-concrete,” “non-representational” whole, that a truly harmonious building would represent for us.

The “non-concrete” and “non-representational” in the given case in no way removes from such an ensemble a very well-defined “figurative quality.”

And in this sense architecture in various epochs is expressive in different ways, and moreover, expresses a definite thought or idea in the most concrete sense of the word.

And this is because the “image” is always socially and historically conditioned and expresses in itself a definite ideological content of a certain epoch.

The very rhythm (and melody) of forms harmoniously overflowing into each other is a reflection, through the inter-relationship of volumes and spaces and the construction of materials, of a certain prevailing image of social conceptions, and a completed building thus expresses and embodies the spiritual content of a builder-nation at a definite stage of its social and historical development.

(The mistake of so-called Left architecture—especially Constructivist<sup>22</sup>—consisted in the rejection of the “figurative” content of a building, which reduced it to a dependence on the utilitarian aims and the characteristics of the building materials.

No less repulsive in its ideology is the architecture which substitutes for [the figurative content of a building] an eclectic reconstruction “in fragments” of elements taken

from obsolete architectural epochs which, in their forms, express the ideology of other nations and social institutions of political varieties strange and alien to us.<sup>23</sup>

If one compares the perfect transitions of architectural forms into each other in such different models as, let us say, the Hagia Sophia or Chartres Cathedral with a government building of the epoch of Nicholas I or with the façade of the Pitti Palace, then one is immediately struck by the basic difference of the rhythmic nature of both the forms themselves as well as the rhythmic passage of the transition of one into the other which occurs in the process of the formation of a complete organic architectural unity.

And each of these models begins to speak with utmost figurative eloquence of its own epoch: of its system or its inner aspirations.

So expressive is the appearance of palaces of feudal lords who constructed a fortress in the center of the city—as a stronghold against a commune of too independent townspeople.

An image of absolutism frozen in its indestructible principles—is the structure of buildings of the Nicholas era. The terrestrial emperor is a concrete and tangible “Tsar and God,” leaning on the bureaucrat and gendarme.

And on the other hand, the exalted “soaring” of the Middle Ages in Gothic churches which aspired to the abstract idealistic God of the mystics, for whom the Roman high priest—the Pope—did not succeed in substituting himself.

However, at the basis of all the historical differentiation of the architectural image in the composition of ensembles of various epochs, there always lies one and the same principle—the principle of the transition of separate parts of a work into one another, the principle of a harmony which resounds in different ways in different epochs.

It is on this second feature that we will now concentrate our attention.

98 On the various paths and crossroads of my journey toward cinematography I had to occupy myself for some time with architecture as well (at the Institute of Civil Engineers). I was just about to proceed with my projected work when the whirlwind of the Civil War swept me away and then did not return me to the drawing boards of architectural projects, but transferred me to the stage of the theater, first as a designer, then as a theater director, then—as a film director.

My experience as an architectural planner and theater designer did not last long.

But long enough to grasp one extremely important feature of the actual process of the “creation” of spatial-volume constructions.

There is a good reason for calling architecture “frozen music” (*gefrorene Musik*—Goethe).

At the basis of the composition of an architectural ensemble, at the basis of the harmony of the piling up of its masses, in the establishment of the melody of future overflowings of its forms and subdivisions of its rhythmic articulations which provide harmony to the minting of its ensembles, lies that same unique “dance” which is at the basis of the creation of works of music, painting, and film montage.

The masses and the spatial caesuras between them, the spots of light and the pits of darkness setting them off, the accumulation of forms growing out of each other and the definitions of the general contours which run off in trills of details are all preceded by a preliminary sketch of spots, lines, and intersections which attempt to make fast on paper that flight of spatial visions which is condemned to become embodied in brick or stone, in iron or concrete, in glass and in the textural treatment of the walls of the finished construction.

At the basis of the architectural projection is the same excitement which from the degree of inspired obsession now pours over into flames of ecstasy—and dithyrambs of

its visions are made secure in the choir of a cathedral frozen in stone, now by a sumptuous march step whose image for centuries has been embodied in the palatial and park structures of Versailles, and now, finally, is capable of dispersing itself in the artificial play of the pipes of porcelain shepherds and shepherdesses who through their coquettish playing revive the atmosphere of the Trianon . . .

We are interested in the first case.

A case of extreme obsession.

A case when architecture is not yet analogous to salon conversation in stone, but is a unique stone “symbol of faith”—a passionate expression conveyed in stone of its ideological credo, whose ardor forces stone upon stone to pile up and in their aspiration toward the sky, to forget about their own weight, to fly by means of arrow-shaped arches suspended in the air, and moving apart the piers between them, to return into them along the surface of the stained-glass windows burning with multicolored fires.

It is difficult to find structures which more distinctly represent the embodiment of ecstasy frozen in stone than Gothic churches.

It is difficult to find buildings which by their structure alone are more capable of being “in tune” with the ecstatic harmony of one entering beneath their vaults.

A separate chapter would be needed to analyze to what degree the structure and form of such a cathedral in all its features repeat that system of successive degrees of intensity erupting out of each other, the principle of going out of self and the transition into each other and the final merging into one of all the elements composing it when the vaults are shaken by the organ and the sun is streaming through the stained-glass window, etc., etc.

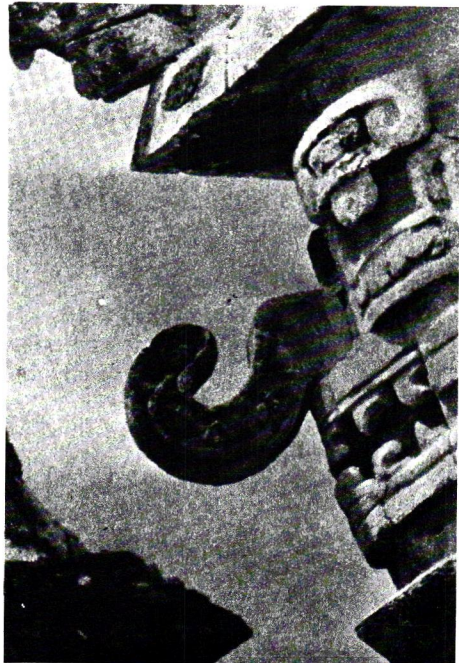
But we are also interested in the social-historical aspect of the form of a Gothic cathedral, about which a great deal has already been written, as well as in the internal prototype of it as an ecstatic vision.

13 Mexican ornament from  
*Eisenstein's Que Viva Mexico, 1931*

14 Indian ornament.



13



14

And we are quite justified in suspecting such a psychological basis for it. 99

If at the initial source of this image there would have been no ecstatic state, then the image which had not been engendered by such a state would not be in a condition to function as a “prescription” which would induce the reader experiencing it to fall into a state of ecstasy by repeating it.

Tolstoy wrote about music in this way. (The shortest path of the direct transmission of the initial state of the author—to the listener.)

Thus waltz tempo is a copy of that state in which Johann Strauss’ “soul danced,” repeating in its movements the structure of this tempo in the finished waltz. One who is dancing participates in that same state in which the author was at the moment of the creation of the dance.

A rudimentary model of this same phenomenon can be found in the culture of ancient Mexico (fig. 13).

Here there are models not quite so grandiose and systematically developed by a system of canons as in the culture of the Gothic church. But it is just because of this, probably, that everything is even clearer and more perceptible. Chimeras are solemnly enthroned in these cathedrals like the frightening visions of delirium.

Frightening are the thousands of figures encircling like a forest the structures of the Mexican’s Asiatic peers, the Indian “gopurahs” (fig. 14).<sup>24</sup>

But they (basically composed of separate natural phenomena: the head of an eagle over the breasts of a woman, a human body crowned by an elephant’s head) are nothing in the horror they inspire to the ornamental monsters of ancient Mexico.

And here the monstrosity and frightening unexpectedness derives not so much from the combination of various frightening details which actually belong to various animals (the

100 same way in which Leonardo da Vinci composed “real” stuffed animals from unreal creatures, and Barnum set up in the fair booths at the beginning of his career) so much as from . . . the ornamental decomposition of visible objects of nature.

Your head literally whirls when you look at the treatment of the corner of the Nunnery in Uxmal, which has the form of a decomposed human profile, or at the serpent heads disintegrating into unbelievable irreconcilable confusion on the galleries behind the pyramid in Teotihuacan.

How simply and clearly are the split details composed back again “in reverse” into a bear: muzzle, eyes, paws, its back on a light blue rug of North American Indians.

How easy it is to recover the whole from this ornamental distribution done “by montage.” And what dizziness actually overcomes you when a stone hook, protruding diagonally from a corner of the building, begins to be read as a nose, and deformed stone eyes must be sought by a system of separate carved stones on both sides of the corner, and the teeth of the lower part of the decoration of the building suddenly appear to be a system of monstrously deformed jaws.

The dizziness is the result of the constant sliding from the prototype-face into this system of fragmented details which lose their human features, and back again into a face, in an anguished attempt to reproduce the *process* through which one becomes the other, the initial one becomes the monstrous result and the monstrous result—again—“in reverse”—becomes the initial one (without which it is impossible to “read” it, to understand, perceive, and include it into the system of representations peculiar to us),

And . . . dizziness—is not simply a turn of speech—it is what actually occurs.

For in the attempt to “enter” into the process of the genesis of these frenzied forms of ornamental arrangement of faces and heads (which actually become “frenzied” by the way the forms have been arranged), you enter into a system of

the normal, standard process which engendered these modes of arrangement of forms that are inaccessible to a normal state of consciousness [ . . . ]

De Quincey writes about the vision of similar architectural images found in states of exaltation and ecstasy in connection with . . . opium (*Confessions of an English Opium-eater*, 1821). (He calls his own addiction to opium a sickness.)

“In the early stage of my malady, the splendours of my dreams were indeed chiefly architectural: and I beheld such pomp of cities and palaces as was never yet beheld by the waking eye, unless in the clouds” (De Quincey, *Confessions* . . . , ed. Richard Garnett [New York: White and Allen, 1885], p. 135).

Later he quotes Wordsworth, “a passage which describes, as an appearance actually beheld in the clouds, what in many of its circumstances I saw frequently in sleep” (p.135).<sup>25</sup>

In the same excerpt he pauses at the episode of the *uninterrupted* flow of architectural ensembles which piled up like thunder clouds:

“The sublime circumstance—‘battlements that on their *restless* fronts bore stars’—might have been copied from my architectural dreams, for it often occurred” (p. 135).

What has already been said above would have been enough to compare Piranesi’s amazing architectural visions which float into each other not only in terms of the uniqueness of their structure, but even their figurative system, to the reflection in concrete forms of the fantastic architecture of the ecstatic states of the author.

However this is also confirmed by that fact that De Quincey actually uses Piranesi’s own *Prisons* as the most precise correspondence to those architectural visions which capture him in states of exaltation under the influence of opium:

“Many years ago, when I was looking over Piranesi’s *Antiquities of Rome*, Mr. Coleridge, who was standing by, described to me a set of plates by that artist, called his

*Dreams*, and which record the scenery of his own visions during the delirium of a fever: Some of them (I describe only from memory of Mr. Coleridge's account) representing vast Gothic halls: on the floor of which stood all sorts of engines and machinery, wheels, cables, pulleys, levers, catapults, etc., etc., expressive of enormous power put forth, and resistance overcome. Creeping along the sides of the walls, you perceived a staircase; and upon it, groping his way upwards, was Piranesi himself: follow the stairs a little further, and you perceive it come to a sudden abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who had reached the extremity, except into the depths below. Whatever is to become of poor Piranesi, you suppose, at least, that his labours must in some way terminate here. But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher: on which again Piranesi is perceived, but this time standing on the very brink of the abyss. Again elevate your eye, and a still more aerial flight of stairs is beheld: and again is poor Piranesi busy on his aspiring labours: and so on, until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall.—With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams" (p. 133).

We must not be disturbed by factual impreciseness of petty details.

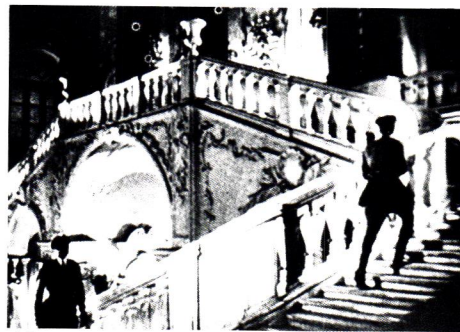
The *Prisons* are called *Dreams*.

The movements of Piranesi himself along the staircases of his own fantasy—are invented.

An etching similar to the one described is not in the series *Prisons*.

But the fact that the flight of staircases reproduced the inner flight of the author himself is evident.

And it is not accidental that the mutual memory of the two poets—one about the etchings and the other the story about them—embodied this idea into a real image of the author of the etchings running along the staircases.



15

102 There is also no testimony of visions of any feverish delirium imprinted on these etchings. And the reflection in them of states of real exaltation—is nothing more than baseless conjecture. But even more basic is the mistaken definition of the halls as Gothic.

This is not so much a mistake as Piranesi's ecstasy caught very precisely, which through architectural form is expressed very fully in Gothic halls and cathedrals.

The scheme, the device, the formula or method is manifested very clearly when you see them applied not only in pure form, but in parody. Parody can be of two types.

Either what is parodied—"is raised to laughter"—is both the theme as well as its treatment. And then parody is an oblique attack on something.

Or parody is of method (device, formula, scheme). This arises when the object of scorn is not the "treatment," but the "theme." Then the means are in the hands of the author himself, and he applies them when, for example, in order to achieve persiflage, "the insignificant" is raised to heights of great emotion.

The application to "the insignificant" of a treatment normally applied to "the worthy and significant" in and of itself produces—by the lack of correspondence between the form and content of narration—a mocking and comic effect.

(Thus, for example, the comic "catalogues" of Rabelais, which "emotionalize" the trifles of everyday life in the childhood of the giant Gargantua, sound like a parody on Whitman.)

There is a similar case in my own practice.

It is interesting to note that such an example was inserted productively into a series of shots (when the production of *Old and New* was suspended)—that is, in the middle of shots of the very film in which the problems of emotion were made more precise.

16 Giovanni Batista Piranesi, Title page to "Invenzioni Capric di Carceri." *First state, I, ca.1745.*  
*17 Second state, I, ca.1760.*

18 Giovanni Batista Piranesi, Carcere, with a Staircase Flanked by Military Trophies. *First state, VIII, ca.1745.*  
*19 Second state, VIII, ca.1760.*



16



17



18



19



This “case” is one of the scenes from the film *October* (produced in 1927).

The scene is the ascent of Kerensky, the head of the pre-October Provisional Government, up the Jordan Staircase of the Winter Palace, which is treated as an ironic symbol of his rise to the summit of power (fig. 15).

The “trick” of this scene (and its ironic effect) consists in the fact that *one and the same* piece showing the ascent of the head of state up the marble staircase of the Winter Palace has been cemented together in succession “ad infinitum.” Of course, not really “ad infinitum,” but in the course of the four or five variants in which this same scene was shot, which during the actual shooting was intended to be a very luxurious and ironic episode; however, the episode is solved simply and “in an everyday fashion”—after ascending the staircase, Kerensky “democratically” shakes the hands of former tsarist footmen lined up on the top landing of the staircase.

Already in the course of montage there arose the idea of solving the sequence as a parody through the repetition of the shot showing the ascent up the staircase.

In any case, the same fragment showing the ascent is repeated four to five times.

Besides “the insignificance” of the object, the ironic effect was helped by the fact that to achieve emotion in the scheme of construction—where to produce ecstasy the transference (leap) from dimension to dimension, from piece to piece is absolutely necessary—here not only are there no “leaps” in quality, but not even a change in the sequence itself.

In one piece Kerensky climbs from the bottom to the top.

In the second—from the bottom to the top—up that same staircase.

In the third—from the bottom to the top.

In the fourth.

In the fifth.

This lack of a qualitative *crescendo* from piece to piece was emphasized by the fact that into the cutting of these pieces was included a crescendo of titles which cited the ranks of ever increasing importance by which this pre-October toady of the bourgeoisie was so obligingly covered.

“Minister of this,” “minister of that,” “president of the Council of Ministers,” “Chief of State.”

And the repetition of one and the same path in the representation in its turn “decreased” the crescendo of titles and ranks—lowered them to the level of that absurdity in the ascent “to nowhere” which the little legs of the high commander-in-chief, fettered by English style leggings, beat up the marble stairs.

As we can see, through an essentially simple system of displacement the emotional rise of Piranesi from the visions of De Quincey-Coleridge was transformed into the ironic flight “in place” of Aleksander Fedorovich Kerensky.

“From the sublime to the ridiculous—in one step.”

Just as in the essence of the phenomenon, so in the principles of its compositional embodiment!

In any case, this example provides us with the realization of our basic principle from one more angle of possible perspectives. From the position of a parody-ironic construction.

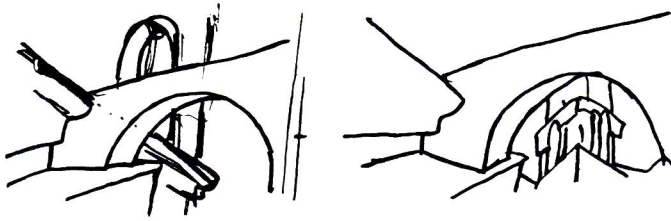
We have already spoken above about the “significance” and meaning of just those forms—architectural forms—pouring into each other, which belong to the system of the most stable objects of nature organized by man.

However let us turn back, for a moment, and once again compare what Piranesi does in his classical *Carceri* to what Giesecke calls the “Ur-Carceri.”

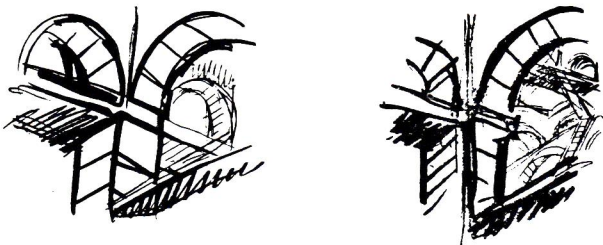
20 "Each time behind such a column or semicircle of an arch the perspective movement is caught up again." Diagram by Eisenstein.

21 "It is very curious that certain aspects of Piranesi's method correspond to the 'vertical' landscapes . . . of Chinese and Japanese painting (kakemono)." Diagram by Eisenstein.

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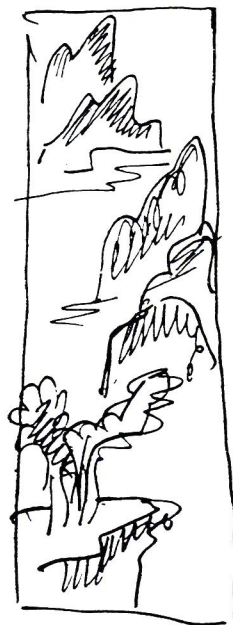


not like this



but like this

20



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The similarity of these two states is particularly notable. In them we see everywhere one and the same technically composed device.

To the already existing states (see, for example, in Giesecke the reproductions of both states of the title sheet [figs. 16, 17] or the sheet of the powerful monumental staircase with armor, helmets and standards at its feet [figs. 18, 19]) Piranesi invariably adds new foregrounds.

These new foregrounds in one step hurl ever deeper into the depths the spanning forms which thrust, plane after plane, ever backward.

Even without this, the actual composition of architectural ensembles is constructed on the basis of the uninterrupted reduction of repetitions of one and the same architectural motif, repetitions which seem to hurl out of each other (by perspective).

Like the tubes of a single telescope extending in length and diminishing in diameter, these diminishing arches engendered by the arches of a plane closer up, these flights of stairs ejecting progressively diminishing new flights of stairs upward, penetrate into the depths. Bridges engender new bridges. Columns new columns. And so on, *ad infinitum*. As far as the eye can follow.

In raising the intensity of the etchings from state to state, Piranesi, in establishing new foregrounds, seems to thrust once again into the depths one measure deeper the entire figure created by him of successively deepening volumes and spaces connected and intersected by staircases.

Plane bursts from plane and by a system of explosions plunges ever deeper into the depths.

Or through a system of new foregrounds continuously arising which by their displacement plunge forward from the etching, attacking the viewer.

Forward or into the depths?—Here is it not all the same? And in this simultaneity of opposite aspirations—forward

and into the depths—once again there is solemnly removed in ecstasy one more pair—a pair of opposites!

As we can see, this occurs not only in the scheme of a finished construction, but even in the method of the actual process of construction in which one plane “issues out of” another one.

One must pause for a moment here and say a few words about the significance of reduced perspective.

Their role in Piranesi is twofold.

In the first place, the usual role—illusory-spatial, that is, “drawing in” the eye into an imagined depth of space which is represented according to the rules of how one is used to seeing distances as they diminish in actual reality.

But there is another—“in the second place.”

Perspectives in Piranesi are constructed quite uniquely.

And the basis of their uniqueness is their constant interruption and image of “leaping.”

Nowhere in the *Prisons* do we find an uninterrupted perspective view into the depths.

But everywhere the initial movement of deepening perspective is interrupted by a bridge, a column, an arch, a passage.

Each time behind such a column or semicircle of an arch the perspective movement is caught up again (fig. 20).

However, it is not in the same perspective mode but in a new one—usually in a much more reduced scale of representation than you would expect or might suggest.

This produces a double effect.

The first is a direct effect which is expressed in the fact that such reduced representation through the breach of an

arch or from under a bridge, or between two columns, creates the illusion that what is represented in the depths is extremely remote.

But the other effect is even stronger.

We have already said that the scale of these new pieces of architectural space turns out to be different from the way the eye “expects” to see them.

In other words: the dimensions and movement of architectural elements which are directed, let us say, toward meeting an arch naturally define the scale of elements behind the arch while proceeding from the scale of elements in front of the arch. That is, the eye expects to see behind the arch a continuation of the architectural theme in front of the arch, reduced normally according to the laws of perspective.

Instead through this arch another architectural motif meets the eye, and moreover—a motif taken in reduced perspective, approximately twice as large as the eye would suggest.

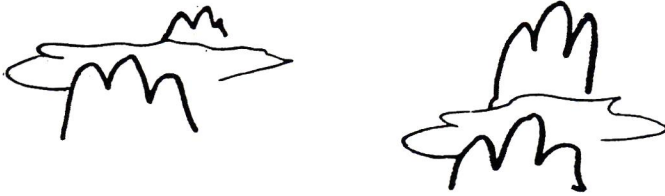
And as a result one feels as if the suggested arched construction “is exploding” out of its naturally suggested scale into a qualitatively different scale—into a scale of higher intensity (in the given case—the normally proposed movement into space is exploding “out of itself”).

This is the source of the unexpected qualitative leap in scale and space.

And the series of spatial movements into the depths cut off from each other by columns and arches is constructed like a succession of broken links of independent spaces strung out not in terms of a single, uninterrupted perspective, but as a sequence of collisions of spaces whose depth is of a qualitatively different intensity. (This effect is constructed on the capacity of our eye to continue by inertia a movement once it has been given. The collision of this “suggested” path of movement with another path substituted for it also produces the effect of a jolt. It is on the analogous ability

22 “Here the new element turns out to be unexpectedly reduced, but at the same time unexpectedly increased (also approximately twice!)”  
Diagram by Eisenstein.

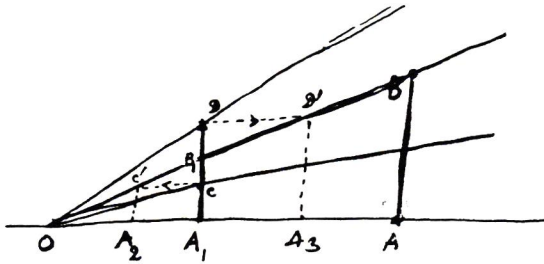
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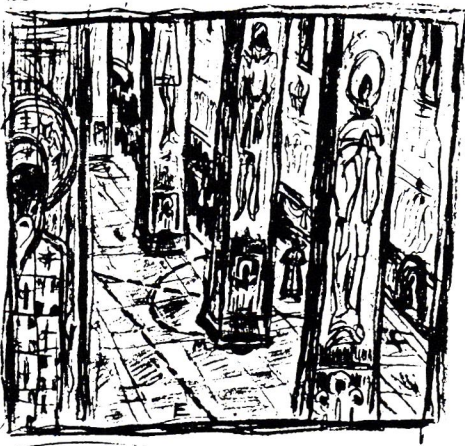
not

but

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of retaining imprints of a visual impression that the phenomenon of cinematic movement is built.)

It is very curious that certain aspects of Piranesi’s method correspond to the “vertical” landscapes . . . of Chinese and Japanese painting (kakemono).

Their scheme is like this (see fig. 21).

Here also a remarkable feeling of ascent is achieved.

But the character of this “ascent” is very different from Piranesi’s models.

If in Piranesi everything is—dynamism, whirlwind, a furious tempo drawing one into the depths and inward, then here everything—is a serene, solemn ascent toward the enlightened heights.

But in their emotional effect both this and the other model exceed the limits of a common realistic effect.

The first does so—by passion.

The second—by enlightenment. It is as if the active aggressiveness of Western ecstasy were engraved in them (Spanish, Italian) in contrast to the ecstasy of the quietism of the East (India, China).

It is interesting to compare the difference in the means by which these effects are obtained, effects different in nature but equally ecstatic in regard to the “normal” order of things.

The attempt of the Italian is directed with all his might toward producing a three-dimensional body captured realistically from the flat surface of the plate.

The attempt of the Chinese is to make out of three-dimensional reality—a two-dimensional image of contemplation.

This is the source of the representational canons—the ex-

23 "The jump between  $AB$  and  $A_1D$  is less than the normal perspective interval  $AB—A_1B_1$ , and the eye, carrying  $A_1$  to  $A_3$ , extends it forward—to the flat plane." Diagram by Eisenstein.

24 Sketch for the scenery of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, 1944–1945.

cessive perspective of the one and . . . the reverse perspective of the other.

What is common to both is the exact same sequential explosion of the uninterrupted representation that occurs.

In Piranesi the continuity of perspective is smashed by columns, arches, and bridges.

In Chu Chi-Kuei and Buson Essa<sup>26</sup> the compactness of the representation simply explodes or "is motivated" by layers of clouds.

After each such explosion or letting in of a layer of clouds, the successive representation of an element of landscape (a mountain mass) is once again not given in the scale which would be dictated by an effect that would produce a sense of real distance.

However, in contrast to Piranesi, here the new element turns out to be unexpectedly reduced, but at the same time unexpectedly increased (also approximately twice! [fig. 22]):

The volume of the object (the mountain ridge) also "goes out of itself" in respect to the suggested scale.

But this leap is not for the purpose of increasing the range between the normal perspective dimensions of details, but on the contrary, for the purpose of reducing this range.

According to the scheme it is obvious what occurs in both cases.

Let the real perspective reduction of the object  $AB$  at point  $A_1$  be expressed through  $A_1B_1$ .

At this point Piranesi represents it in the dimension  $A_1C$  (thus  $A_1C < A_1B_1$ ).

The jump between  $AB$  and  $A_1C$  is greater than the normal perspective interval  $AB—A_1B_1$ .

This is the reason the "bursts" are stronger, and the illusory feeling of depth greater, and the eye, carrying point  $A_1$  to  $A_2$ , explodes into the depths. 107

The Chinese painter at this same point  $A_1$  represents the object in the dimension  $A_1D$  (thus  $A_1D > A_1B_1$ ).

The jump between  $AB$  and  $A_1D$  is *less* than the normal perspective interval  $AB—A_1B_1$ , and the eye, carrying  $A_1$  to  $A_3$ , extends it forward—to the flat plane (fig. 23).

As a result both cases produce an ecstatic effect which goes beyond the limits of the simple actual reflection of the appearance of phenomena.

But their character is different (opposite): one serves as an expression of the pantheistic quietism characteristic of the ecstatic contemplation of the East; the other expresses the "explosiveness" typical of "active" ecstasy—one of the tendencies of "Western" ecstasy. (This certainly does not mean that the East is not familiar with the fanatic ecstasy of the dervish or the Shashsei-Vashei, and Spain—the mystical ecstasies of St. John of the Holy Cross, or that the creations of Fra Beato Angelico do not correspond to the Bodhisattvas of India or the Mongol demons to the works of El Greco. This division is, of course, quite "conventional.")

Quietism tries to reconcile the opposition by means of the *dissolution of one into the other*. This is why the reduced range of the difference in dimensions repeats this process, returning and bringing the explosive leaps into one smooth, single flow.

The other type of ecstasy acts in a different way: while sharpening each of the contrasts to the maximum, it tries at the highest point of this tension to force them to *penetrate each other*, and through this it raises their reduced dynamism to the highest limits.

The present section of this work has been basically devoted to this type. Attention is drawn to quietism in another work of this collection—in "Non-indifferent Nature."

108 This method of capturing depth of space is very close to me in my own work on the shot.

It is interesting that this method is formulated more clearly in *Old and New*, and it finds its most extensive application in the scenery of *Ivan the Terrible* where it also achieves the effect of the “enormity” of the chamber (fig. 24). I wrote about the meaning of these various scales in an extract of a paper on the Terrible in issues of *Izvestiia* [4 February 1945] in connection with the release of the first part of the film. And probably it is not accidental that I designated their size not by a static term, but by a dynamic one like “growing dimensions,” vaults “rearing up,” etc. Through this terminology I expressed the feeling created in them of the obsession and exaltation of the theme which the author achieved.

This method consists in the fact that “scenery as such” for my shots is never exhausted as a real “place of action.”

Most of the time this “scenery as such” is like a “spot on the background” which penetrates an applied system of foregrounds, which are distributed endlessly “like stage wings” in front of it, driving this “scenery as such” farther and farther into the depths.

In my work scenery is unavoidably accompanied by the unlimited surface of the floor *in front of it*, which allows an unlimited advancement of separate details of the foreground, and these details consist of the following: transferred columns, parts of vaults, stoves, piers, or objects of everyday use.

The last point on this path is usually a close-up of the actor carried beyond all conceivable limits, over whose shoulder is all the space which can be outlined by the scenery with various modes of application, and nape of whose neck conceals that part of the studio which no longer can be fettered by applied details of a “place of action.”

This “ecstatic” method of constructing the scenery according to the scheme . . . of a telescope is not limited in my work to the area of the visual and the plastic.

As other “schemes” of ecstatic construction, this also finds a place in the dramatic composition of my work.

If in terms of *Potemkin* and *The General Line*<sup>27</sup> we have touched on the “transference into the opposite” in the course of the drama itself, and in *Old and New* the pivot of action consisted in a similar transport from “the old” into “the new,” then in another case of epic-drama we are concerned with a pure scheme of the phases of the development of a historical subject hurling out of each other consecutively “like a crossbow.”

It was exactly in this way that the scheme of the subject of the film about the Ferghana Canal was constructed, which Pyotr Pavlenko and I planned right after *Alexander Nevsky* but, unfortunately, was never realized.

I conceived it as a triptych of the fight of man for freedom.

Three phases:

Tamerlane,  
tsarism,  
the collective farm structure.

How should one get involved with the dynamic unity of three such epochs separated by centuries and decades from each other?

The device here was the “triple crossbow” taken at the tempo of narration—a double going out of self grouped in retrospective sequence.

The first generation.

What came was an epic interpretation of Tamerlane’s campaign and the siege of Urgench.

And its tragic finale flowed into the image of the old narrator Toxtasyn who is singing about those long past times.

The figure of the old man indicates the end of the first generation.

And the singing old man begins

the second generation.

The narration, in every day terms rather than in strong, poetic form, is in tune with the battle for a centimeter of the irrigation ditch of impoverished Central Asia under the tsars; a battle replacing the grand dimensions of the campaigns of the titans of the Middle Ages, of hundreds of thousands of fighters pursuing each other, those from besieged cities fighting beside each other like currents of a river, and like the flow of water, drowning the army of besiegers.

In the unequal battle with the bey and the tsar's bureaucrat, the old singer abandoned his native Central Asia after having begun a sorrowful page of his history with his song.

The merchant and bey kidnaped his daughter "for a debt."

The son broke with his father, the contemplator and non-resister of evil, and went off to be free.

And the old man dragged himself to the Iranian foothills, far away from people . . .

But even this episode turns out to be narrative: not a song about the past, but a story around the bonfire.

The story of an engineer-constructor, one of the participants in the unprecedented construction of the Ferghana Canal.

The engineer was that same young man—the son of Toxtasyn, who left his father, and the "second generation" of the film was the story of how, after passing through the Revolution, he came to the Ferghana construction.

And his tale opens

the third generation of the epic narration.

The third generation, beginning with his story, unfolding

a new monumental fresco of new campaigns by many thousands; but no longer is it a battle of one man against another, but the one battle which remains the lot of a man free from exploitation, free from the chains of slavery, a man creating the Communist society—a battle with the elements, a victory over nature, the subjugation of natural forces to the creative genius of a free man.

The living Toxtasyn returns from the Iranian foothills to the storm of this construction and meets his son at the joyful moment when the water is freed. . . .

In the epic structure of this film, as if in slow motion, is slowly unfolded this same telescopic structure which, in the instantaneous leap from phase to phase, moving like a spring, was examined by us above when we observed the action of the ecstatic effect in the preceding examples.

- 110 *Figures 1, 2, 11, 12, 15–19, and 24 were added to this article by the Editors.*
1. Text from Sergei Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia, III* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), pp. 156–187—Ed.
  - The manuscript of the chapter has no title. It is given here according to a note dated July 4, 1947, in which Eisenstein specifically writes: “Properly speaking, the second theme in each little chapter is or should be distinguished: for example, ‘Helena, or Saving Virtue’: ‘Piranesi, or the Fluidity of Forms’.”—Ed. Russian edition.
  2. Potylixa was a village outside Moscow where the film studios of the capital are located.—Ed.
  3. Daniel Marot (c.1663–1752)—French engraver and theater designer.—Ed. Russian edition.
  4. Gerard Edelinck (1640–1707)—French engraver.—Ed. Russian edition.
  5. William Hogarth (1697–1794)—English painter, engraver and theoretician of art.—Ed. Russian edition.
  6. Robert Nanteuil (1623–1678)—French engraver.—Ed. Russian edition.
  7. Claude Méllane (1598–1688)—French engraver.—Ed. Russian edition.
  8. However, this same mistake was made by the Academy of Architecture of the USSR—which was far less permissible than for an individual who happened to be a mere admirer—in the album *Piranesi* (1939), including it with the same lack of foundation in a series to which it does not belong.—S.M.E.
  9. S. M. Eisenstein, “Vertikal’nyj montaz, stat’ja pervaja” (translated as Chap. 2 in *The Film Sense*, New York 1942); see also “El Greco,” in *Eisenstein’s Complete Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1964), pp. 145ff. and 156ff.—Ed.
  10. Eisenstein is referring here to the actual Greek root of “ecstasy,” a synthesis of the words “ex” and “stasis.”—Trans.
  11. Albert Geisecke, “Meister de Grafik, IV,” *Giovanni Batista Piranesi*.—S.M.E.
  12. *Zaválinka*—small mound of earth along the outer walls of a Russian peasant’s house.—Trans.
  13. Jacques Callot (c.1592–1688)—French engraver.—Ed. Russian edition.
  14. In *The Battleship Potemkin*.—Ed.
  15. Mikhail Glinka (1804–1857).—Ed. Russian edition.
  16. Tchaikovsky was referring to the opera *Ivan Soussanin* of 1836, which marked the birth of Russian classical music.—Ed. Russian edition.
  17. *P. I. Tchaikovsky’s Diary* (Moscow-Petersburg: GIZ, Musical Sector, 1923), pp. 214–215.—S.M.E.
  18. Although they do not undergo that savage violence which the disintegrating (exploding) line possesses in, for example, the pen drawings of Van Gogh.—S.M.E.
  19. Paul Cézanne asserted, “Everything in nature is sculpted in the form of a sphere, cone, or cylinder; one must learn to paint in these simple figures and if you learn to master these forms, you will be able to produce whatever you wish.” Cézanne’s formula reflected one of the directions of painting in the twentieth century—Cubism, whose program was stated by the French artists Albert Gleizes (1881–1953) and Jean Metzinger (1883) in the book *On Cubism* (1912).—Ed. Russian edition.
  20. This citation was introduced by me on another occasion in a corresponding section of “Non-indifferent Nature.”—S.M.E.
  21. We’ll return to the problem of Picasso’s ecstasy in a section of “Non-indifferent Nature.”—S.M.E.
  22. In the 1920’s Russian Constructivist architects employed rational-functionalism as representative of the new Socialist society.—Trans.
  23. At the beginning of the twentieth century Russian architects were continuing to apply eclectic styles to their buildings.—Trans.
  24. Portal tower of Indian temples richly decorated with sculpture.—Ed. Russian edition.
  25. The poem by Wordsworth quoted by De Quincey is as follows: “The appearance, instantaneously disclosed,  
Was of a mighty city—boldly say  
A wilderness of building, sinking far  
And self-withdrawn into a wondrous depth,  
Far sinking into splendor—without end!  
Fabric it seem’d of diamond, and of gold,  
With alabaster domes, and silver spires,  
And blazing terrace upon terrace, high  
Up lifted; here, serene pavilions bright  
In avenues disposed; there towers begirt  
With battlements that on their restless fronts  
Bore stars—illumination of all gems!  
By earthly nature had the effect been wrought  
Upon the dark materials of the storm  
Now pacified: on them, and on the coves,  
And mountain-steeps and summits, whereunto  
The vapors had receded,—taking there  
Their station under a cerulean sky . . .”—Ed. Russian edition.
  26. Buson (1716–1783)—Japanese artist and poet.—Ed. Russian edition.
  27. *The General Line*—the name of the first variant of the film *Old and New*.—Ed. Russian edition.
- Figure Credits  
 1, 4–9, 13, 14, 20–23 Reprinted from Sergei Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia, III* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), pp. 156–187.  
 2, 15 Reprinted from *The Complete Films of Eisenstein* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1974).  
 3 Reprinted from Ian Jonathan Scott, *Piranesi* (London: Academy Editions, 1975).  
 10, 11, 16–19 Reprinted from Giovanni Batista Piranesi, *The Prisons* (New York: Dover Publications, 1973).  
 12 Reprinted from Harold E. Wethey, *El Greco and His School*, vol. I (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1962).  
 24 Reprinted from *Ivan the Terrible* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963).



Sergei Eisenstein

*Translation by Roberta Reeder*

Several times already in the course of this work the pointed profile of Gogol has cut into its diversity, gliding like a shadow across its various parts.

It would be too simple and too easy to flood these pages with a sea of quotations taken from the well-known pages of his emotion-filled works, where from time to time lyrical digressions “rear up” in his narrative poems, tales, and stories.

Their “ecstatic” construction is everywhere distinct and clear.

But it is at this very point that we will focus on Gogol in greater detail in relation to our theme.

In relation to an area which would ordinarily seem less connected to him.

To recall Gogol side by side with Piranesi . . .

Concerning the problem of . . . architecture.

This would appear to be odd and unexpected only if one has forgotten Gogol’s sojourn of many months in that same Rome which enfevered the imagination of Giovanni Batista,

And if one has forgotten those “prisons” of the spirit by way of which Gogol drives his reader through the “Inferno” and “Purgatory” of the completed sections of *Dead Souls*,<sup>2</sup> and from which he himself sought a way out toward the light, just as desperately as did the figure of Piranesi as imagined by Coleridge, dashing along the precipices of the passages and staircases of his own etchings.

And if one has completely forgotten about the extraordinarily passionate enthusiasm of Gogol for architecture,

And how Gogol senses the architecture, and how he writes about it—which is probably very close to how Piranesi forces it to come alive and vibrate in his etchings.

It is exactly the same process as that of going outside

oneself and that of forms passing into each other through which Gogol writes about architecture, revealing in the emotion of his descriptions both the ecstatic character of his own nature as well as the reflection, in the actual principles of architecture, of those basic, prerequisite strivings of our nature which have found expression in it. 111

Very few people probably now read Gogol’s *Arabesques*. And even fewer readers linger over the article “About the Architecture of our Time.” And I also would have barely glanced at it if it had not been placed right next to the article “Several Words about Pushkin” which I needed for a very different reason.

Therefore I must introduce detailed excerpts from this article.

It is extremely characteristic that of all the types of architecture, Gogol was most fascinated by the architecture that was most ecstatic—the Gothic.

There was good reason for Coleridge (and after him, De Quincey) to have wrongly defined the actual style of Piranesi’s architectural visions, designating it as “Gothic halls”; even though the designation of the actual style of these halls is incorrect, it is quite correct in defining what Piranesi does (ecstatically) with these halls!

“No matter which type of architecture—the smooth, monumental Egyptian; the gigantic, variegated architecture of the Hindus; the sumptuous architecture of the Moors; the inspirational and gloomy Gothic; the graceful Greek—they are all good when they are adapted to the function of the structure; they all become magnificent when they are actually conceived.

“However, if one must give a definite precedence to any one of these types of architecture, then I would always give it to the Gothic. . . .

“But it disappeared, this lovely architecture! As soon as the enthusiasm of the Middle Ages died down and man’s thought scattered and pursued many different directions, as soon as the unity and oneness of the whole disappeared—the grandeur disappeared as well. The force of the enthu-

112 siasm, having been dispersed, became feeble: it suddenly produced all sorts of amazing works, but nothing more of the truly magnificent, the titanic.

“They have passed—those ages when faith inflamed, ardent faith directed all thoughts, all minds, all actions toward one goal, when the artist strove to raise his creation higher and higher toward the sky, when he rushed toward it alone, and before it, almost facing it, he reverentially raised his hands in prayer. His building flew up to the heavens; narrow windows, columns, and vaults extended infinitely upward toward the heights; transparent, almost lacy spires appeared above like smoke; and the majestic temple was so grand compared to the common dwellings of the people, just as grand as the demands of our soul are compared to the needs of our body. . . .

“Gothic architecture, this Gothic architecture which appeared before the end of the Middle Ages, is a manifestation which the taste and imagination of man has never again produced. . . . In it everything comes together: that forest of vaults rising slender and high above your head; enormous, narrow windows with endless circumlocutions and interweavings attached to that terrifying colossus of a mass of the tiniest, most variegated decoration; that light web of carving enmeshing the building with its net, winding around it from the bottom to the top of a spire, and flying off along with it to the heavens; the grandeur as well as the beauty, the luxury and the simplicity, the heaviness and the lightness—these are the virtues which never again, outside of this period, became part of the architectural composition. Entering into the sacred darkness of this church through which the fantastically vari-colored hues of the windows peer, and raising your eyes upward where they lose themselves in the intercrossing of the ogee-shaped vaults, one above the other, one above the other without end—it is quite natural to feel an involuntary terror in one’s soul at the presence of the sacred which the audacious mind of man dare not touch. . . .

“Look more often at the famous Cologne Cathedral—there all of it [the Gothic—S.M.E.] is perfection and grandeur. A comparable monument has never been produced by an ancient or modern age. I prefer Gothic architecture, therefore, because it better allows the artist to revel. The imagination vigorously and ardently reaches for height rather

than breadth. And that is why Gothic architecture must be used only for churches and buildings that rise very high. The lines and pilasters without cornices of the Gothic, narrowly compressed, must fly across the whole building. It is unfortunate if they stand far apart from each other, if the building does not tower at least twice if not three times higher than its breadth! It is then destroyed within itself. Erect it as it should be: so that its walls rise higher and higher, as high as possible,<sup>3</sup> so that all the more thickly, like arrows, like poplars, like pines, numerous corner columns surround them! There should be no rupture or break or cornice which would give another direction to or decrease the dimensions of the structure! They should be equal from the base to the very top! Enormous windows, varied in their form, colossal in their height! Airier, lighter than the spires! So that everything, the more it rises upward, the more it takes flight and is transparent. And remember what is most essential: there is no comparison of height and breadth. The term breadth must disappear altogether. Here there is only one dominating idea—height.”<sup>4</sup>

Magnificent pages! Magnificent in their perception of the pathos of Gothic architecture,

And excellent examples of the perception of the characteristic features of structure evoking strong emotion.

A sense of the fundamental principles which, in the present case, have the ardor of an idea.

The confluence of all the multiformities in terms of the problem of expressing the unity of that idea.

The unity of opposites as a factor of its expression (“grandeur together with beauty,” “luxury and simplicity,” “heaviness and lightness.” At another point in the article Gogol writes: “The true effect consists of sharp contrast”).

Repetition going to infinity (“ogee-shaped vaults, one above the other, . . . without end”).

The leap from dimension to dimension (“so that all the more thickly, like arrows, like poplars, like pines, numerous cor-

ner columns surround them”; the “lacy spire” emerging out of the materiality of stone and “like smoke” winding over the building).

And in the very exposition of Gothic features—a leap from the description into a direct address by the author to the reader: “Erect it . . . higher, higher, as high as possible. . . .” And from an address to the reader to a direct command to the phenomena themselves: “No rupture. . . . They should be equal. . . . Enormous windows. . . . Airier, lighter than the spires! So that everything . . . takes flight and is transparent!”

And here, as if in outline, we read through that same scale of gradations, one issuing out of the other, with which Gogol years later succeeded in describing the emotional flight of the “bird-troika” in *Dead Souls*.

But the other pages of the article are also strewn with a similar exposition of the vivid movement of architectural forms understood dynamically.

Sometimes the exposition is ecstatically explosive, and then its image resounds like a familiar trope (I will stress it in the text):

“The portico with columns . . . has also disappeared with us: it does not have the possibility of providing colossal dimension, *of moving across the width of a building, of rising to its full height*. . . . Is it surprising that the buildings which required to be huge seemed empty because the pediments with columns were sculpted only over their porches. . . .

“New cities have no special appearance: they are so correct, so smooth, so monotonous that, after walking down one street, you already feel bored and give up the desire to look at another. They are nothing more than a row of walls. One’s glance seeks vainly to find one of these endless walls at any point suddenly grow and *erupt out into the air* by the daring break of a vault or *cause* some giant tower to *erupt*” [Eisenstein’s emphasis].

Sometimes the actual form of the description slips into another structure—into a metaphoric structure,

And then these descriptions take on a particularly sensual charm, for the comparisons are chosen on the basis of those extrinsic prototypes imitated or on the basis of those intrinsic dynamic impulses (the dance) which to a great extent determine the forms and rhythms, harmony, and character of architectural structures:

“In Gothic architecture what is most notable is the imprint, although vague, of a tangled forest, gloomy, magnificent, where an ax has not been heard for centuries. Those rushing, endless lines of ornaments and the nets of filigree carving are nothing but the obscure reminiscence of the trunk, branches, and leaves of trees.”

And the buildings went beyond their stone limits, and the temple turned into a forest. But this was not enough—for here is how the image from “the kingdom of Asiatic splendor” is drawn:

“The huge oriental dome—whether completely round, or curved like a voluptuous vase overturned, or in the form of a sphere, or overloaded, covered with carving and ornament like a rich miter—reigns patriarchally over the whole building; below, at the very base of the structure, small domes encircle its extensive walls in an unbroken fence like obedient slaves; on all sides fly slender minarets, which present a most charming contrast in their light, joyful turn-out to the solemn, majestic appearance of the whole building. Thus a majestic Mohammedan in an ample robe decorated in gold and stones reclines amidst houris, slender, nude, and dazzling in their whiteness.”

The forms of the building are enlivened by a group of human beings.

Obedient slaves encircle it below like houris surrounding light minarets, and its dome reposing in the center is turned into a majestic Mohammedan in a gold robe. . . .

But even these transformations do not satisfy the author.

According to his will, architecture must fuse into a multiplicity of all possible forms pouring into each other (the following discussion concerns the architecture of cities): “Here architecture must be as whimsical as possible: it

114 must take on an austere appearance, manifest a happy expression, breathe with antiquity, shine with novelty, chill with horror, gleam with beauty, be now as gloomy as a day full of huge, threatening clouds, now as clear as the morning in bright sunlight. . . .

“Architecture—it is also a chronicle of the world,” writes Gogol further, “it still speaks when songs and legends are silent, and when nothing else speaks about a people which has perished. . . .”

And we will find what is probably the most dynamic picture of the timeless transition of architectural forms into each other which his imagination paints . . . in a footnote to the same article:

“Once a very strange idea came to me: I thought it would not be a bad idea to have in a city one street which would contain in itself the chronicle of architecture; it would begin with heavy, gloomy gates, after passing which the viewer would see on both sides the magnificent rising building of wild and primitive taste common to archaic peoples; then the gradual change of it into various types: a lofty transformation into an Egyptian street, colossal and full of simplicity, then into the beauty of a Greek street, then into a voluptuous Alexandrian one and a Byzantine one with flat domes, then into a Roman one with arches in several rows; farther on descending again to primitive times and then suddenly rising to the unusual splendor of Araby, then to the primitive Gothic, then the Gothic-Arabic, then the pure Gothic, the crown of art that breathes in the Cologne Cathedral; then to a horrible mixture of architecture proceeding from a return to the Byzantine, then to the ancient Greek in new costume, and finally, the whole street would end with gates which would contain within themselves the elements of the new taste. . . .”

The perception of this formation of new types of architecture as a single current of types continuously flowing into each other comes through in the words in which this strange vision is described: “the gradual change . . . into various types,” “a . . . transformation into an Egyptian street,” “then into the beauty of a Greek street,” “then into a voluptuous Alexandrian one . . .,” “descending again to primitive times,” “then suddenly rising,” etc.—all this char-

acterizes this change as a single current of forms “being transformed” into one another, “descending” from one into another and “rising” from one into another.<sup>5</sup>

However, what is probably most striking about this whole article is how Gogol, with the true perception of a seer, “throws out” from the pile of architectural images of the past centuries and his own contemporary architecture a hint of architectural forms of future ages.

He “divines” in passing . . . the skyscraper (although of modest dimensions) when he drops a remark about houses erected on the hills of a city (“One need only observe that the houses would show their height one behind the other so that to one standing at the foot of the hill it would seem that a twenty-story mass were looking at him”).

Quite reasonably he sighs:

“Can it be . . . is it impossible to create (if only for the sake of originality) a quite unique and new type of architecture, going beyond the former conditions?”

No less correctly—even for our day!—he grieves:

“Can it be we are not capable . . . of turning bits and pieces of art into something grand? Can it be that everything encountered in nature must necessarily be only a column, a dome, and an arch? How many other forms are there which have not been touched by us at all! . . .” How many of those forms “which not a single architect has yet introduced into his code! . . .”

Gogol mischievously and clairvoyantly throws in a perfectly concrete example at the end of the essay:

“Let us take, for example, those hanging decorations which have recently begun to appear. So far hanging architecture has only appeared in theater boxes, balconies, and small bridges.

“But if whole stories hang,

“if daring arches are flung across,

“if whole masses are found on open-work cast-iron supports instead of heavy columns,

“if the house is covered from top to bottom with balconies with patterned cast-iron railings,

“and, from them, hanging cast-iron ornaments in thousands of varied forms clothe the house with their light net, “and the house looks through them, as through a transparent veil, “when these cast-iron open-work decorations, wound around a lovely round tower, fly with it to the heavens, “—what lightness, what aesthetic airiness our houses will then acquire!”

Once Andrey Bely astonished readers with a quote from “Nevsky Prospect” which anticipates Picasso.<sup>6</sup>

But somehow even Bely overlooked the fact that Gogol anticipates the concept of Le Corbusier’s house on columns; and if his idea about the “transparency” of architecture was resolved not by a cast-iron “transparent veil” but by . . . glass, then—he also anticipates the American Wright, “father of transparent homes,” and, with his conception of the “lovely tower”—Tatlin’s tower.

It is also interesting that here in Gogol the small, isolated detail (hanging theater boxes, balcony, small bridge) expands into a new quality of a fantastical whole,

And how he himself recognizes this characteristic and capability,

And how he considers this characteristic and capability to be inseparable from the creator and the poet:

“But what a multitude of hints there is scattered throughout everything, capable of engendering in the head of the architect an utterly singular, living idea if only this architect—is a creator and poet.”

And all this was written in . . . 1831!

1. Sergei Eisenstein, *Izbrannyye proizvedeniia*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), pp. 192–198.—Ed.

2. Eisenstein alludes here to Gogol’s conception of *Dead Souls*. The Russian literary critic D. N. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskiy, in characterizing this concept, wrote that Gogol’s great work “had to first depict everything bad and dark” in the nature of Russian man, and then expose good inclinations hidden in it and, finally, show the way to resurrection, to a better future. . . . The story of Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov turns from a poetic contemplation of Russia “from a nice distance,” into a mournful narration about northern Russian “darkness and the frightening absence of light,” and finally into a moral-religious work—about Russian “hell” (part 1), “purgatory” (part 2), and “heaven” (part 3). Thus was the conception inspired by Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, which Gogol never stopped reading in Italy, where he was also working on *Dead Souls* (D. N. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskiy, *Collected Works*, vol. I, “Gogol” [Moscow, Petersburg: GIZ, 1923], pp. 32–33).—Ed. Russian edition.

3. Is it not from here that Plevako took the exclamation famous for its . . . pathos, which resounded at the trial of the Mother Superior Mitrofanina, which, as everyone knows, served as the basis for the subject of A. N. Ostrovskiy’s *Wolves and Sheep*.—S.M.E.

Fedor Nikiforovich Plevako (1843–1908)—Russian lawyer and judicial orator. At the scandalous trial of Mother Superior Mitrofanina, the former Baroness Rozen, who was connected by dark machinations with great speculators and cheaters, Plevako shouted: “Build the wall of the communities entrusted to you higher and higher so that the deeds accomplished by you under the cover of cassock and cloister not be visible to the world!”—Ed. Russian edition.

4. N. V. Gogol, “About the Architecture of our Time,” *Collected Works in Six Volumes*, vol. VI (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1959), pp. 40–61. Henceforth this edition of the essay will be cited.—S.M.E.

5. At another point in this book, I will introduce (for another reason) a picture composed according to this same type of description showing the movement of the evolution of female fashion. It was written (in an ironic manner) by Jean Cocteau. As we shall see, our Gogol “outgalloped” the French wit of our time by a good one hundred years.—S.M.E.

6. At this point in the manuscript Eisenstein makes a footnote: however he does not introduce the quote. In the archives the following excerpt has been preserved from A. Bely’s book *The Mastery of Gogol* marked “Apropos of . . . Gogol—Piranesi”: “his [Gogol’s—S.M.E.] description of a city is decorative beyond all decorativeness; Paris: ‘struck . . . by the gleam of the streets, by the disorder of the roofs, by the thickness of the chimneys, by the non-architectural, solid masses of the houses covered over with compact ragged stores, ugly naked . . . side walls, . . . a crowd of gold letters which climbed up the walls, the roofs, . . . the chimneys; struck by the light transparency of lower stories . . . from mirrored glass . . . Paris . . . —a crater . . . a magical heap blazed up . . . houses became transparent’, etc. (*Rome*).”—Ed. Russian edition.

**On Manfredo Tafuri's  
Théories et histoire de l'architecture**

Manfredo Tafuri. *Théories et histoire de l'architecture*. 1976, Paris, Editions S.A.D.G. 397 pp.

Yve-Alain Bois

*Yve-Alain Bois is currently writing a doctorat d'Etat at the CNRS, Paris, on Mondrian and De Stijl. He is also an editor of Macula.*

*Now I ask you, what is it that supports the roof of a building? If the wall, then there is no need for an architrave; if columns or pilasters, what becomes of the wall? Come, M. Protopiro, what do you want to cast down? The walls or the pilasters? You do not answer? Ah, well then, I, I will destroy everything. Note, then, buildings without walls, without columns, without pillars, without ornaments, without cornices, without vaults, without roofs; piazza, piazza campagna rasa.*  
G. B. Piranesi<sup>1</sup>

Manfredo Tafuri's book, *Théories et histoire de l'architecture*, recently translated into French,<sup>2</sup> gives one the uneasy feeling of hesitating between many possibilities which in the end cancel each other out. In it, the ambitious project of making an ideological critique (a history) of architecture is undermined by the digressive remarks that he adds, while in turn the fragmentary character of his intuitions, of his brilliant display of scholarship, is denied by an encroaching commentary, the importance of which is itself denied.<sup>3</sup>

It is as if some rhetorical flux, some hermeneutic obsession, is constantly submerging the novelty of the discontinuous discoveries that make up the details of this book; as if in the analysis of the discourses of architecture (of architects, historians, critics, theoreticians), the teaching of Tafuri has lost the architectural object itself: wishing by historical deciphering to "make architecture speak," he makes it invisible by a surplus of ideological interpretation.

*Théories et histoire de l'architecture* was not necessarily the best of Tafuri's books to publish first in French translation; given its specific character it hardly gives the measure of his considerable work. This is so not only because the translation and publication were manifestly put together very quickly (a fact which does not help to dispell the impression of confusion generally left by the book at first reading),<sup>4</sup> but because, in many ways, as the author re-

calls in the Preface, it is a book of circumstance linked very closely to the political and social conditions of Italian culture in the 1960's; its appearance in French, ten years after its writing, certainly required some revision or emendation.<sup>5</sup>

Be that as it may.

The radical demythologization of modern architecture is nevertheless a promising enterprise when conceived as the primordial task of criticism. Modern architecture was polemically announced, defended, and lived as an anti-historical rupture; the question now is to write the history of this pretension to the *tabula rasa* (a pretension which in itself forbids historical investigation),<sup>6</sup> the history of this *negative* relationship with the history of architecture and, finally, the history of the movements which emerged and continue to emerge in reaction to modernism—the multiplication of "revivals" naively opposed to the International Style that have arisen since the middle of the fifties, such as English neo-brutalism, Italian neo-liberty, and the like.

The great merit of Tafuri's book is then to attempt to write the history of the relationship of architects to history and of architecture to its own history; thus to probe "genealogically" the representation of rupture which modern architecture makes from itself to itself.

On this point, Tafuri might seem contradictory, because if he affirms that in fact the "break with history did not occur and does not seem on the point of happening"; if he credits Le Corbusier and Wright, as Vincent Scully has before him,<sup>7</sup> with having been among those few who recognized the "historicity of their anti-historicism," at the same time he sometimes seems to believe that the modern 'revolution' in architecture did indeed achieve its aims, and to take seriously the negativity that was introduced by Dada in order to put an end to history. More precisely, Tafuri takes seriously the nihilistic will of this 'negative'

belief in not perceiving its irony, even (and above all) if he demonstrates its inevitable consumption as positivity (“the magic role to which the avant-garde is condemned is that of King Midas” [p. 6]).

The contradiction is doubtless only apparent, and a result of the entirely correct limits of Tafuri’s procedure, which also form its basis: his work remains an ideological analysis of the ideological *program* of architects, not the programmatic reading of their works; no concrete, narrow analysis of architectural realizations is proposed. In this, however, one might wish that the author had paid more attention to architectural form, something that the instrumentalism of his work forbids. In the end, as we shall see, this predisposes him against the possibility of an architectural meta-language, of a critical architecture, about which he nevertheless gives remarkable insights.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, as Tafuri shows in his archaeological retracing (heuristically interpreting this notion in a new way), “the *anti-historicism* of the modern avant-garde is not the product of an arbitrary choice. It is the logical outcome of a process whose epicenter is the revolution of Brunelleschi and whose bases are established in the debate which is prolonged over more than five centuries at the heart of European culture.” The so-called rupture produced by modernity is, for Tafuri, only an after-blow, the echo of a previous shock. Brunelleschi is the “protagonist of the first artistic ‘avant-garde’, in the modern sense of the term” because he “breaks the historical continuity of figurative experiences by pretending to *construct* a new history” (p. 29) and because he introduces into the medieval city semantic disturbances which would henceforth govern the course of its development; his resort to the model of antiquity is then a true de-historicization (p. 27). As for Alberti, who was the next to reaffirm this strong blow against continuity in history (proving, for example, the “progress of classicism over the barbarous Middle

Ages” by conserving Gothic elements in his “restoration” of Santa Maria Novella [p. 30]), he is, as opposed to Brunelleschi, the first to show the ambiguity of the architect in relation to history: the exorcistic temptation to *soil* oneself with the architectural codes external (anterior) to classicism (the dominant “code”) carries in itself this danger, in that it reveals the “seduction that linguistic pluralism exercises by contagion” [p. 30].<sup>9</sup> This then is the framework which allows Tafuri to interpret all the sudden leaps of the different architectural avant-gardes since the Renaissance, passing from Mannerism to Borromini, Piranesi, the Enlightenment *philosophes*,<sup>10</sup> and finally to the Modern Movement.

In this process (one that is, despite Tafuri, hardly dialectical, since there is only a bivalent rhythm: a movement by metronomic fits and starts), “those who seem to negate history produce works which, historically, have a motivation. Those who are concerned not to burn bridges behind them are stranded in ambiguity” (p. 65). Thus it is in reaction against the “ultimate murder of history” perpetuated by the eclecticism of the nineteenth century and against that “instrumentalism of history and its non-productivity” that the “artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century discarded history to *construct* a new history,” desiring “to recuperate the only kind of historicity still acceptable after the twilight flame of parnassian Art Nouveau symbolism: that which was founded on the *tabula rasa*, disengaged from any commerce with the past” (pp. 50–51).

Since the war, the architect and the historian have known that radical departures are unthinkable, impossible under the actual conditions of society (pp. 307–308). New types of relationships with history have been established for the architect (by, for example, the theme of a critical-architecture) and new tasks laid out for the historian (having identified the critique in history [p. 228], he must exacerbate the conflicts, aggravate the theses, and accen-

tuate the malaise in order to unblock the “crisis”). In Tafuri’s words, “history can *no longer* promote solutions” (p. 302); the historian must present the architect with a picture that totalizes the actual contradictions (p. 303), placing him clearly in front of the choices to be made: “by rationalizing that which, in aesthetic activity, is almost always produced beyond any logical control—in the rigorous sense of the term—by laying bare the ideological values attached to formal choices that are often made out of habit, the critic can place the architect in front of his responsibility toward a constant and *merciless* control of his sources and the symbolic systems with which he is entrusted in a conscious or unconscious way” (p. 275).

And since architecture can no longer assume a “pedagogic” role (p. 133) given the loss of *aura* (the “crisis of the object”),<sup>11</sup> a loss which characterizes the way in which the modern building is inscribed within the noise of the city; since architecture can no longer be anything but ambiguous (it is the observer who “gives signification to the object or to the series” [p. 116], who is concerned with signs, which are closed, dulled, neutral, and invariable, like the “empty prisms of Mies,” or, at the other extreme, with the “total permanent, and open theater” of Le Corbusier [p. 128]); since “the symbolic values linked to typology—the newly codified structure of the *perception of genres* which replaced that of the *unicum*—have also disappeared behind the wave of images which became primary for the formal explication of typology itself” (p. 132); and since the abolition of all the certainty of that progressivist fantasm on which was based the “militant” critique of architecture (that critique which Tafuri calls *operative*); this critique has no longer any reasons to perpetuate itself.

It is a useless critique (“to oppose a cultural situation called *consumption* with a critique that is equally of consumption, is that not an operation which is carried out too much at the *inside* of the situation in order

120 to pretend to act in a truly productive way?" [p. 211]); and it is a detrimental critique insofar as it manifests itself as ideological interference ("jamming")—on it devolves the responsibility of having transformed the architectural culture into a culture of *images* (p. 215). This critique becomes an object of analysis in that, since Bellori, it has not ceased to constitute *myths*, and thus it carries "in itself the germ of anti-historicism" (p. 192), even though it avails itself of history in order to "deduce its own values or to try to force the future" (pp. 194–195). "It is," Tafuri concludes, "up to the historian to destroy the 'instrumentality' of history" (p. 303).

Taking his cue from the *Mythologies* of Roland Barthes, Tafuri is concerned to track down history everywhere, even beneath "nature" itself. He thus presents new "objects" for historical analysis, opens so many new routes for historical research; but in the end these "objects" always remain abstract processes, which bear witness to Tafuri's incapacity finally to render account of a building. For example, the historical deformations of "operative" criticism as traced by Tafuri are themselves historically dated: the interpretation by Sigfried Giedion of Sixtus V as "the first modern urbanist"<sup>12</sup> is not properly speaking an "error"; it was without doubt indispensable in its time ("his cultural productivity proves it" [p. 208]) because it calmed the fears of the Modern Movement by furnishing it with a paternity and on occasion gave "an impulsion to backward or slow to develop experiences" (p. 209). In the same way, the rejection of Giedion's interpretation is also historically determined: "If today, his historical positions satisfy us no longer, and if to attack them we have had recourse to a more responsive philology, it is because the discovery in history itself of an unstable dialectic, of a co-existence of a multiplicity of senses and directions, corresponds itself to a need to restore actual signification to history" (p. 208). The need to justify the monosemic and totalizing projects of Modern Movement urbanism

produced the discourse of Giedion even as the apology for polysemy now refutes it.

But what comprises the novelty of Tafuri's book, especially in France, in this period when semiologizing and formalizing commentaries on architecture are piling up, is the place which it reserves for that new tendency: the deliberate practice of architecture as a *metalanguage*, as criticism of architecture.

If all "architecture possesses, in the proper sense, a critical level" (p. 149), Tafuri is here concerned with a more radical demand: Bruno Zevi envisages a "history of architecture written with the expressive instruments of the architect and not uniquely with those of the historian of art" (p. 144); he questions, "why not express architectural criticism with architectural forms and not with words?" (p. 145). The opposition to the logocentrism developed by the hermeneutic philosophers (among whom Emile Benveniste is the most lucid representative: "Language is the interpreter of all semiotic systems. No other system has at its disposal a 'language' in which it can be categorized and interpreted according to its own semiotic distinctions, in that language can, in principle, categorize and interpret everything, having understood itself" [p. 120])<sup>13</sup> marks a new type of relation that joins the architect with his historical object, a relation of which Tafuri fashions a very useful portrait.

But while he reveals the historical antecedents of this internal—non-linguistic—dialogue of architecture with itself (for example, the criticism of centrality by Peruzzi, Serlio, Montano and his engravings of *tempietti*, which Tafuri assures us could never have been constructed—showing how much "baroque culture was ready to receive no matter what message sent by *images*" [p. 159]; the systematization of heresy and collage in Borromini; the typological variations in Wren and Palladio), Tafuri judges this autocriticism to be in-

effective. It is, according to him, incapable of "illuminating the ideological systems subjacent to the different codes as well as to isolated works" (p. 140); and he repeats this in connection with Borromini (p. 160). He defines such criticism as only privative, mute; deprived of speech, it cannot be intelligible. Worse still, it is only an experimentalism, which can only demonstrate the solidity of the "codes" that it dislocates or dismantles (pp. 142–143).

Tafuri's argument becomes twisted when he reproaches Robert Venturi for utilizing semiology (a semiology that is nevertheless useful to the historian to reveal "in a merciless way"—still this inquisitorial word, the police-like tone—"the false acts of liberty, the timid offenses against the codes" [p. 289]) as a means of presenting ambiguity and contradiction as "principles of poetics," emptying them of their "historical consistency" and with a citational leveling justifying an aesthetic of indifferenciation (pp. 293–294).<sup>14</sup> Tafuri's technique is clever. He wants to condemn a practice of architecture which is constructed as a non-discursive critical work (even if its author uses oppositions of a syntactical order to explain his position: *for* an architecture of *simultaneity*, *against* an architecture of *exclusivity*)<sup>15</sup> because according to him it renders criticism, properly speaking, useless. To make this argument Tafuri attributes to the architect the logocentric positions which are his own (beating down the architectural volume on the basis of the linearity of a linguistic "code").<sup>16</sup> The technique is a common enough defense reflex. It is as if Tafuri, confronted by Venturi's work, is saying: "This architecture "places architectural criticism in crisis" (p. 184), annuls the effectiveness of my discourse and disturbs its ordering, renders me as critic useless, steals my work by "a veritable exorcism" (p. 177) [this religious figure of speech often occurs in Tafuri's book], and above all it shows how architecture should be looked at,<sup>17</sup> which I do not. Therefore, I say that it is governed by "the constant fear of an authentic critical proce-



ess" (p. 184), that it is itself a defensive reflex—all the while that I maintain elsewhere that it is only a "masochistic flagellation" (p. 177). To see my discourse overrun, to see it lose control, to believe it irremediably replaced by another type of analysis (which is nevertheless simply complementary to it), this I fear. I will repress this fear and the anguishing representations which accompany it by quickly characterizing this other menace as cowardly, without knowing that the very speed of my reaction is readable as a symptom of my fear.'

Tafuri in fact does not always deny the viability of a historical dialogue internal to architecture and to its project (one can so interpret the graphic interpretations of antique architecture proposed by classical architects),<sup>18</sup> and he regards with sympathy the work of Louis Kahn as emblematic of that "metalinguistic" movement which tries to escape from redundant academization, from the signaling idiosyncrasies of modern architecture. Even there, however, Tafuri's text is not without ambiguity: if he recognizes in Kahn the merit of having overturned "the whole history of architecture" by his work, work "which, by itself, clarified a process hardly evident till then" (pp. 274–275); if he sees in it a measure of the will of history (architecture which wants, "in a word, to *historicize itself* and lead toward a historicized perception, profoundly thought" [p. 185]); if even he qualifies it as "criticism in a new sense" ("it does not refuse the tradition of the Modern Movement, but it compromises it by confronting it directly with its origins: as if to make it give forth a certificate of historical legitimacy" [p. 172]);<sup>19</sup> it is only to immediately stigmatize it as a supposed utopia. For Tafuri the work of Kahn is only an enigmatic demand for *aura*, which wishes to oppose itself by persuasion to the distracted perception which, in the city, causes the dilution of the modern architectural object. For if Tafuri sometimes seems to believe in the possibility of such critical homeopathic actions ("architecture can as-

sume the task of clarifying a historical situation by charging it with critical values" [p. 101]; "architectural criticism is confounded with a criticism of the city" [p. 183]), his conclusion seems to be without appeal: "the crisis of 'rationalism' has also brought in its wake an end to all illusion concerning the possibility of a critical exercise dissolved in the use that one makes of the city. The disappearance of the object has not been replaced by any new critical behavior" (p. 133).

The reaction of rejection, however indulgent, that Tafuri shows with regard to the work of Kahn, as well as to that of other critical architects, is, when all is said and done, unjust. His prejudice in favor of the avant-garde ("affirmative, absolutist, totalitarian," turned toward the future) but against any experimentation which "tends to dismantle, to recompose, to contradict, to wear out in exasperation syntaxes and languages accepted as such" (p. 141) is only one chapter of a style to which he does not pay attention in his practice of criticism: if he applies himself to a demystifying task, it is precisely because "the epoch" is recapitulating in all fields of culture (Tafuri's work is also itself historically determined), even if this renewal should, as Tafuri hopes, prepare the way for a "radical change" yet to come (p. 312).<sup>20</sup> An excellent quotation on Kahn that he makes from Scully serves to give a more precise understanding of the present situation of the architect and critic in relation to history: "It is probably no accident that both [Wright and Kahn] turned to Hadrian, since that haunted Emperor was perhaps one of the first, certainly one of the most conspicuous, men in Western history for whom—all ways having opened, which more true than another?—conscious, selective memory was a major determinant of life. Is this a pervasive problem of the modern world—all possible, nothing wholly serving, no way the only Way, memory all too free to choose?" (p. 156, note)<sup>21</sup>

In effect, and these are the pages which

justify the whole book and make one want to read it, Tafuri, from his Introduction on, pleads for the critic's open-mindedness—by which he intends a state of appreciativeness that does not necessarily lead to the "relativist haze where everything is equal" (p. 13)—and proposes that he, the critic, should provisionally reserve judgment.

While in the criticism of painting the discourse of flattery is spreading (a smooth stopgap, governed by the situation of the market), the decline of the International Style has been followed by a certain distancing in architectural criticism (a separation often masked by the "union of the architect and the critic in one and the same person" [p. 11]). Now this retreat position (sometimes ironic) is experienced by architects like a narcissistic wound. The situation is certainly not identical to that in painting where, as Lawrence Alloway has remarked, dogmatism was always the useful response of criticism to the modern experience of the superabundant multiplicity of the styles, a condition of modernism already perceived by Baudelaire.<sup>22</sup> But in Tafuri's description of the compulsive demands to which he is subject, we can recognize the same tendencies evident in those who, historians as well as critics, today write on painting: "The pure critic starts by being considered as a dangerous person. From there the attempt is made to attribute to him the mark of a movement, a tendency, a poetic. Criticism, wishing to keep its distance from the operative practice, can only submit the latter to a constant demystification in order to go beyond its contradictions or at least reveal them with precision. This explains why architects try to capture this criticism and even to exorcize it. One would be foolish or dishonest to pretend that every attempt to remove oneself from this trap was dictated by fear. For the critic, the fact of wishing anew to assume his proper task—which is to make a historical diagnosis, objective and without prejudices [?], and not to be an instigator or a 'corrector of proofs'—

122 implies on the contrary a good dose of courage, because in historicizing the dramatic density of the present movement, he risks venturing onto a mine field" (p. 12).

All page numbers in the text and the following notes refer to the French edition.

1. G. B. Piranesi, "Parere sull'Architettura" (1765), quoted by M. Tafuri in "Giovanni Battista Piranesi—l'utopie negative dans l'architecture," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 184, March-April 1976.

2. M. Tafuri, *Teorie e storia dell'architettura* (Bari: Laterza, 1968).

3. Tafuri defines ideology as "the structure of false conscience offered by intellectuals to the dominant systems" (p. 5); architecture as ideology as "the construction of a utopia" necessarily leading to failure (p. 279); and its history as "that of the subservience of nature by the constructive activity of the dominant classes" (p. 251).

Rhetorical contestations of all that which pertains to the rhetorical abound in Tafuri, such as: "the critic is the one who chooses to walk a tight-rope while the currents of air, constantly changing direction, do everything in their power to bring about his fall. The image is *absolutely not* a rhetorical figure" (p. 11).

4. Reference to notes without reference, mentions of "op. cit" without any previous reference at all, false references, etc. The most annoying errors are those of translation: thus the uncontrolled usage of demonstrative pronouns (one no longer knows to what or to whom they exactly refer) makes the passage concerning Mannerism (p. 32ff) relatively obscure. If the misprints were unavoidable, the fatal character of these inarticulate utterances should not prevent a careful reading of the proofs.

One can, however, only rejoice at the publishing of a new collection of architectural history, and at the translation of this volume, which should be followed by other publications of the same nature. This effort is most commendable: one more reason for us to take care of details in the future with less haste. With regard to the labyrinthine structure of the work, which Tafuri himself acknowledges (cf. the interview by Françoise Very in *A.M.C.*, no. 39, June 1976), Tafuri mentions, among other things, that it is a bad idea to read *Théories et Histoire . . .* as a "source of information." The French reader, though, would probably be wise not to listen to this restrictive usage of the book.

5. Example: the sempiternal discussion concerning the false opposition concerning structuralism/history, which constitutes the fifth section of the book—"the instruments of criticism," is useless today. Not that Tafuri's positions are in themselves criticizable, but these many pages do nothing more than repeat (by quoting) the theoretical debate which took place in France at the end of the 1960's, of which we have already had our fill.

6. "The difficulty of historicizing contemporary architecture results from its initial choice, which is to wish to present itself as an absolutely anti-historical phenomenon" (p. 21).

7. Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture: The*

*Architecture of Democracy* (New York: Braziller, 1962). Scully specifically remarks that, contrary to the neoclassic "revolutionaries" of the Enlightenment who idealized the Greek temple in a frozen vision of history, and perceived neither its "plastic action" nor its relation with the natural environment (p. 14), Le Corbusier was capable of seeing its sculptural force, its mode of integration, which included the landscape (the temple measures itself with respect to the sea which it overlooks), and was thus able to avoid a "non-Greek imitation" (p. 41). Reyner Banham, on the contrary, because of the chapter on regulating lines in *Vers Une Architecture*, considers Le Corbusier a very poor historian—"sloppy in the extreme." Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London: Architectural Press, 1972), 4th ed., p. 226.

The issue of "historic centers," with respect to which Tafuri proposes a new classification of the programmatic oppositions of architects, allows the famous antagonism Wright/Le Corbusier to be suspended: both have a dialectical conception of the historic center, not in the sense of utilizing it as a portion of the city (not to renovate or adapt it), but as a museum, a reminder (historicizing the "present") of the past (pp. 77-81).

8. Tafuri does not deny the need for formal analysis (he does not propose any), but for him it should measure the work (conceived as result) in relation to the strength of the intent which presides over it: "if one must pronounce a judgment one must find its parameters within the structures of every work, once their coherence is verified in relationship to their initial intentions (182).

The instrumentalism of Tafuri's work becomes evident in a statement such as, "the domain of the critique must change scale: from the analysis of the architectural *object* it must shift to the critiques of all the contexts which condition the object's configuration. The structure of this context—laws, rules, social and professional morals, modes of production, economic systems—will only be confronted in every work by a second reading: these will be presented only as particular phenomena of a more general structure, which is the true context on which criticism would like to exert itself" (p. 210). Once more, it is the formal analysis of buildings which will become secondary by virtue of the claimed change of scale, as though we were saturated by such analyses.

9. "The exasperated need of specifying the classic code by basing it on a historic verification is thus the result of an uncertainty which is found in more than one passage of *De Re Aedificatoria*" (p. 30). For a detailed formal analysis of this historical paradox as represented by the facade of Santa Maria Novella (first, in reconciling the old and the modern; second, in becoming the most important model for the new style the type of which it defines), cf. Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Human-*

- ism (London: Academy Books, 1973), II, 3.
10. Regarding the "naturalization," the idealization of history developed by the "revolutionary" architects of the eighteenth century, Tafuri remarks that the architect Aldo Rossi did not perceive at all the modernity of Perrault's propositions (for whom "the language of classical order is arbitrary") compared to those of Boullée (who criticized Perrault—he "confirms their adequacy with respect to natural laws"), p. 45, note. This dispute is in fact the reiteration by Boullée of the famous altercation between Perrault and Blondel (cf. Boullée, *Architecture—Essai sur l'art* [Paris: Hermann, 1968], p. 60ff). In *Progetto e Utopia* (Bari, 1973), the speedy translation of which is desirable (now translated in English as *Architecture and Utopia* [MIT Press, 1976]), it is Piranesi who becomes for Tafuri the point of departure, the troubled introductor of history, of negativity, in architectural issues. This idea was already projected by Scully (see note 7).
11. This claimed "crisis of the object" serves as an implicit justification for Tafuri with respect to the blindness which strikes him in front of buildings (it has already been remarked that he does not propose a reading of buildings). Nevertheless it appears that this blindness is programmed by his very concept of the architectural object. Is not the definition of architecture in terms of the object (or of the crisis of the object, the absence of the object, which is his privative version of the same notion) to paradoxically blind oneself in reaction to the new distracted attention which characterizes, in the opinion of Walter Benjamin, the aesthetic experience of modern man, son of the Baudelairian "homme blasé?" Tafuri mentions this "loss of authority on the part of objects" about which Benjamin talks (pp. 119–120), and for which the most exact elaboration was provided by the "accompanying music" of Satie, the "architectural painting" of Matisse, the expanses of color fields of Barnett Newman, and the neutralizing invasion of space proposed by the American minimalist sculpture of the period 1965 to 1975; but it seems that he does not perceive its whole novelty. Thus it is not surprising that instead of such works he prefers to make reference to Dadaist collages (Schwitters) and then, closer to our times, American Pop Art? If there is in fact such a thing as the "crisis of the object," it certainly is not explained by the *combine-paintings* by Rauschenberg or the works of Jasper Johns.
12. Tafuri limits himself to saying that this reading is wrong, giving no other reason other than this tautology: "he could not have been modern since he was conservative" (pp. 206–207).
13. Emile Benveniste, "Sémiologie de la langue," *Problèmes de Linguistique générale*, II (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 61–62.
14. Robert Venturi, *De l'ambiguïté en architecture* (Paris: Dunod, 1976), and Jean-Claude Le-

bensztejn, "Hyperréalisme, Kitsch et Venturi," *Critique*, no. 345, Feb. 1976. See also, the answer offered on this point by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown in the interview published by Hélène Lipstadt in *A.M.C.*, no. 39, June 1976. The gentle irony in which they indulge, regarding architects who are too busy with semiology and not busy enough with urban sociology, is kinder than the judgmental accusations of Tafuri. Despite the interest, the richness of the work of this investigator, one can only regret the manner of his value judgments, such as: "it is inexplicable that so serious and insightful an investigator as Vincent Scully could have written, in his introduction, that Robert Venturi's book is the most remarkable cultural event within the field of architectural debate after *Vers Une Architecture* by Le Corbusier" (p. 294).

15. Venturi, *De l'ambiguïté en architecture*, pp. 29–31. English translation: *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*.

16. Tafuri's linguistic metaphors have already been noted by many commentators; the most one can say is that they are not very rigorous ("The architectural object as organic system of linguistic-functional signs," p. 273ff).

17. Bruno Zevi, *Apprendre à voir l'architecture* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1959), French translation.

18. The demonstration given by Tafuri is quite spectacular: from the *bad* survey of the oratory of Sainte-Croix (461–468 A.D.) by Francesco di Giorgio can be deduced:

"a) the *heretical* value attributed by classical culture to complex structures;

"b) the reactions, given this provocation, of the culture at the end of the fifteenth century and its new uncertainties toward the antique (Francesco di Giorgio distorts the edifice which he surveys, but he accepts all the same, at least at the very beginning, his situation with respect to it);

"c) the identification, achieved by the architects of humanism, between the supra-historical dialogue and the architectural ideation: between the recognition of the structural laws of its own formal codes and the exploration of the codes of antiquity" (p. 243).

19. But Tafuri writes elsewhere, "the critical value of the work of Kahn is not directed toward the material of history, but toward the process of manipulation of forms, accomplished by the least advanced currents of modern architecture" (p. 93).

20. On this issue, Tafuri uses a point made by Cesare Brandi, with whom this whole book is a dialogue. He quotes from him: "the end of the avant-garde is connected to the loss of the future as an ontological dimension of the human condition: one cannot seriously consider an avant-garde of the present, because the concept is in itself contradictory" (p. 141, note).

21. Cf. Vincent Scully, *Louis I. Kahn* (New

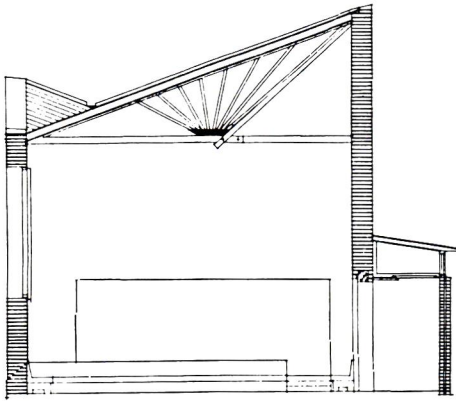
York: Braziller, 1962), p. 38. Tafuri correctly cites the Villa Adriana in relation to the Campo Marzio of Piranesi, but he does not bring his argument full circle. It is no coincidence that Piranesi, who, in Tafuri's opinion, introduced the "negative"—history—into architectural thinking, was so interested in the Villa Adriana, the spatial ambiguity and topographical multiplicity of which is like the model of contradictory work produced by architectural memory. This stratification of spaces has an equivalent only in the co-existence and cohabitation of buildings from very different epochs in the group of churches of San Stefano, in Bologna; the diachrony or temporal division is read synchronically or spatially in the exemplary perceptual floating which produces such a succession of shocks, of gaps, of semantic or referential breaks (one passes from one space to another in the same way as the Indian knight in *Helzapoppin* crosses the universe of Hollywood [he misreads the movie] in search of his space of origin and end). On Piranesi the archaeologist cf. the text of Werner Oeschlin, "L'intérêt archéologique et l'expérience architecturale avant et après Piranesi," in *Actes du Colloque Piranesi* (Rome, May 1976), to be published in the end of 1977. 22. Cf. "The Uses and Limits of Art Criticism," *Topics in American Art since 1945* (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 253. Alloway would probably not repudiate Tafuri's position on this point.

## Alvar Aalto and the Origins of his Style

Paul David Pearson. *Alvar Aalto and The International Style*. 1978, New York, Whitney Library of Design, an imprint of Watson-Guption Publications. 240 pp., \$27.50.

Kenneth Frampton

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1 Town Hall, Säynätsalo, Finland. Alvar Aalto, architect, 1950–1952. Section.

It would be hard to imagine a more opportune occasion to issue an in-depth study of the work of Alvar Aalto than the present moment, when we are beginning to question the whole significance of the Modern Movement in architecture. There have of course been many studies of Aalto before—as the bibliography of one hundred and forty items in Paul David Pearson's book would indicate—including the still inexplicably unpublished material made available by Edward Neuenschwander's book of 1954 and the equally revealing Leonardo Mosso catalogue that accompanied a large Aalto retrospective staged in Italy in 1965. There are also such standard texts as Frederick Gutheim's monograph of 1960 and the more recent Simon and Schuster publication of 1971 with its perceptive introduction by George Baird. Until recently, however, these monographs, together with Karl Fleig's complete works and a collection of Aalto's own writings entitled *Synopsis*, have represented the sum total of material available in English.

Apart from attempting to redress this dearth of information, Pearson's study of the 'first' career of the Finnish master (from 1923 to 1949) achieves a new insight into the evolution of the Scandinavian modern movement, an extremely rich cultural development which has hitherto remained closed to Western understanding. It is one of the ironies of English provincialism that Scandinavia, which has after all always been geographically close, should remain so isolated from a cultural standpoint. Despite the British nineteenth century passion for Ibsen and Strindberg in literature and despite the influence of the Swedish cooperative popular style of building (the New Empiricism that was so readily absorbed by the British Welfare State after 1945), any profound understanding of Scandinavian modern architecture has hitherto largely escaped the Anglo-Saxon mind. This has surely never been more true than in the case of the Scandinavian crypto-classicism of the early twentieth century, which, with the single exception

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of Henry-Russell Hitchcock's *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Re-Integration* of 1929, has been either ignored or misunderstood.

Like Demetrius Porphyrios's recent essay on the Doricist Sensibility which appeared in *Lotus 16*, Pearson's work on Aalto does much to overcome this void in our understanding. Above all his study is packed with hitherto unknown information about Aalto's formative years. There is, for example, the surprising but understandable fact that he fought on the nationalist side against the communists in the Finnish Civil War following the declaration of independence in 1917, and the equally significant fact that his contact with Swedish architectural culture dates from this time, during which a number of prominent Finnish-Swedes were serving on the nationalist side. More importantly we learn of his major mentors immediately after this period: first, Gustaf Nyström, the neo-classical designer of the main library of Helsinki University—a figure close to Otto Wagner in his determination to integrate technical elements with classical form; and second, the aesthetician Yrjö Hirn, who rejected any notion of ideal form in favor of an aesthetic derived from free creation as a form of libidinous gratification.

Aalto's initial professional experience after graduating from Helsinki Technical University in 1921 was with the Swedish architect Arvid Bjerke who was then designing the entrance pavilions for the Gothenburg World Fair of 1923. He made his mark in Bjerke's practice by detailing the large parabolic arches to Bjerke's Congress Hall built for the same fair. This tour de force in wooden construction (fig. 2) bears a close resemblance to the tennis halls he later designed for Jyväskylä University in 1952. The innate Finnish capacity for exploiting the structural and architectonic potential of timber stems, of course, as Pearson points out, from the Baltic wooden vernacular in which Aalto was to build throughout his early career.

2 Congress Hall, Gothenberg. Arvid Bjerke, architect, 1923. This structural frame was detailed by Aalto.

3 Viinikka Church, Tampere, Finland. Alvar Aalto, architect, 1927. Competition project carried out in a Schinkesque neo-classical manner. Side elevation.

4 Viinikka Church. Plan showing Parish House.

By 1922, Aalto, like Mies van der Rohe, was moving in more than one direction at once. The four buildings that he designed for the Industrial Exhibition held at Tampere in that year speak of different levels of culture and productive development. In all the rhetorical diversity of his later career, no contrast is so expressive as that found in his work at Tampere, between, say, his *Wagnerschulerisch* industrial pavilion, built of modular plywood panels (cf. Wagner's Karlsplatz station for the Städtbahn of 1899) and his thatched roof kiosk designed for the display of Finnish handicrafts.

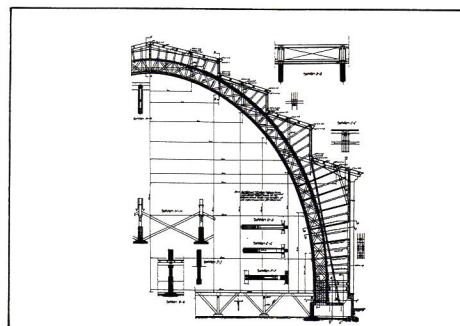
Aalto's early practice in Jyväskylä after 1923 was marked by two large row house developments built for railway workers and a workers' club; all three works of 1924 were carried out in the stripped-down Scandinavian classical manner of the period (cf. Gunnar Taucher's perimeter housing blocks for Helsinki of 1918). It is hard to know the derivation of this peculiar style; it obviously derives in part from the *Wagnerschule*—above all from Josef Hoffmann—but antecedents for it can also be found to an equal degree in the work of Heinrich Tessenow, C. F. A. Voysey, and Gunnar Asplund. The so-called *Hochschule* system of proportioning, based upon squares, also seems to have been integrated into this style, and certainly such a grid determined the crypto-classical buildings of Aalto's early career—including the 'guard houses' that he had realized at Seinäjoki and Jyväskylä.

Aalto's hitherto unknown career as a church designer throughout the first decade of his practice (he designed some thirteen churches in one form or another between 1923 and 1930) now seems to have been central to the evolution of his own crypto-classical style. The Italianate basilica church form was never more *atectonically* rendered by him than in his Viinikka Church project of 1927 (figs. 3, 4)—note the totally flattened pediment of the main basilica and the cylindrical form of the cam-

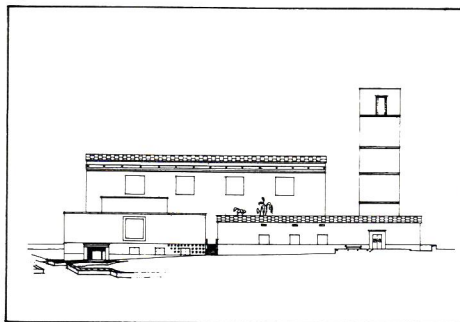
panile. This work reflects the mannerism of his Viipuri Library project design of the same year (fig. 5).

None of the remarkable works brought to light by Pearson's research serves to counteravail the established view that 1927 was a crucial year in Aalto's development. In that year his work lay curiously suspended between the crypto-classicism of his initial practice and the 'functionalism' that first fully emerged in his work in the Turun Sanomat newspaper building of 1928 and the Tapani apartment block of 1929, both in Turku. His major competition entries of 1927, his hitherto unknown design for the World Headquarters of the League of Nations in Geneva, and his famous Viipuri Library point toward a classicism that was extremely close to the mature work of Asplund. As the author suggests, it is probable that this classicism had a nationalistic optimism about it, which then related directly to the tenth anniversary of Finnish independence. Following the success of the young nation Aalto moved his office in that year to the booming city of Turku, which at that time, as a major port in southern Finland, was still subject to Swedish influence.

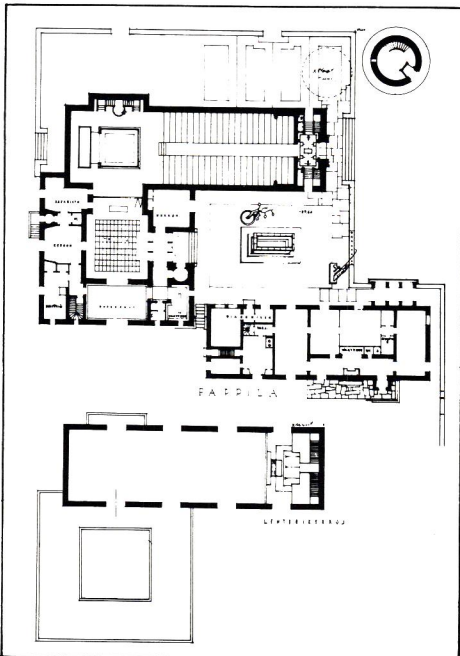
The move to Turku and the subsequent contact with the stripped down classicism of Erik Bryggman served simply to reinforce Aalto's own stripped down classical tendencies, so much so that Bryggman's Atrium apartment block of 1925 could easily have come from Aalto's hand. Aalto was to outdo Bryggman as a 'reductionist' in his own South-Western Agricultural Co-operative building, realized in Turku in 1928, but here the debt is not only to Bryggman but also to Asplund. The color scheme of the cinema in this building—a dark blue auditorium offset by grey and pink plush upholstery—is taken directly from Asplund's Skandia cinema built in Stockholm in 1923; and the influence does not end here, for what is true of the color scheme is also true of the plan. Even the decorative frieze around the upper perim-



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5 *Municipal Library, Viipuri, Finland. Alvar Aalto, architect, 1927. Elevation of competition entry.*

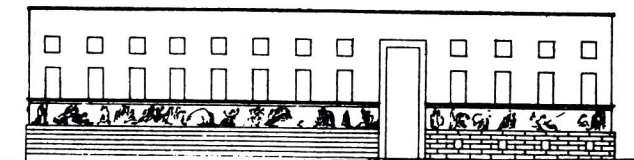
6 *Municipal Library, Viipuri. Second version of the library (1930). Note the gradual transition to the International Style.*

7 *Suomi Insurance Building, Helsinki, Finland. Erik Bryggman, architect, 1927. This competition entry exercised a*

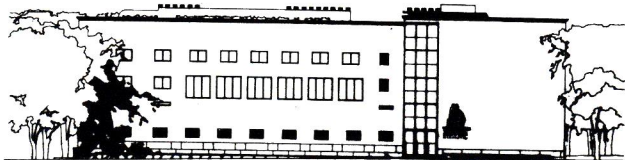
*marked influence on Aalto's Turun Sanomat building of 1928.*

8 *Public Library, Stockholm. Gunnar Asplund, architect, 1923.*

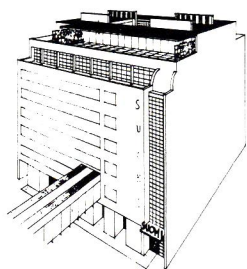
9 *Turku 700th Year Fair, Turku, Finland. Erik Bryggman with Alvar Aalto, architects, 1929. Restaurant design drawings.*



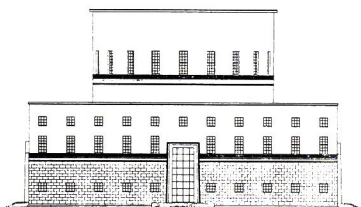
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eter of this 'blocky' building is taken from Asplund's neo-rococo decor for the interior of the Skandia cinema. All in all, Aalto's initial maturity as a functionalist—that is to say, his Viipuri Library of 1927–1935 (figs. 5, 6) and his Paimio Sanatorium of 1929–1930 (figs. 12, 13)—is unthinkable without the combined influence of Bryggman and Asplund, the former for his Suomi Insurance building projected for Helsinki in 1927 (fig. 7), the latter primarily for his neo-classical Stockholm Public Library designed in 1923 (fig. 8). The empathy between Bryggman and Aalto was such that the two men even worked together during this crucial period, something of an exception in Aalto's entire career. They first collaborated on an office building for Vaasa and then, in 1929, on an exhibition to be dedicated to celebrating the seven hundredth anniversary of Turku (figs. 9, 10). This design brought Bryggman and Aalto to follow the Russian Constructivist lead in the field of architectural propaganda, and there is sufficient evidence that their Turku Fair was a model for Asplund's adoption of rhetorical functionalism, complete with illuminated graphics and cable-suspended sky signs, in his own designs for the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930.

The density of the cross-influences occurring during this period—with master influencing pupil and vice versa—contrasts with the extremely competitive climate of the present era, where few architects are prepared to acknowledge the influence of any contemporary. Whatever the jealousies aroused by Aalto's precipitous success at the end of the 1920's, there is no doubt that he both took and gave, almost involuntarily, to the general development of a modern style; and whereas the influence passed from Asplund to Aalto in the case of Aalto's initial design for Viipuri, the line ran in an opposite direction in the case of the Stockholm Exhibition and Asplund's Bredenberg store of 1933.

After the realization of the Turun Sanomat building in 1928, Aalto was able to take

10 *Turku 700th Year Fair. Erik Bryggman and Alvar Aalto, architects 1929. Pylons.*

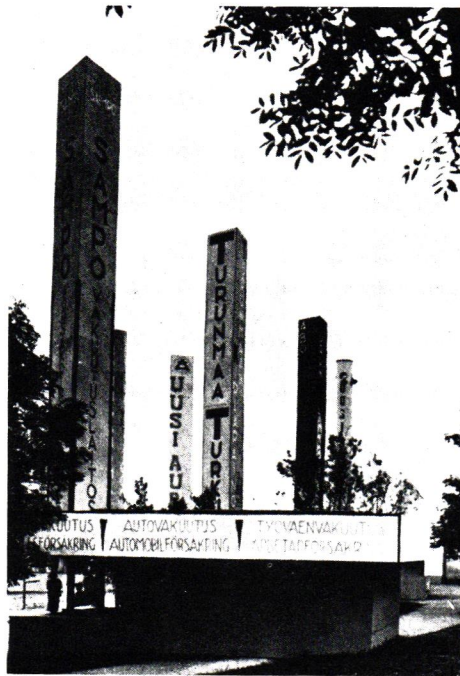
11 *Zonnestraal Sanatorium, Hilversum, Holland. Johannes Duiker, architect, 1928. This nursing unit plan formed the parti for Paimio.*

12 *Sanatorium, Paimio, Finland. Alvar Aalto, architect, 1930. Site plan.*

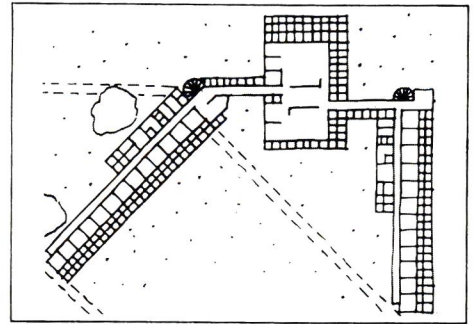
13 *Sanatorium, Paimio. Elevation.*

14 *Model Town for Finland. Alvar Aalto, architect, 1940. This project was designed with M.I.T. students.*

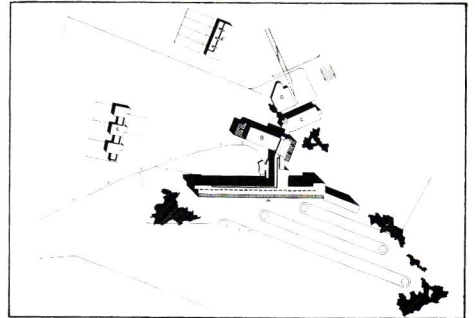
advantage of his growing national and international reputation by traveling abroad—often as an invited guest—to attend conferences on modern architecture and construction. Such a conference on reinforced concrete held in Paris in 1928 enabled him to become acquainted with the Dutch Constructivist architect Johannes Duiker whose reinforced concrete Zonnestraal Tuberculosis Sanatorium (fig. 11) was the point of departure for the organization of Aalto's prize-winning Paimio Sanatorium (figs. 12, 13) submitted in January 1929, and from this date on (the year of Turku's seven hundredth anniversary) Aalto was decidedly under the influence of Dutch and Russian Constructivism, particularly as it was manifested in the work of Duiker and the urban projects of N. A. Ladowsky's ASNOVA and ARU groups. The progressive and repetitious geometrical patterns of the formalist schemes proposed at different times by ARU, such as Ladowsky's Kostino quarter projected for Moscow in 1926, are obviously the source for the hyperbolic entry trajectory and the serial landscape formations that appear in Paimio. In a similar way, the free serial compositions proposed by Aalto for the Sports Institute at Vierumaki in 1930 were to recur in a model town designed by Aalto at M.I.T. (fig. 14) a decade later and again in the two projects that he made for Säynätsalo Town Hall and Village between 1940 and 1942. Aside from reflecting the urban formalism of ARU, Paimio was a turning point at the level of detail for it abounded in Constructivist quotations drawn from Duiker's work; the Paimio water tower is singled out by the author as being directly referential to the cylindrical water tower that crowned Zonnestraal's central administration building.



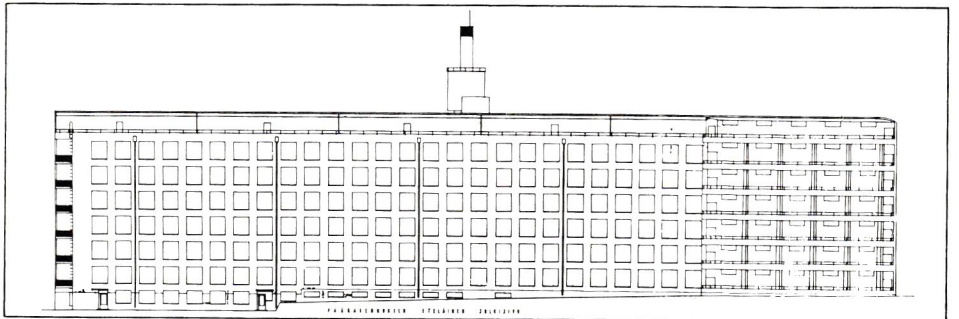
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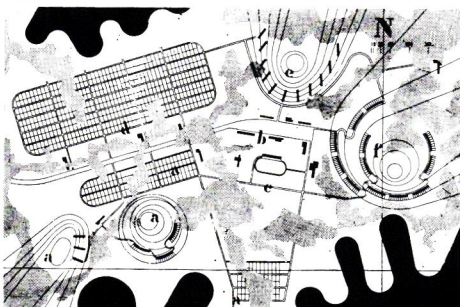
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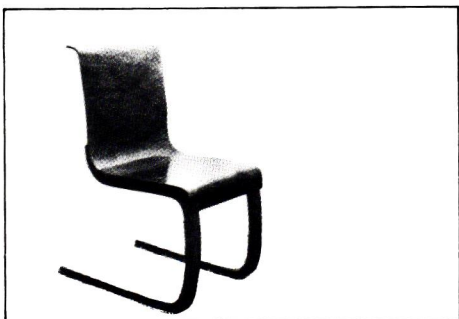
It is evident, as Pearson indicates, that Aalto was drawn into the CIAM circle around this time and while he seems to have deliberately kept his distance from the polemical controversy, he became involved with similar material in his own work, most notably with the theme of the

15 Plywood chair with laminated wooden legs. Alvar Aalto, 1929.

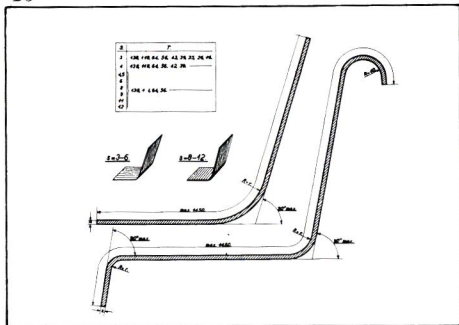
16 Aalto seems to have derived his plywood furniture in part from the furniture of A. M. Luther Co., Tallinn, Finland, which had been in production with these forms since 1911.

17 Villa Mairea, Noormarku, Finland. Alvar Aalto, architect, 1937. First project showing resemblance of main living space to Gallen-Kallela's studio in Ruovesi of 1894.

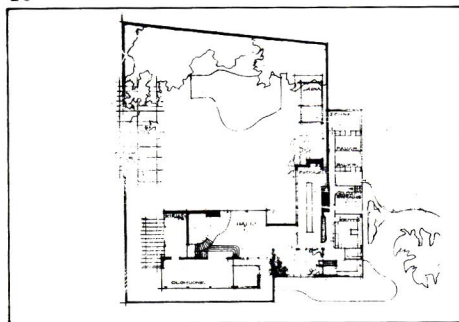
18 Gallen-Kallela studio, Ruovesi, Finland. Axseli Gallen-Kallela, architect, 1894. Ground plan, note the similarity of the location of the fireplace, stepped platform, and mezzanine stair to the same elements in the Villa Mairea.



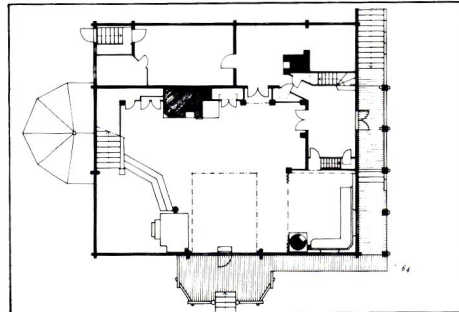
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1929 Frankfurt CIAM congress on *Existenzminimum*. Aalto's minimal apartment designs for the Finnish Arts and Crafts Society in 1930 and his prototypical minimal house (seventy-five to ninety meters) for the Nordic Building Conference of 1932 were to reflect to a large degree the concerns of the German functionalists.

Aalto's career took a surprising turn at this time, a shift which expanded the scope of his work beyond the bounds of normal practice. His meeting with Harry and Maire Gullichsen opened up his design activity to the two primary aspects of industrial production, that is to say, to both process and product. Maire Gullichsen, who had inherited from her father the Ahlström timber, paper, and cellulose fortune, had seen Aalto's earliest furniture pieces in a Helsinki store, and soon after the Gullichsens invited Aalto to apply his abilities to the design of an industrial plant and a range of timber furniture. The immediate results of these commissions were the Sunila pulp mill and adjacent workers' housing built in 1934 and the Artek furniture company which started to mass produce Aalto's furniture in 1932. Aalto had in fact been designing bent plywood pieces since 1926 when he produced a wooden stacking chair for the Jyväskylä Civil Guards House. He followed this initial success with his classic bent plywood and laminated armchair (fig. 15) for the furnishing of Paimio, a prototype of which was finally put into production in 1933. It is interesting to note that Aalto was to base his bent ply and laminated design on a form of bent plywood seating that had been under production in Tallinn since 1911 (fig. 16).

Aalto's patronage by the Finnish timber industry—his work for both Ahlström and Enso-Guzeit, large industrial concerns that were to be his patrons for the rest of his life—brought him to reappraise the value of timber over concrete as a primary expressive material. With this he seems to have returned almost overnight to the highly textured architectural thematic of

the Finnish National Romantic movement; that is to say, to the work of Eliel Saarinen, Axseli Gallen-Kallela, and above all Lars Sonck. The first indication of this move away from international Constructivism came with his own house built in Munkkiniemi, Helsinki, in 1936, and this somewhat irregular L-shaped plan, executed as a collage in rendered brick, grooved planking, and exposed brickwork, was followed by Aalto's prize winning entry to the Finnish Pavilion for the Paris World's Fair of 1937, a timber structure significantly entitled "Le bois est en marche." In the following year, Aalto achieved the masterwork of his prewar career, namely the Villa Mairea (fig. 17), a summer home built for the Gullichsens at Noormarku in 1938. The initial scheme for this L-shaped plan, published in Pearson's book for the first time, makes explicit reference to National Romanticism inasmuch as the plan of the main living hall refers directly to the plan of Gallen-Kallela's log cabin studio built in Ruovesi in 1894 (fig. 18). A prominent, rendered, sculptural fireplace and a stepped platform leading to a mezzanine stair, which in turn serves an upper gallery, are apparently common to the living spaces of both works, and it is clear that much of this spirit remains in the Villa Mairea as it was finally built. Like the Munkkiniemi house this summer villa is compounded out of a mixture of brickwork, rendered masonry, and timber siding. The sauna of this building, linked by an outriding rubble wall to the main house, is roofed with sod and built according to the canons of Finnish timber vernacular.

The rest of Aalto's career both prior to and immediately after World War II was inseparable from his initial visits to America, to which he first came in March 1939 to supervise the construction of his pavilion for the New York World's Fair. His subsequent sojourn in the States, which began with his appointment to the M.I.T. faculty in the autumn of 1940, had to be curtailed because of the threat of a renewal of the Finno-Soviet conflict. His return to Fin-



land brought him in 1942 to tackle the new Enso-Gutzeit settlement at Säynätsalo and seven years later, his competition entry for the same location brought him the commission for the Säynätsalo City Hall (see fig. 1). The line of development that links his Munkkiniemi house of 1936 to his M.I.T. dormitory of 1947 marks the progressive evolution of Aalto's updated National Romantic manner and leads eventually to its resolution in Säynätsalo. Säynätsalo breaks with the collages and textured structuralism of the Villa Mairea and the national pavilions for Paris and New York. As with the Sunila pulp mill and the M.I.T. dormitory, the power and rhythm of its form stems from the sculptural impact of its brick profile and from the fact that it is largely executed in a single material—brick. The mythic use of narrative form evident in the 1937 Finnish Pavilion and in the Villa Mairea—that opposition, say, between formal entry versus informal exit or between interpreted versus simulated vernacular—emerges again in the City Hall, where the high mono-pitched roof (comparable to the studio in the Villa Mairea) announces the honorific status of the council chamber, a differentiation that is reinforced by the introduction of a boarded timber floor in the chamber itself and by an exposed elaborate timber truss supporting the roof above.

There is no doubt that Pearson's book has opened up the field of Aalto studies in the West and that the information made available here will now become a prerequisite for any future study of Aalto's work. The author's interpretations on the other hand leave something to be desired. They are in my view often asserted without sufficient consideration as to the particular sensibility within which the work was created. An example of such fusion occurs in his assessment of Paimio, where he writes: "In the creation of Paimio, Aalto left few items to chance, and though it is certainly a building firmly in the International Style, its considerations are so extensive in scope as to place it within the most complete

*Gesamtkunstwerk* created during the Art Nouveau or any other comparable period." Surely nothing could be more of a distortion than this, first because the very notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk* presupposes a hermetic intention (compare, for example, Frank Lloyd Wright's complaint that he was not allowed to re-style the telephones in the Larkin Building), an intention that is patently absent from Paimio, and second, because the category immediately becomes blurred once one appeals to "any other comparable period."

At this juncture, the author quotes from Aalto's address of 1955 "Between Humanism and Materialism" to the effect that "when I received the assignment for this sanatorium, I was ill myself and therefore able to make a few experiments and find out what it is like to be really ill." Without citing factual evidence to the contrary, the author dismisses this as "a piece of designer's poetry," only to then go on to claim that Aalto had always paid particular attention to user needs throughout his life.

It is regrettable that this otherwise excellent pioneering study is in this way occasionally indecisive and diffuse. Pearson seems to lack a sufficiently tempered vantage point from which to make an assessment of Aalto's overall achievement. He is at his best when rendering the significance of local cultural conjunctions; he is not so successful however when he attempts to situate Aalto in a broader historical context. Yet while one waits impatiently for such an assessment to be made, one knows already that any future study will have to take serious cognizance of this work.

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## Diana I. Agrest

130 Diana Agrest graduated from the School of Architecture and Urbanism University of Buenos Aires in 1967 and attended the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes and the Centre de Recherche d'Urbanism, Paris, for her post-graduate studies (1967-1969). She has taught in Princeton University School of Architecture and Urban Planning from 1971-1972 and 1974-1975, and in 1972 became a Graham Foundation Visiting Fellow at The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies where she became a Fellow in 1973. She presently teaches at the Cooper Union School of Architecture and at The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies. As a practicing architect, she has designed and built projects in Buenos Aires—and developed design projects in New York—housing and single family houses. She was awarded second prize for her submission to the competition for the renewal of the area of La Villette, Paris. Parallel with her design practice she has developed work on the theory and criticism of architecture and urban design, much of this work has been published in various international journals—L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, Oppositions, Controspazio, Semiotica, and A + U. In addition to her written research, she has participated in various congresses and symposiums and has lectured in various universities in the United States and Europe.

Stanford Anderson was born in Minnesota in 1934. He received his B.A. from the University of Minnesota in 1957, his M.A. (Arch.) from the University of California at Berkeley in 1958, and his Ph.D. in Art History from Columbia University, New York, in 1968. He was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to the Technische Hochschule in Munich (1961-62), a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship (1969-70), a Graham Foundation Fellowship (1971), and an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship (1977-78). He has taught the history, theory, and design of architecture and urban space at the Architectural Association, London, 1962-1963, and 1974-present, and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, 1963-present, where he is also the Director of the Ph.D. program of the Department of Architecture, 1975-present. His professional and research experience includes the "Streets Project," with the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (co-director, 1970-present; funded by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development), and "Design for a Socially-Responsible Redevelopment within New York City," with Robert Goodman and Henry Millon (co-director, 1966-67). His published work includes: "Architecture and Tradition," in the History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture, Marcus Whiffen, ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966), also published in A.A.J. (London), May 1965 and in Italian in L'Architettura, April 1965; "Peter Behrens's Changing Concept of Life as Art," Architectural Design (London), XXXIX, February 1969. He is also editor of Streets (to be published in 1978).

Manfredo Tafuri was born in Rome in 1935. He graduated in architecture in 1960, and has taught the history of architecture at the Universities of Rome, Milan, and Palermo. Since 1968 he has been Professor of History of Architecture and the Director of the Institute of History at the Architecture Institute in Venice. He is a member of the Scientific Council at the International Center of studies of Architecture "Andrea Palladio" of Vicenza and is an editor of Werk/Archithese and of Casabella. His published works include: Teorie e storia dell'architettura (Bari: Laterza, 1968); L'Architettura dell'Umanesimo (Bari: Laterza, 1969); Via Giulia (in collaboration; Rome: Staderini, 1973); Progetto e utopia (Bari: Laterza, 1973); La Città americana dalla guerra civile al New Deal (in collaboration [Bari: Laterza, 1973]); Architettura contemporanea (in collaboration with F. Dal Co [Milan: Electa, 1976]). He is presently working on a book on the study of the relationship between the avant-garde and contemporary architecture.

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